

Timing in Road Safety Communication for Enhanced Traffic Safety in Nigeria

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Abstract: Detailed analysis and reports from avalanche of literature have shown that in the vast majority of road accidents, human error is either the main cause or a key contributory factor. Unfortunately, despite many extant laws especially the Federal Road Safety Corps Act, of 2007 at the disposal of the FRSC these human errors have been hardly prevented, thus calling for better strategies to enhance traffic safety within the ambit of “road safety communication” that are done primarily through education, training and information on one hand, and also through checks, controls and penalties on the other hand. This paper identified timing as that better strategy to enhance traffic safety in Nigeria. The role of timing in road safety communication are on discussed under the television advertorials and Radio jingles for enhanced traffic safety; education of road users on Road Signs for enhanced traffic safety; education of road users on Drivers License, Seat Belt Use, Fire Extinguishers and others for enhanced traffic safety; education of road users on the state of the road they are plying; education of road users on removal of obstructive elements on the road for enhanced traffic safety. These roles are also to be considered under the tripodal approach of preventive, corrective and punitive measures. However, the anticipated challenges will be those of poor mindset, culture and poverty; impatience and subversion of due process; indiscipline and lawlessness; the state of road infrastructure and the road safety lacuna it creates; and lack of Adequate Manpower. Along the lines of these anticipated challenges, we recommend that there be a holistic involvement of the three tier administrative organs in road safety administration; effective drivers training policy that ensures a well articulated driving school standardization programme; teach children in schools road safety tips (catch them young; expand the scope of the NYSC Road Safety Club that teaches gradates about the safety of the road and ensure entrenched safer road use culture in the country

Keywords: Timing, Road Safety, Communication, Road Safety Communication, Traffic Safety

INTRODUCTION

The declaration of “Decade of Action on Road Safety” made by the then Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr. Ban Ki-moon on 11th May 2011, on the heels of the increasing trend of daily occurrence of deaths due to road traffic collision on the global scale, is a global testimony to the need for enhanced traffic safety in the world in general and in Nigeria in particular where tales of

deaths and injuries from road traffic collision abound as reported by our national dailies. The National Agency of Nigeria (NAN) of 02 August 2021 reported that FRSC recorded a total of 5,320 crashes, 2,471 deaths nationwide in 6 months. The Guardian Nigeria of 15 January 2022 reported that Nigeria lost 2,927 males to road accidents in nine months. The above assertions were given credence to by a report released by the Federal Road Safety Corps (FRSC) that indicated that the corps recorded not less than 5,320 road traffic crashes (RTCs) involving 8,808 vehicles with 2,471 deaths in the first half of 2021 nationwide.

Indeed, this incessant road traffic crashes are very perturbing having snuffed out the lives of many promising youngsters and sent many illustrious citizens to the great beyond, in addition to thousands of Nigerians who have become permanently deformed and disabled due to loss of one body part or another in road accidents they were involved in at various points (Madobi, 2021).

Statistically, Nigeria's road casualty is averaged at 33.7 per 100,000 people annually. This is despite the relentless efforts of the Federal Road Safety Corps in ensuring a safer road for Nigerian road users (Madobi, 2021). To understand why Nigeria still records such large number of dead toll in spite of the corps relentless efforts towards reducing carnage on the highways, the below concepts when explicated will be of immense help.

CONCEPT CLARIFICATIONS

Timing

While timing is the measure of coincidence of events, it can also be seen as the ability to select the precise moment for doing something for optimum effect. In a way, timing could also mean "On time" which means being timely, i.e. when something is planned or expected to take place at a specified time and it takes place accordingly. Thus, timing is the ability to select or do something at just the right time to maximize the effect of the action.

Communication

The act or process of using words, sounds, signs, or behaviours to *express or exchange* information or to express your *ideas, thoughts, feelings*, etc., to someone else. In general terms, communication is the process of **SENDING** and **RECEIVING** messages through verbal or nonverbal means, including speech or oral communication; writing and graphical representations (such as infographics, maps, and charts); and signs, signals, and behaviour (Nordquist, September 19, 2019). Emphasis by Pearson & Nelson (2000) is on "*shared* understanding" when he defined Communication as the process of understanding and sharing meaning. This shared meaning has to be made common such that everybody will know it as a common practice.

Road Safety

Road safety, according to the Cambridge Dictionary entails *teaching people* how to behave safely when driving or crossing the road for the purpose of observing measures necessary to reduce the risk of road traffic injuries and death. Therefore, road traffic safety refers to methods and measures for reducing the risk of a person using the road network being killed or seriously injured. Thus,

road safety means methods and measures aimed at reducing the likelihood or the risk of persons using the road network getting involved in a collision or an incident that may cause property damages, serious injuries and/or death.

Road Safety Communication

Road safety communication in this study represents the process of sharing the set of norms, mechanisms and measures taken or to be taken by the different actors in charge of road infrastructure construction and road traffic management in order to ensure the protection of road users and their properties

Traffic safety

Traffic safety refers to the state of being safe from harm or danger of all the vehicles that are moving along the roads in a particular area. Any type of focus that promotes enhances or maintains safety in the realm of motor vehicle travel is traffic safety.

ROAD SAFETY COMMUNICATION SITUATION IN NIGERIA

Since most of the road traffic injuries have been identified as preventable, road safety communication has been identified as a strategy to prevent road traffic injuries and deaths (Chisholm et al, 2012). This is because, many road accidents are mostly due to human error including reckless driving, over speeding, inconsiderate use of the road, incompetent drivers and driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs, among others (Derek et al, 2012). Thus, without preventive actions, which road safety communication portends, road accidents fatalities will not abate. This is why it is said that among the means by which the members of the Federal Road Safety Corps make the roads and highways safe is to educate road users on the importance of road rules, discipline and mutual respect.

This education entails communication and communication as one of the basic tools for achieving safe road traffic environment, has gained more relevance in recent times because influencing road users' behaviour through enforcement has its limits, just as communication itself has its limits as well. However, the combination of communication enforcement serves as a magic wand in ensuring the traffic safety.

The road safety communications are done through

- ✓ Road safety campaigns, including: TV and broadcasting (spots, films); Leaflets; articles in newspapers and magazines; and billboards alongside roads both out and inside built-up areas.
- ✓ Information for drivers through road signs and signals, including variable message signs as a part of telematics systems, where the information capacity, priority and conditions of effectiveness are crucial:

The most important parameter of communication towards road users is the effectiveness of the measure used. It is clear that ineffective measures make no sense. According to various survey

results, the measures and strategies of communication is key to the effectiveness of road safety communication for road traffic safety that we want to achieve. The success and effectiveness of the measures and tools used depends to a large extent on ability of the road users to understand and to decode the messages sent to him.

In Nigeria, road users have been availed the opportunity of road safety communication by the top agency for the safety of the Nigeria road – the Federal Road Safety Corps (FRSC) but it seems these process of sharing the set of norms, mechanisms and measures taken or to be taken by the different actors in charge of road infrastructure construction and road traffic management in order to ensure the protection of road users and their property have not yielded the desired result hence this paper has identified a core concept or variable that will make a difference. That concept or variable is called timing.

THE ROLE OF TIMING IN ROAD SAFETY COMMUNICATION IN NIGERIA

The main objective of communication is to disseminate information in order to influence behavior positively. However, when such information thus disseminated, did not wield the kind of influence on behaviour that is expected, there is usually a need to diagonalize the process and strategy with the view of identifying and correcting the flaws.

Thus, this paper identified “timing” as that important ingredient required in information dissemination that is expected to influence behaviour of road users for positive change. This is because “timing” is the ability to select the precise moment and target to disseminate specific traffic safety information through the various channels for optimum effect. This timing can be applied to road safety communication on the following tools and channels of road safety communication:

a. Timing on Television adverts and Radio jingles for enhanced traffic safety in Nigeria.

There are several paid television advertorials and radio jingles sponsored by the FRSC for the purpose of enhanced traffic safety in Nigerian highways because of the deemed effectiveness of communication in exerting positive influence on the behaviour of road users. Many, if not most of these adverts and jingles have not yielded the anticipated change of behaviour of road users, despite the cost involved. The reason can easily be traced to timing. This is because in Nigeria, festive seasons for instance are associated with increase road accident and subsequent loss of lives or body parts, therefore, when and if adverts and jingles suitable for a specific season is rolled out and in time too, the messages it bear will be delivered to the road users who in due course will make great and beneficial use of such information. However, if adverts and jingles meant for the Christmas season is rolled out on the 25th of December when the people are already engrossed with struggles to make the best of the reaming days of the season, the essence of the jingles and adverts will not be achieved.

However, the physical and visional measures can be adopted to complement the TV adverts and Radio jingles. For instance, as you (the FRSC) normally do send out officers to ensure the safety

of the road during the festive seasons, these officers only need to appear calm and supportive in reinforcing those road safety tips to the road users. I am sure the road users will learn at the spot, appreciate the officers and the commission and may likely internalize what was shared with him/her. By that, that simple act of support and subtleness by the officer would have achieved the purpose the paid adverts and jingles did not achieve.

Again, the billboard safety caution will also be very effective during the festive seasons. With catchy captions like “you and your loved ones need to get home safe and sound, drive carefully” “Many drivers have lost body parts and some are death leaving their loved ones to suffer, drive carefully” “home is near, late to home is better than early to hospital or grave” etc, on billboards with catchy pictures/images will send chills down the spines of many reckless drivers some of whom may have past experiences that will easily connect with these catch phrases.

b. Timing and education of road users on Road Signs for enhanced traffic safety

It will surprise you that many road users in Nigeria do not know the meaning of many road signs notwithstanding how long they have been driving. This has accounted for many human errors that have contributed to many incidents of road mishaps that have claimed several lives, vehicles, body parts and road infrastructures. Timing here proposes that there should be opportunity of instant education of such motorist/road users who for one reason or another does not know the meaning of certain road signs. This proposal is based on the observation that many active road users did not attend any formal driving school, especially those driving commercial buses, tippers, trailers, Keke and okada. Sometimes, you find that they are the ones causing accidents on our highways. The same goes to our young guys of today who picks money from above and launches new fast moving cars without prior official knowledge and certification to drive, they hit the road. When dictated, despite the availability of booking (punitive sanction), an officer doing on the spot education within few minutes will not only have availed the road user the opportunity to learn new thing, it has also given the road users opportunity to see the officers as friends and not foes. This aspect is very important. Today, road users fear road safety officer more than they fear police and the military. To the same extent, they dislike road safety officers and when an audience dislikes you, he/she will hardly learn from you. So, it is time we (officers) make ourselves approachable and likeable by the road users.

c. Timing and education of road users on Drivers License, Seat Belt Use, Fire Extinguisher for enhanced traffic safety in Nigeria

It is a serious problem to road safety that some road users do not have drivers license while some are in possession of fake ones. Unfortunately for them, the real essences of having drivers’ licenses are unknown to them and they are thinking that the essence is to display to road safety officials on the road and drive away. I am convinced that when such persons are made to know that without driver’s license, if a driver happens to kill someone via accident; it is categorized as murder and not manslaughter because the driver is not empowered by the law to drive. The same faith awaits the person holding a fake drivers license plus other implications. It is believed that if road safety officials can take out small time on the spot along the road to educate some of the defaulters, they will be glad to do the right thing and not feel compelled to do them.

The same applies to the use of seat belt and having functional fire extinguisher as well as buying and driving on good and unexpired tyres. It may sound funny but many drivers only use seat belt whenever road safety officials are on sight. But for some of us who seat belt has saved their lives, we know that seat belt is a life saver and hence a major point to hammer on when road safety education is tuned. If you conducted a sample among commercial buses drivers your heart will be shattered to find that despite the numbers of fire accidents that have claimed people's cars and even lives, many of them still use expired fire extinguisher. And seriously, many of them are not aware of its expiration mechanism, hence the continued holding on to one irrespective of its status so long as it answers Fire Extinguisher which can be shown to a road safety officer and be allowed to continue the journey. The fact that expired fire extinguisher cannot function again has to be sold to road users for informed decision. Beside when the cost of getting a functional extinguisher is compared to the cost of getting a new car is used as a point of instillation, the road users will make informed decisions. The worst case is that of expired tyres and use of worn out tyre, including the pumping sizes of the tyres. Please don't take it for granted that many drivers in Nigeria do not know how to check the expiration date of a tyre, hence they just buy tyres whose teetees are still sharp. Now that the main source of tyre to many road road users is the "Belgium tyre dealers" who sell overseas used tyres some of which have already expired, road users need this knowledge to guide them in buying those affordable tyre but with sensitivity to the harm expired tyres can do to him and his car in case of puncture on the way. The same goes to the size to pump a tyre.

d. Timing and education of road users on the state of the road they are plying

The terrible state of the Nigeria road has overwhelmed the Nigerian road users whose pleas, cries and complaints have not been heeded to by the government to change the narrative of the Nigeria roads as deathtraps. The road safety officers are always partakers in the terrible state of the road. While it is not the responsibility of the FRSC to build, manage and administer road infrastructures in Nigeria, the corps has a crucial role to play in ensuring enhanced safety of the Nigerian highway. The corps is advised to timely position men of the corps who will educate road users on the state of the road they are plying. This is important and crucial as there are many traps on our highways such as deep potholes that if a driver enters it, the tyre and realm will be condemned instantly and if care is not taken, the car may swerve into the bush, leading to imaginable losses. But if the men of the corps are on the road and ordered drivers to slow down and observe deep pothole about a pole or two away, where there is no obvious sign, deaths and losses associated with such occurrences will be prevented. Even where there are signs, there is need for that reminder. This effort will certain guide the behaviour of the drivers at least within the areas described and caution will be applied and lives saved.

e. Timing and education of road users on removal of obstructive elements on the road for enhanced traffic safety in Nigeria.

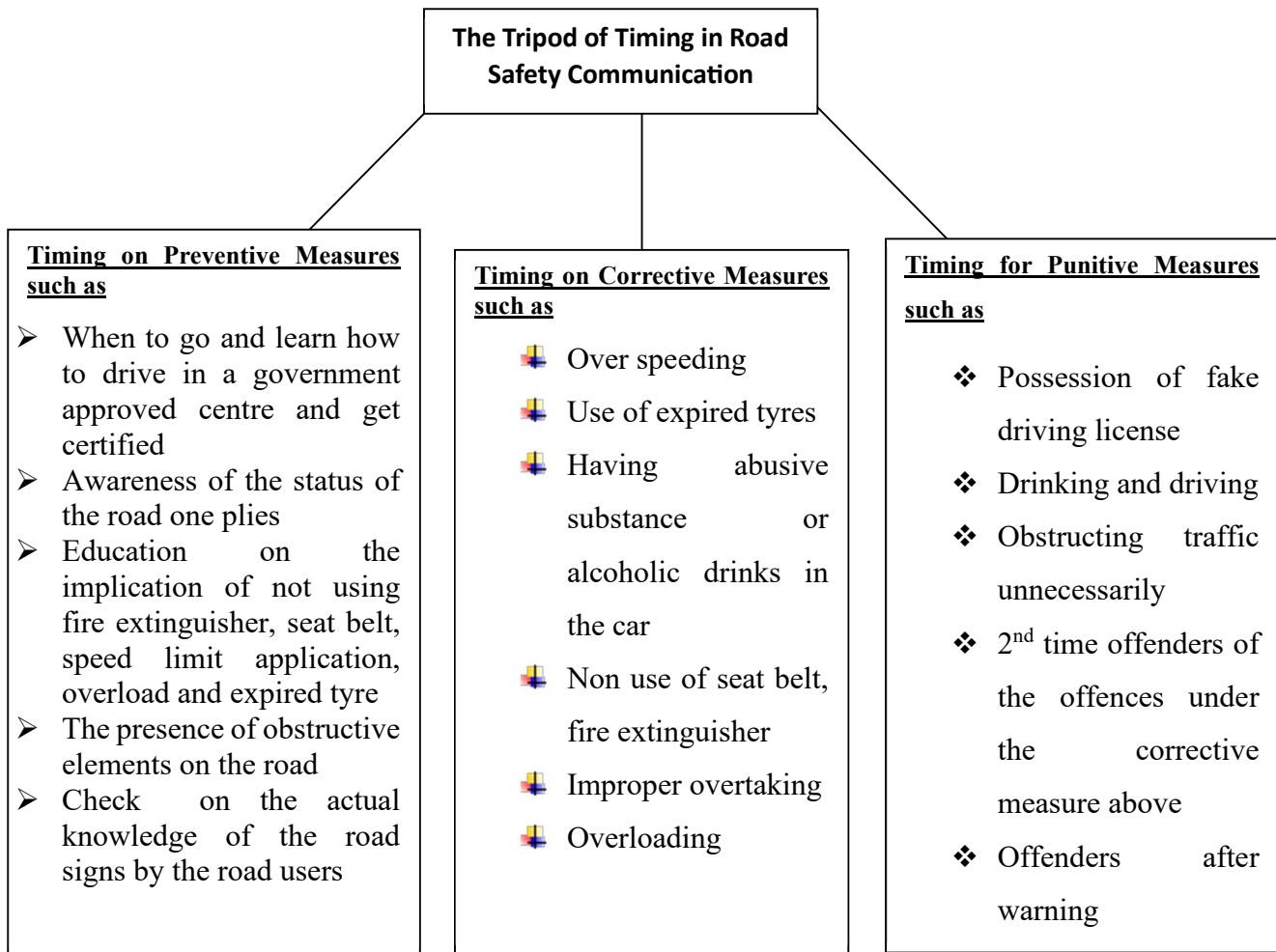
Many a times, you find on our highways vehicles that broke down and were left there at the exact spot it broke down. And one begins to ask, can't the owner find persons to assist him/her to push the car out of the road to avert road obstructions.

On many counts, several road mishaps have occurred because a car broke down and the owner left it there without proper and adequate notification. While it is required to place triangle to show and reflect to oncoming vehicle that there is danger ahead, this point proposes timely intervention of the corps in ensuring that such obstruction is averted. However, the road safety officers cannot be everywhere at every time and hence the need for them to educate road users as a matter of urgency and necessity to ensure that cars when broken down on the highway are immediately pushed out of the road. The big Lorries are the actual problem as it is difficult to push out of the road but when this education gets real into them, certainly big Lorries will start assisting themselves in ensuring that obstructive elements such as their Lorries are removed from the road, thereby enhancing safety of the road.

THE TRIPOD APPROACH TO TIMING IN ROAD SAFETY COMMUNICATION

Timing in road safety communication has to be considered along the tripod mandate of the commission to ensure enhanced traffic safety in the country through preventive, corrective and punitive measures. It is believed that life is precious and its sanctity has to be protected. Under the law, the government has a fundamental responsibility of protecting lives and properties. Therefore, losses of lives and properties that occur on our highways are the main reason for the establishment of the FRSC. This commission has a very critical work to do with few human and technological resources. This gap calls up the need for timing, hence the below presentation.

Fig. 1. Tripodal use of timing in road safety communication for enhanced traffic safety



THREATS TO TIMING IN ROAD SAFETY COMMUNICATION

As noted earlier that control of human behavior is a difficult that the FRSC has to grapple with in ensuring enhanced traffic safety in Nigeria, it is envisaged that in the course of using timing in road safety communication for enhanced traffic safety, the FRSC will encounter challenges such as:

❖ Poor mindset, culture and poverty

When it comes to respecting, observing and obeying traffic rules, many Nigerian road users have a mindset that tells them that it is not necessary. The same applies to getting a valid driver's license, use of seat belt, having functional fire extinguisher as well as using good and unexpired tyres. Such mindset has culminated into a culture kind of thing that sees impunity thrive against every legitimate effort to make things work. The worst part of it is that many people has linked this to

poverty. Some have argued that the cost of drivers' license is unnecessarily expensive and given the poverty situation of these people, they either risk driving without it or patronize those that issue them with fake licenses at lower rate. The poverty aspect also speaks to the issue of use of bad tyres and expired tyres. Another aspect of the poverty discourse is those commercial drivers who carry overload to the detriment of the vehicle and passengers. The same applies to the ability to put their vehicles in good condition. However, the worst case of this poverty issue is the poverty of the mindset which does not tell them that "Cheap things are expensive" for instance, instead of buying a brand new tyre at N30,000, a commercial driver prefers to buy the fairly used tyre at N13,000, only for that tyre to spoil within 7 months of purchase while the brand new one will serve up to two (2) years.

❖ **Impatience and subversion of due process**

Despite the efforts of the commission, the impatience and subversion of due process by eminent members of the society is one factor that will stand against the impact that communication hopes to achieve in enhancing traffic safety in Nigeria. Every Nigerian is aware that both the political elites and their associates are impatient at road check points and traffic regulations. They will always bully other road users and the officers on checkpoints and drive against such formal checks and traffic control systems. The other road users observing such trends will either emulate them to violate traffic rules or disrespect the traffic control officers who they will be accused to have allowed certain persons to beat the traffic. When these classes of people beat traffic, they have subverted due process and there is a high tendency that they do not even have valid driver's license and up to date papers of the registration of the vehicle they are driving.

❖ **Indiscipline and Lawlessness:**

While impatience leads to undisciplined acts, subversion of due process leads to lawlessness. We all can bear witness that there is high level of indiscipline by the motorist exhibited by both the elite and the masses especially as it regards route violation. Wherever there is a checkpoint that requires road users to queue up in a single file, you see road users creating up to four lines and in so many cases covering entire road without making a way for the oncoming vehicle thereby making the traffic lock more difficult to control. Before you realize what is happening, you see Uniform men driving against the traffic which they are suppose to help to protect. Sometimes you see those uniform men mounting illegal road blocks that ends up causing obstructions on the road. Tanker and trailer drivers park indiscriminately on the highways with reckless abandon. Most of Okada riders are not willing to wear safety helmets. The list is endless

❖ **State of road infrastructure and the road safety lacuna it creates**

No matter how good the commission's preparedness towards the prevention of events that leads to road injuries, death or loss of properties, the state of road infrastructure is at the heart of the success or failure of the efforts of the commission. This is because the road safety has almost nothing or little to do about the provision and maintenance of road infrastructure. Yet it affects their efforts in that when road users have suffered more than their patience can take or have spent major part of his journey on bad roads, he/she tend to speed up to cover for the wasted time in the bad spots.

This urge to cover up time arises in virtually all the road users which lead to competition on the use of the road. This competition leads to over speeding and while on that speed, the effects of the bad roads on the vehicles may manifest in the vehicle losing control and perhaps lead to road mishap. It is at this point that the officers' hands are tied against their will to ensure safety of the roads

❖ **Lack of Adequate Manpower:**

It is not in contention that the commission lacks adequate number of staff to take up the dare task of enhancing traffic safety in the country through communication. However, where there is inadequacy in terms of number, such inadequacy can be made up by skills to be acquired through training and retraining of staff such as this. Be that as it may, there is the need for the commission to have officers and men well trained in related field like law to prepare them for prosecution of traffic offenders. Other areas are rescue and emergency services, ICT and human resource development among others. This would build more confidence in staff to discharge their duties more firmly.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. There is need for **holistic involvement of the three tier administrative organs in road safety administration**. This is because our roads are divided among the three tiers of government. The trunk A, B and C entails that there are road users at all the levels of government hence the need to educate members of these three levels of government on the safety of the roads. Since what we have is the federal road safety commission saddle with traffic safety tasks without state and local government road safety commissions, both state and local government should parley with the commission to ensure total enlightenment of our road users. This is pertinent given the fact that those using the trunk C and B, will one day start using the highways hence the need to be prepared in terms of the knowledge of the traffic safety in the country. This parley will enable the commission to widen the scope of their enlightenment campaigns given the supports that may accrue from such parley in the face of dwindling funds at all levels and institutions in Nigeria.
2. There is need for an **effective drivers training policy that will ensure that there is well articulated driving school standardization programme**. This is because, as mentioned in the paper, many drivers especially in the commercial circle did not attend any formal driving school where the rules, signs and signals are thought. On the basis of this point, it should be noted that while there is a policy in place for driving certificate before issuance of driving license, attention should be paid to many of those driving school operators who feel comfortable collecting fees and issuing certificate to people who did not go through their practical driving instructions. Again, apart from the field driving exercise, the signs and symbols are another technical aspect that requires special attention for especially those that don't know how to read and write, hence the call for standardized programme where a road user will be certified on the basis acquired requisite skills to drive and knowledge of roads signs.

3. There is need to **catch them young. By this, we mean that teaching the young ones road safety tips** is a very good timing for road safety communication toward enhanced traffic safety in Nigeria. Road safety is a great subject in which to engage children and young people. If approached in the right way, students often enjoy and get a lot from studying and campaigning for road safety because it is an issue they can understand and that affects them. It is vitally important to help shape children and young people's understanding of and attitudes towards road safety, to help give them the best chance of keeping safe while they are young and as they get older. Road crashes are the biggest killer of young people worldwide.
In the private schools, the commission should parley with the school administrators and train their teachers to serve as trainers such that road safety will be adequately handled at the school level without much logistics squabbles.
4. There is need to **expand the scope of the NYSC Road Safety Club** that teaches graduates about the safety of the road. By implication, the programme should be made compulsory for every graduate. This is because they will also serve as trainees in the various schools where they will be deployed for the Primary Assignment. The gain is in three folds. The programme will help the commission educate the educated component of the youth population in Nigeria, while also training people that will help the commission train the younger population when they are assigned to teach road safety tips to children in the schools they are posted and lastly it would have saved the commission the manpower challenge identified earlier.
5. Generally, there is need for **entrenched safer road use culture in the country**. While the commission will continue and expand its road safety enlightenment campaigns, emphasis should be on making road safety a part of our culture where everyone is involved.

Conclusion

The sanctity of life is worth protecting and given the statistics of deaths through traffic collision, everybody must be awake to ensuring that deaths and injuries on our high ways are drastically reduced through the application of preventive methods that are at the disposal of the public through the public enlightenment campaigns of the FRSC. There is also need for the commission to re-strategize when old formulas are no longer yielding results.

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