

Development Department Research Programme

Evaluation of the Drug Driving TV Advert

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The Scottish Executive and the Scottish Road Safety Campaign commissioned NFO Social Research to carry out an evaluation of a recent TV advert aimed at discouraging people from driving under the influence of drugs ('drug driving'). The research consisted of a series of questions in the Scottish Opinion Survey (SOS) in June 2002, and a quota survey of a sample of current Scottish drivers between late July and September 2002 to provide more detailed data on reactions to the advert and on individual experiences of drug driving. In addition, a series of qualitative interviews with 17-24 year old drivers and their friends were undertaken in September 2002 to explore attitudes towards the advert in more detail.

Main findings

- Awareness of advertising and publicity on drugs and driving was high – 76% of respondents in the SOS and 70% of respondents to the quota survey of drivers remembered seeing some advertising or publicity on drugs and driving recently.
- Understanding of the key messages of the advert was generally good. Many participants were unaware of the new tests for drug driving, and therefore found the advert informative. The research also indicated that the advert was particularly successful in reaching the 17-24 year old key target group.
- There was, however, some evidence that the overall impact of the advert was undermined by doubts about the credibility of the enforcement message. Many participants in the qualitative interviews expressed doubt that drivers in Scotland would be stopped by the police, or that the tests would detect many drug users.
- The qualitative research suggested that some aspects of the style and content of the advert may also have limited the impact on younger drivers. There was a widespread perception that the characters in the advert were too old, and that they appeared to be drunk rather than on drugs, which limited the extent to which participants could identify with them. There was also some criticism of the lack of information in the advert about the precise legal consequences of drug driving.
- Most participants found the first half of the advert amusing, but there was some debate amongst respondents over whether the second half had as much impact on viewers.

Introduction

The drug driving television advert is a response to rising concern about the issue of drug driving in Scotland. A recent NFO System Three research report for the Scottish Executive (Ingram et al, 2000) found that 9% of respondents in a survey of 17-39 year-old drivers in Scotland reported having driven under the influence of drugs, and 5% reported having done so in the previous 12 months. The survey also suggested that knowledge of the legal position regarding illegal drug use and driving is poor – 12% of respondents thought someone could not be prosecuted for driving after taking illegal drugs, while 23% were unsure whether someone could be prosecuted or not.

The drug driving television advert was developed by Faulds Advertising on behalf of the Scottish Road Safety Campaign's Drug Drive Working Group in response to these concerns.

The advert uses humour to attempt to gain the viewer's attention before presenting the serious message that new tests aimed at catching drug drivers are being introduced in Scotland. The advert begins by showing what are apparently clips from American police video footage of people being tested for drug driving, attempting to touch their nose with their fingers, walk in a straight line, count backwards etc. It is intended to be very amusing. The footage then switches to a police check in a Scottish city. An on-screen message reads 'The same tests are now being carried out in Scotland'. A blurry-eyed man is shown failing the same test and is then shown in the back of a police car. The slogan at the end reads 'Now who's laughing?'

NFO Social Research was commissioned to evaluate the advert. The evaluation focused particularly on its impact on young drivers aged 17-24 years old – the key target group for the advert because of their increased likelihood of involvement in drug driving.

The research had three main elements: a series of questions about the advert in the June 2002 Scottish Opinion Survey (SOS); a separate quota survey of 730 Scottish drivers, and a series of peer focus groups and 'paired depth' interviews with 17-24 year-old drivers and their partners or one other close friend.

Views and experiences of drug driving

The research found that drug driving remains much less common than drink driving. While 4% of respondents to the survey of drivers admitted ever having driven within a few

hours of using cannabis, 30% admitted driving when they thought they might have been over the legal limit for alcohol. This is a lower proportion of respondents admitting to drug driving than found in the previous Ingram's NFO System Three study, however, this difference is probably explained by the fact that the Ingram study only included 17-39 year-olds, thus excluding older age groups who are less likely to have drug-driven. This assertion is supported by the fact that when the results of the driver survey for this study are confined to 17-39 year-olds, 9% admitted having driven within a few hours of taking cannabis.

The qualitative research explored the situations in which drug driving occurs. These included: after taking drugs (usually cannabis) in cars, particularly for younger drivers where the car plays a key role in their social life; after taking drugs at a friends house or party; and driving home from clubs after taking drugs.

Both the qualitative interviews and the survey of drivers suggested that young people do not view the impact of drugs on people's driving capacity as being great, particularly by comparison with the effects of alcohol. Drink driving was seen as both more dangerous than drug driving, and more likely to lead to prosecution.

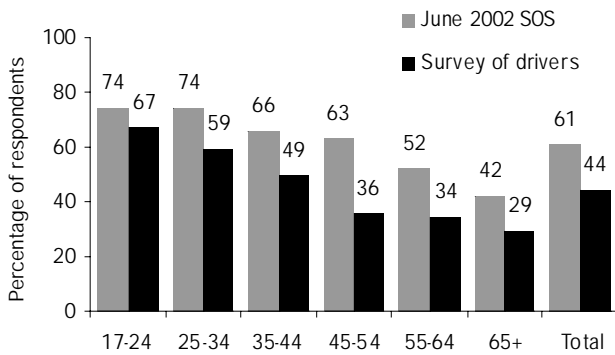
Participants did recognise, however, that the effects of drugs on a person's driving would vary depending on the type of drug used, the amount taken and the individual concerned.

Over half of respondents to the survey of drivers who had driven within a few hours of using cannabis were 'not very worried/concerned' or 'not at all worried/concerned' either about being stopped by the police or about having an accident. This contrasts with 57% of drivers who had driven when they thought they might be over the limit who said they had been 'very' or 'fairly' worried or concerned about being stopped by the police, and 47% who had been 'very' or 'fairly' worried or concerned about being involved in an accident.

Awareness and understanding of the Drug Driving TV advert

The quantitative research found that awareness of advertising and publicity on drugs and driving in general, and of the drug driving TV advert in particular, was high. The SOS, carried out immediately after the advert had been shown on Scottish TV, found that 76% of respondents remembered seeing some advertising or publicity on drugs and driving (81% when confined to respondents with a current driving licence). The survey of drivers, carried out 6-10 weeks later found that 70% of drivers were aware of

some such publicity. Prompted awareness of the Drug Driving TV advert was highest among 17-24 year-olds in both surveys – see figure, below. This suggests that the advert was successful in reaching its key target audience of young drivers.



Participants in the qualitative research clearly thought the advert was informative – it told viewers about the new tests for drug driving of which many participants were previously unaware. The informative role of the advert is supported by the fact that a sizeable minority of respondents to the survey of drivers (23%) ‘agreed’ or ‘strongly agreed’ that with the statement “It told me something I didn’t know before”. Further, 82% ‘disagreed’ or ‘strongly disagreed’ with the statement “I wasn’t sure what the advert was trying to say”, suggesting that understanding of the advert was generally good.

However, although participants in the qualitative research found the advert informative, there was some evidence that its overall impact was undermined by doubts about the credibility of the enforcement message. Many respondents expressed doubt that drug drivers in Scotland would be stopped by the police. Some participants suggested that the advert did not tally with their own experience, in that they had not personally heard of anyone being tested for drug driving. Participants were also doubtful that drug drivers would fail the tests even if they were stopped.

Views on the content and style of the advert

Most participants in the qualitative interviews noted that the advert included a mix of different kinds of people rather than stereotypical drug users. However, many participants also commented spontaneously that they felt the people in the advert were generally too old, and that they didn’t look like the type of people who would use drugs. In fact, many participants suggested that the characters appeared to be drunk rather than on drugs. This made it difficult for

participants to identify with the characters shown as young drug users or drug drivers.

The majority of participants in the qualitative research found the first half of the advert amusing. However, there was debate over the use of humour in the advert. While some participants felt that humour was effective in gaining the viewer’s attention, others thought that it detracted from the serious message. It was suggested that the second half of the advert needed to have more impact to offset the more humorous aspect of the advert.

Comparisons were frequently made between the drug driving advert and other road safety adverts that were perceived as ‘harder hitting’, usually because of their inclusion of footage of accidents (whether real or staged). However, it was not clear that participants’ own behaviour was affected more by the latter kind of campaign. In relation to drug driving, the fact that many participants did not perceive drug driving to be particularly dangerous or likely to lead to accidents may mean that this kind of approach would have limited impact in deterring potential drug drivers.

Participants in several interviews highlighted the lack of clarity in the advert about the legal consequences of failing the tests shown. Many participants were confused about what the legal consequences of drug driving are, with suggestions ranging from “a £50 fine and a couple of penalty points” to disqualification or prison. The lack of information in the advert about the consequences of being caught for drug driving was perceived as a significant weakness by a number of participants.

Conclusions and lessons for the future

This research suggests that it may be useful to consider three key areas where there is scope to reinforce the success of the advert:

Future advertising work in the area of drug driving might include more young people, and be clearer in distinguishing drug driving from drink driving. This would make it easier for the target audience of young drug takers to relate to future campaigns.

There may be an argument for developing different materials in relation to different kinds of drugs and/or different kinds of drug users. While the main aim of the advert was simply to highlight the fact that the police are now testing for drug driving in general, the qualitative research found that different drugs are seen as having very different effects on

driving. Young people also make subtle distinctions between the acceptability and effects of different kinds of drugs, and they take drugs in a range of different circumstances. Young people who take one sort of drug in one context may not relate to adverts depicting young people taking other drugs in other situations.

The credibility of the enforcement message needs to be strengthened, along with perceptions of the real legal consequences of drug driving. Advertising needs to be supported by actual police enforcement activity and future adverts could also highlight the actual legal consequences of drug driving. While advertising may have some impact on

people's awareness of enforcement, unless the message is confirmed by high-profile successes or by personal knowledge/experience of police enforcement, its impact over time is likely to wane.

About the Study

The study was carried out by NFO Social Research between June and November 2002. Rachel Ormston led the research which comprised of questions in the June 2002 SOS, a quota survey, peer focus groups and paired depth interviews.

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