

# The Role of Inferences in Constructing, Communicating, & Sustaining Behaviour Change Arguments

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We have been analysing the argumentative content of public behaviour change campaigns in the sustainable transport domain. This has yielded the STCD and given insight into how behaviour change campaigns are developed from an argumentative perspective. Campaigns often communicate information with the aim of inducing the audience to make particular inferences and to consequently elect to alter their behaviour.

With the advent of increased online interaction, particularly social media discussion, behaviour change communications can misfire. For example, language targeting one group of people is misunderstood or taken out of context by another group. Similarly a campaign that might have been quietly withdrawn gains increased attention for the wrong reasons.

## The Sustainable Transport Communication Dataset (STCD)



A collection of high-quality reconstructions and argument analyses from more than 90 English language sources in the sustainable transport domain developed to:

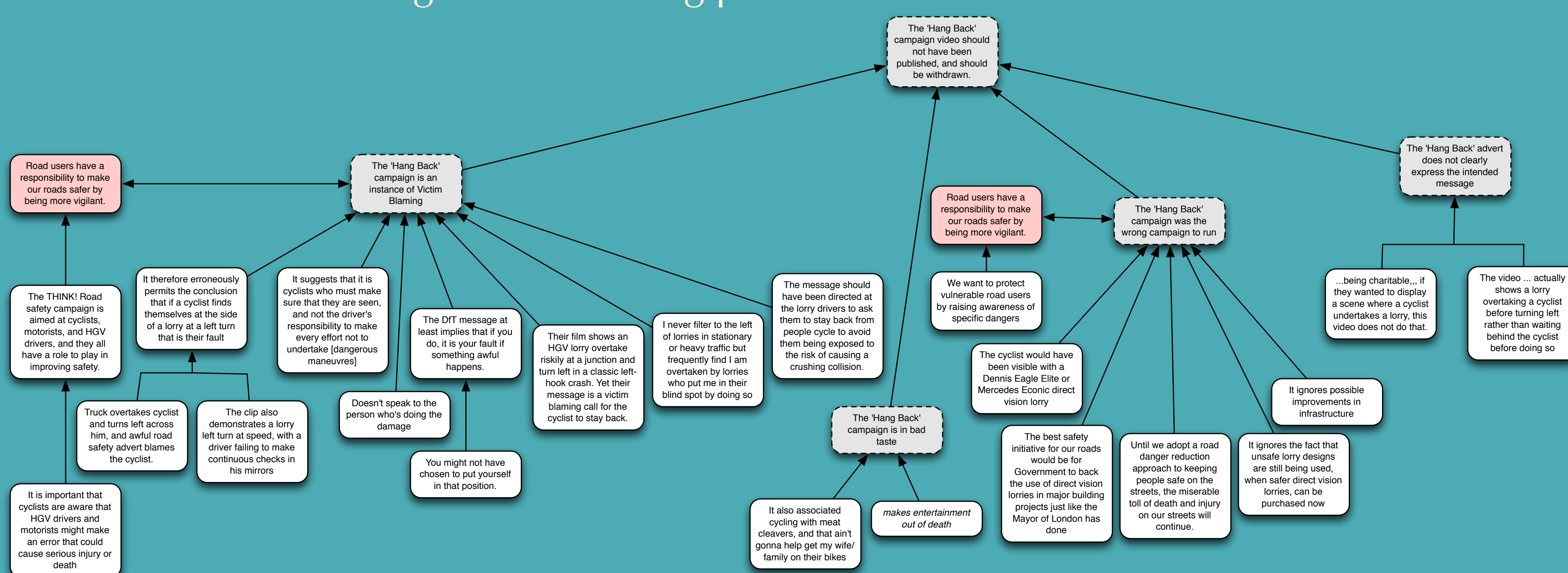
- support the principled design of behaviour change campaigns by examining what has gone before, and
- identify guidelines for reproducible research in computationally oriented argumentation research (this topic was explored in [1]).

[1] S. Wells & K. Pangbourne (2016) "Using Argumentation Within Sustainable Transport Communication" in Proceedings of the 1st European Conference on Argumentation, Lisbon 2015

## CASE STUDY: The THINK! "Hang Back" Cycle Campaign

This public communication campaign from the UK government road safety organisation *THINK!* debuted in September 2016 and included a video that was broadcast on TV & hosted online on YouTube. Immediately there was a substantial negative reaction, both from high profile figures in the media, politics, & cycling worlds, and more generally in the social media arena.

The substantive criticism of the campaign, manifesting as a series of arguments identifying how the video failed to meet its goals was relatively straightforward but the surrounding dialogue was deceptively complex, a situation compounded by miscommunication, misunderstanding, and subtle differences in argument content and stance from both attacking and defending positions.



Arguments are affected by strategic and rhetorical factors & need to be framed for their audience. However, once in the public domain, arguments can take on a life of their own. Whereas in the past, a poster could be taken down or a video not broadcast again, the ease of sharing means that behaviour change campaigns can have an afterlife which far exceeds that which was planned for. Designers must therefore have a response plan in place to enable them to respond to the legitimate questions & issues that arise.

## CONCLUSIONS

It's known that arguments are affected by strategic & rhetorical factors. That arguments must be framed to address their audience. Traditionally behaviour change campaigns could be deployed in a reasonably controlled way in order to address particular communications to specific segments. Some overlap in audiences was an unavoidable effect. However social media facilitates a level of dialogue that is outwith the designer's control, a factor that must be specifically addressed in the design of campaigns.

- \* Once an argument is communicated, it is difficult to influence how that is subsequently comprehended.
- \* Social media has had a great effect on cross-audience penetration of messages.
- \* Behaviour change arguments can and are re-framed by audiences to whom they are not directed.
- \* Behaviour change campaigns should not be static but responsive.

Behaviour change campaigns cannot be designed in ignorance of the ease of sharing & reuse that social media provides. A plan must be in place before deployment to respond to the legitimate issues that arise when an audience interacts with your message in an unplanned way. Constructive engagement rather than defensive dismissal should be the guiding principle.

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