

VIRTUAL EMPATHY AS AN INFLUENCE FACTOR OF ROAD SAFETY PREVENTION MESSAGES' RECEPTION

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INTRODUCTION

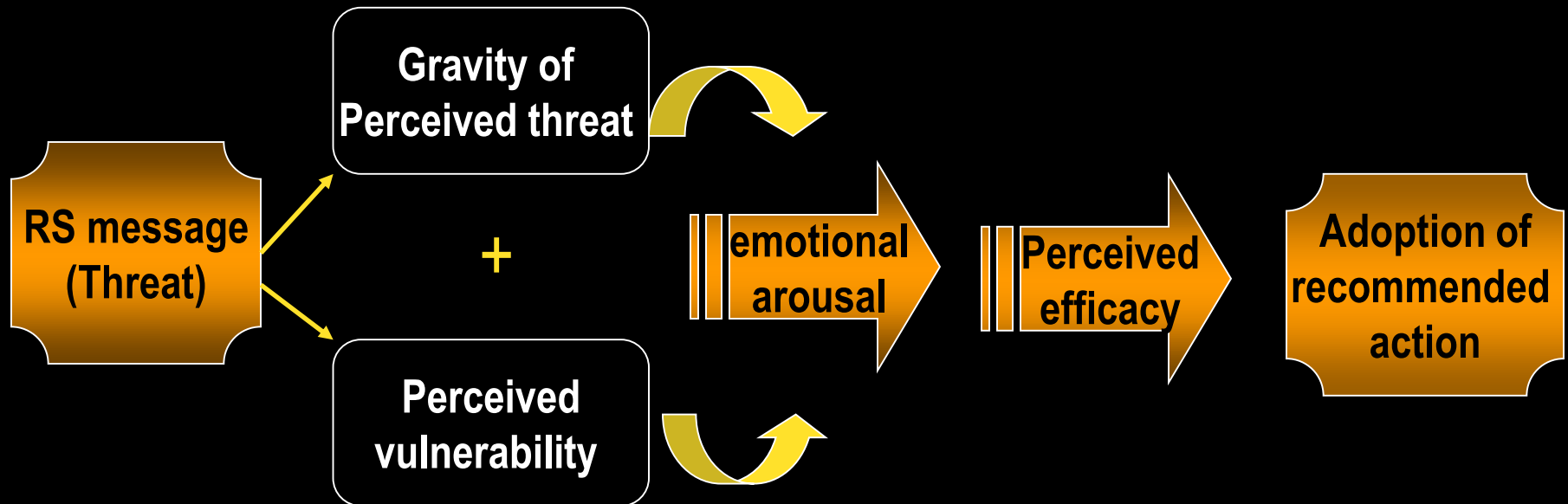
- Role of human factors (speed, alcohol, distractions) in 90% of road accident
- Young drivers
- (16-24 years) are particularly vulnerable (inexperience, invincibility syndrome, etc.)
- Public advertising campaigns as a mean to prevent road accidents : popularity of **fear appeals**

« Campaigns for preventive behavior are more effective if they emphasize the negative consequences of current behavior. Arousing fear (...) has been found to be highly to moderatly successful as a campaign strategy. »

(Rodriguez & Anderson-Wilk, 2002)

FEAR APPEALS IN ROAD SAFETY ADVERTISING

General principle



FEAR APPEALS IN ROAD SAFETY ADVERTISING

Levels of realism : messages appealing to fear and exposing a similar threat, but using a different type of threat representation.

Symbolic

Realistic

Hyper-realistic



3 levels of realism

EMPATHY AS A DISPOSITIONAL TRAIT

- Attitude and behavior change theories : role of individual dispositions?

TRAIT- EMPATHY



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graph TD; A[TRAIT- EMPATHY] --> B[Cognitive dimension: perspective taking]; A --> C[Affective dimension: emotional sharing];
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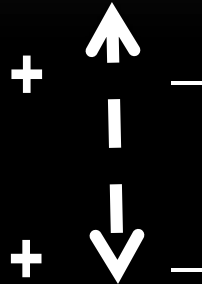
Cognitive dimension:
perspective taking

Affective dimension:
emotional sharing

Def.: Ability to take somebody else's perspective, to imagine how they are feeling and to understand and share their emotions while keeping a sense of self-awareness.

EMPATHY AS A SITUATIONAL RESPONSE

TRAIT- EMPATHY



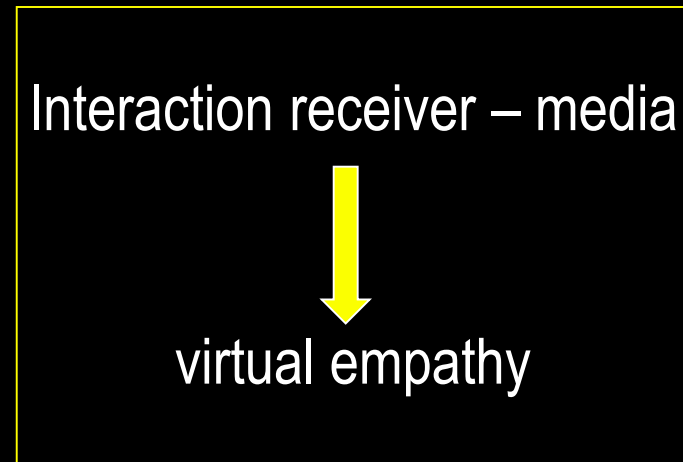
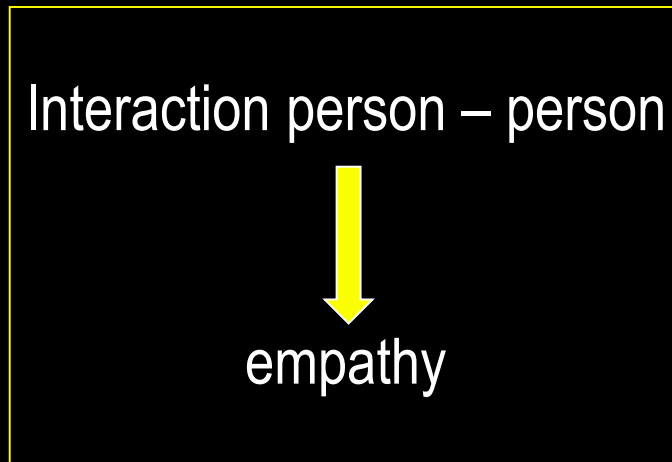
RESPONSE-EMPATHY

Spontaneous projection
in a given situation

Spontaneous emotional response
to another's emotional state

VIRTUAL EMPATHY

- Exploratory concept representing the mediatised context in which empathy can occur, in comparison to a face-to-face/ interpersonnal situation



Def.: Receiver's ability to take a character's (real or fictive) perspective and to project in their situation, to feel and understand how they are feeling while keeping a sense of self-awareness and of the media filter separating him from the observed content.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To examine the relationship between the level of virtual empathy (VE) as a trait and the situational empathic response experienced during the exposure of road safety (RS) messages based on a realistic threat's representation.
2. To examine the influence of theme (speed / alcohol / cell. phone) and origin of the ad (Quebec / France) on the situational empathic response of young drivers exposed to RS messages based on a realistic threat's representation.

METHODOLOGY

Phase I : Questionnaire (measurement of virtual empathy as a trait)

Sample :

- 104 undergraduate students (Laval University)
- aged between 20 and 31

Instrument:

Virtual empathy scale (Daignault, 2007; Reny-Delisle, 2013)

- 60 items reflecting cognitive and affective dimensions and the diversity of media landscape (type of content and media)
- 5-point Likert scale (never/ rarely/ sometimes/ often/ always)
- Partially based on existing empathy scales (Davis, 1980; Gerdes et al., 2011)
- Previously pretested and validated (Cronbach's alpha : 0,857)
- Socio-demographic questions added

METHODOLOGY

Virtual empathy scale (Dagnault, 2007; Reny-Delisle, 2013)

Cela m'arrive	jamais	rarement	parfois	souvent	toujours
Quand je vois une publicité télévisée à caractère dramatique (ex.: scène d'un accident causé par l'alcool ou la vitesse au volant), je ressens les émotions des personnes mises en scène					
Quand je regarde un film ou une de mes émissions préférées (téléroman/télesérie) et que mon personnage favori est heureux, je me sens moi-même heureux					
« Quand je regarde un documentaire ou un reportage télévisé sur la pauvreté, je parviens à m'imaginer ce que ce serait d'être pauvre »					

METHODOLOGY

Phase II: Experiment (situational virtual empathy)

Sample :

- 63 students from first phase participated in one of the 8 experimental sessions
- aged between 20 and 26

Stimuli:

- 6 RS spots (30 sec.) based on a realistic threat's representation

Theme

- Speed (2)
- Alcohol (2)
- Cell phone (2)

Origin of ad

- Québec (3)
- France (3)

METHODOLOGY

Phase II: Experiment (situational virtual empathy)

Measurement:

1. Perception analyzer (continuous evaluation technique)

- Handset with a rotary button and an indicator of the selected value (0 to 100).
- Measure of the two main dimensions of situational virtual empathy : spontaneous **emotional response** and **projection**

2. Thought-listing procedure

- Cognitive response approach (information processing)



METHODOLOGY

Phase II: Experiment (situational virtual empathy)

Protocol:

2 ad exposures

1st exposure : Measure of situational VE (emotional response) with perception analyzer

Instruction:

“As you watch the ad, indicate on a scale from 0 (not at all) to 100 (extremely) to what extent you feel the emotions conveyed. Turn the rotary button in a continuous manner. If you don’t feel anything, leave the button at 0.”

2nd exposure : Measure of situational VE (projection) with perception analyzer + thought listing task

Instruction:

*“As you watch the ad, indicate on a scale from 0 (not at all) to 100 (extremely) to what extent you can project yourself in the events presented. Turn the rotary button in a continuous manner. If you can’t project yourself, leave the button at 0.
You’ll then have 60 seconds to write every thought that came up while watching the ad.”*

PRELIMINARY RESULTS

Q.1 Is there a relationship between virtual empathy (VE) as a trait and situational empathic response ?

Table 1

Type of VE	Mean (μ)	r Pearson	Sign. (5%)
Trait	2,65	-0,037	0,776
Situational	26,80		

Table 2

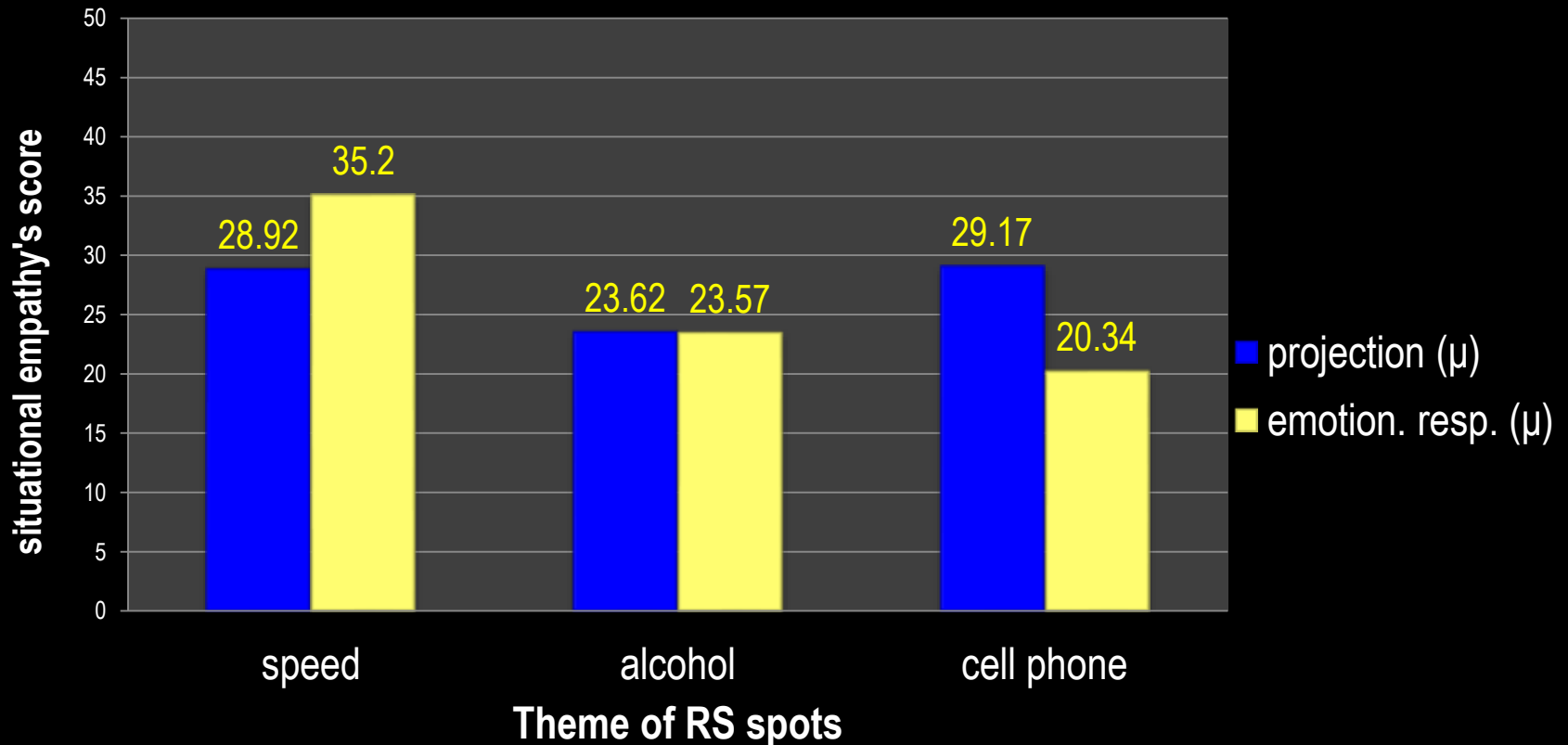
Level of VE (trait)	Situational VE response (μ)	t	Sign. (5%)
Low	⊖	-1,136	0,920
Moderate	25,42		
High	28,65		

Is trait-empathy independant from the situational empathic response that can be generated by a specific media content?

PRELIMINARY RESULTS

Q.2 Does the theme of RS spots influence the situational empathic response of young drivers?

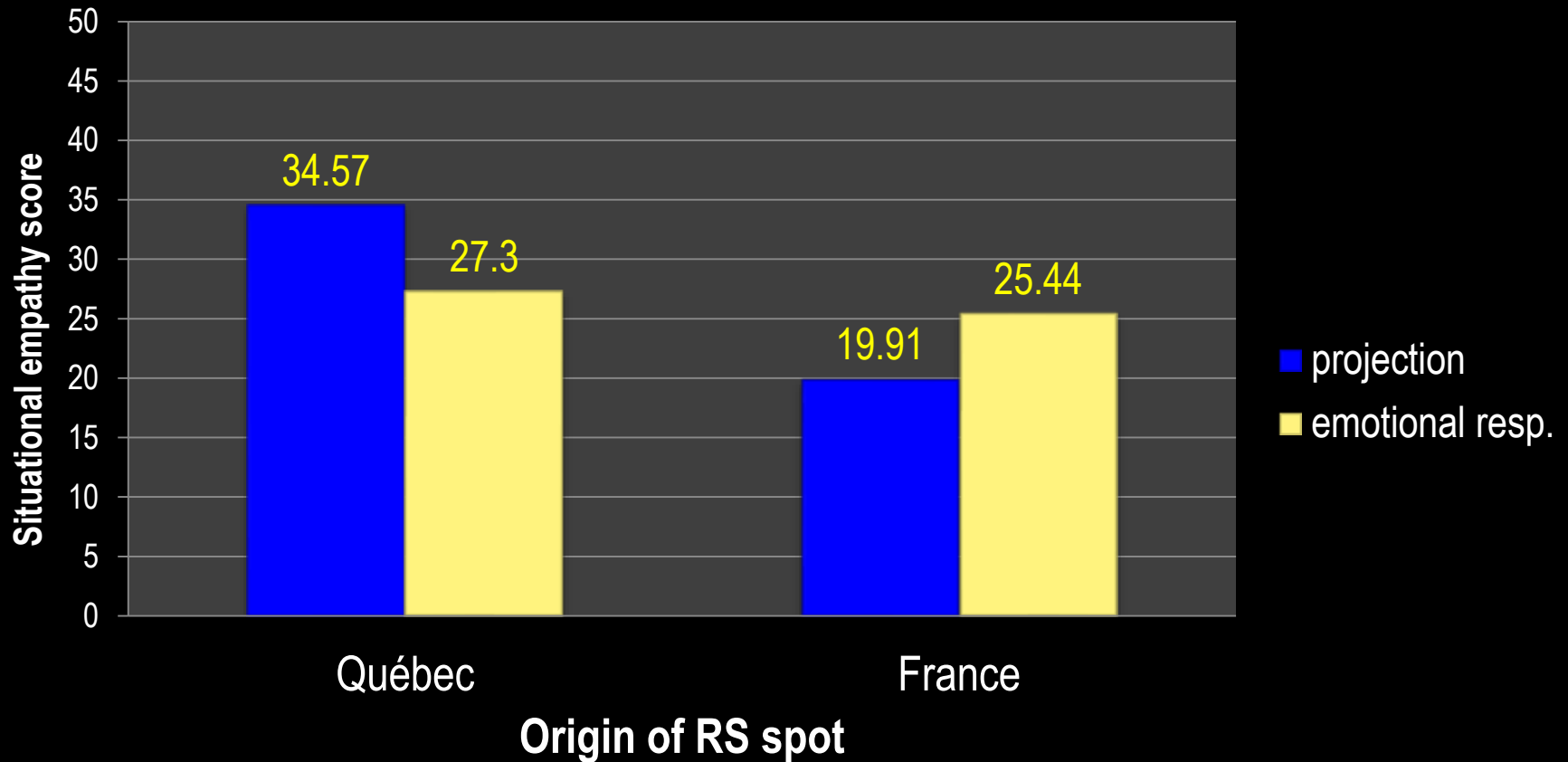
Situational empathy mean scores according to theme of spots



PRELIMINARY RESULTS

Q.3 Does the origin of RS spots influence the situational empathic response of young drivers?

Situational empathy mean scores according to origin of spots



CONCLUSION

- A RS ad can generate an empathic response, independently of general empathic disposition.
- The empathic response is notably influenced by ad's theme and origin (↓ alcohol and French ads).
- Virtual empathy → ad's effectiveness?
- Further research will examine the influence of different road safety's advertising strategies (e.g. positive appeals, guilt appeals) on the empathic response.

THANK YOU!
MERCI!