

Drug Drive Creative Development Research Findings

9th January 2015



Sample

Four groups were conducted with the target audience of young men who drive (or are passengers) after taking drugs.

The recruitment was split on two key dimensions: the age of the driver, and the type of drug being used (either cannabis or class A drugs).

Other dimensions were also taken into consideration to make sure the sample was as representative as possible: SEG, location and type of road driven on (rural or urban).

	Drug type	Age	Gender	SEG	Road type	Location
1	Cannabis	18 - 24	Male	BC1C2	Rural	Leeds
2	Cannabis	25 - 34	Male	BC1C2	Suburban	London
3	Class A	18 - 24	Male	BC1C2	Rural	London
4	Class A	25 - 34	Male	BC1C2	Suburban	Leeds

Lights and Police

Lights and Police were ultimately seen as the same idea

In this debrief the feedback on Lights and Police have been included together because they were ultimately seen as two ways of executed the same creative idea: dramatizing that a drug driver's paranoia of being caught by the police is now becoming a reality.

In Lights this idea is dramatized by the paranoid driver thinking he sees flashing blue lights, in Police it is dramatized by the driver thinking he is seeing policemen. But essentially they are making the same point.

Importantly, there didn't appear to be any significant difference between using flashing lights or using policemen. Both clearly signaled the fear of being caught.

Of the two scripts, Lights was usually preferred. But this wasn't because flashing lights were preferred to policemen. It was because the script felt like a more realistic portrayal of paranoia.

"I thought it [Police] was unrealistic. With [Lights] you could imagine seeing the lights, seeing the police car in the distance. But seeing the police everywhere is too over the top." (Male, Class A, 25-34, Leeds)

It was the idea that most strongly engaged the audience

The paranoia felt by a driver was a feeling that some identified with more than others, but it was something everyone could recognize.

There were some who felt that they'd being drug driving long enough not to feel paranoia anymore. Notably they were the older cannabis users: a group who we've found in previous research have become particularly blasé about drug driving.

Importantly, however, they could still recognise the scenario of feeling paranoid behind the wheel of a car.

“The constant paranoia is what makes it seem like he is younger. When you are older you are used to it, you don’t feel that paranoid because you know what you are doing” (Male, Cannabis, 25 – 34, London).

The reaction was much more visceral than other scripts

Lights and Police were often described as much darker and more disturbing scripts. They tapped into something that left participants feeling uneasy, and prompted a fear of getting caught.

“It creates a fear factor and makes you feel uneasy. Takes you out of your seat and puts you in the car. You can feel it.” (Male, Class A, 25-34, Leeds)

There was potential to communicate the law change clearly

The communication of the law change was notably clearer than it had been in the scripts shown in the previous round of research. In some instances it was spontaneously seen as the main message of the advert. In other cases the message was initially described as “if you take drugs and drive the police could get you” rather than “the law has changed”. But on prompting this was usually understood to be part of the message.

“The message to me is that the law has changed and I have put I should be worried, paranoid now.” (Male, Cannabis, 18-24, Leeds)

The clearer communication was helped by a narrative that led more naturally into the information about the law change. It tells the story of a driver who thinks the threat of being caught is in his head, only for it to become a reality.

Communication was clearest when the titles were more specific

Another element that helped with communication was the wording of the titles. In particular...

“From March 2nd the law is changing to crack down on drug driving. So now there’s even more reason to be paranoid”.

...was preferred to...

“If you’re driving on drugs you should be paranoid. Because the law has changed to make it even easier to convict you”.

The main reason for this was the specific date, which made the point much more clearly than the other, more vague, mention of a change in the law.

“I said it was a clear message that the law was changing and it says the date as well, from March 2nd which is more definitive” (Male, Class A, 18 – 24, London).

There was less of a clear difference in response to the rest of the wording, although “crack down on drug driving” was felt to be more substantial than “make it even easier to convict you”.

“[From March 2nd] It is more specific; the other one is kind of loose. This actually tells you a day and it tells you it is going to get tougher – cracking down on drugs.” (Male, Class A, 25-34, Leeds)

Also, for a small number, there was something in the idea of changing laws to make it “even easier” for police that made them feel a little uncomfortable. It seemed to be suggesting that things were changing in favour of the police.

It was seen to apply equally well to cannabis and class A drugs

Ultimately it was seen that the driver had probably taken Class As, as signified by him looking sweaty and wired.

“It’s when you are coming down on pills. The come down bit. You have been at a party, you think ‘I could get a train home with all of the strangers looking into my eyes or I could just drive home’. It’s a come down and he is sweating, and the dance music on the radio”. (Male, Cannabis, 25 -34, London).

But paranoia was generally accepted as being a universal issue, experienced by most people driving on drugs. As such cannabis users could still recognize it as something they might have experienced.

“I think the biggest thing is the thoughts. When you are driving it is the thoughts because you are paranoid. It doesn’t matter if you are paranoid with smoking or with coke whatever it is you are always going to be on edge because you have done drugs and you think the worst even though the chances of getting caught are low statistically.” (Male, Cannabis, 18-24, Leeds)

The balance of tone feels about right at the moment

A key concern with this route was that it might feel heavy-handed: the driver feels surrounded, the threat of arrest is everywhere, until finally he is caught, and the voiceover talks about paranoia and cracking down.

It was an issue that was raised by a few of the participants. They felt that if the final ad felt too authoritarian they wouldn’t engage with it. But it should probably be seen as something to watch out for rather than an immediate concern.

“You don’t want somebody to have a go at you, you almost want somebody to relate to. Yeah people drink, people smoke but so you know, here are some of the negative things. You don’t want something that says don’t do it, don’t do it, you are an arsehole for doing it. (Male, Cannabis, 25 – 34, London)

Most participants felt the tone was about right. Partly because it is told from the perspective of the drug driver and they identified with him. Partly because they felt a reasonably firm, slightly threatening, approach was appropriate.

“I think it is just right [Lights], keeps it realistic because of the whole paranoia. That could actually be you. You identify with it.” (Male, Cannabis, 25 – 34, London)

“You get a bit more of a telling off in this one [Police] I felt. That’s a good thing, the authority.” (Male, Cannabis, 18-24, Leeds)

Making this a realistic portrayal of paranoia

It's important that the paranoia the driver feels is realistic. But it's also worth noting that the groups accepted the paranoia needs to be heightened a little to make the ad engaging.

The most important distinction to make is between paranoia and hallucination. Paranoia was generally taken to mean looking at something, and for a brief moment, misreading it as something threatening. Hallucination was taken to mean seeing something that simply wasn't there.

For example... Seeing a man in a kebab shop dressed as policeman was seen as a hallucination: there's nothing about a kebab shop owner that looks like a policeman, it's all in the head of the driver. Seeing two bouncers dressed in black and thinking they're policemen was seen as paranoia: it's an easy slip of the mind to make if you're paranoid. It was credible for this slip of the mind to feel a bit "trippy" but not for it to feel like a full hallucination.

"If a policeman can turn into a kebab man, red and white in a kebab shop, I am assuming that it is something more than paranoia. If it was a waiter, come out of a restaurant, or somebody at the side of the street with a black jacket on, then yes" (Male, Cannabis, 25 – 34, London)

For this reason the Lights script was invariably seen to be more realistic than Police. It was realistic that someone might see a flashing light outside of their car and think it was a police light. On occasion some of the scenes were questioned as they didn't feel quite close enough to a blue flashing light outside of the car (e.g. the flashing mobile phone in the first iteration of the script) but generally participants were happy to trust it would work.

"Very realistic, quite relatable as well. Portrays that whole getting caught thing very well, because you are kind of scared of getting caught and then all of a sudden you do get caught" (Male, Class A, 18 – 24, London).

At the same time the Police script was often questioned for feeling too much like a hallucination, particularly the scene where the fly posters look like posters of policemen.

"To be honest I have done acid and anything you could think of but I can't relate to that. I would never be so stupid as to do acid or mushrooms and drive. That is the real silly end of the spectrum. I think it is a good advert, looks great to watch it but you don't think I am never going to do mushrooms and drive?" (Male, Cannabis, 25 – 34, London).

It was important to end with the driver being caught

Nearly everyone we spoke to felt it was important to see the driver being pulled over. Without this scene the ad felt strangely incomplete to them, it implied the driver had probably continued on his way without any consequence.

“It [original version of Police script] doesn't show any consequences so that is what fails to strike any fear into our hearts.” (Male, Cannabis, 18-24, Leeds)

The scripts weren't seen to suggest a heavy police presence

One concern with these scripts was that they might be taken literally: the audience might assume an ad showing a multitude of flashing lights or policemen to suggest there are more police on the roads.

This wasn't something that was raised in any of the groups. Participants were clear that the paranoid driver was imagining the police presence, and that the only real policeman on the road was the one who catches him at the end.

Then and Now

Then and Now was an idea with reasonable levels of engagement

Then and Now told a story that had the potential to be interesting. We see a man in the 1960s knocking back pints of beer, while the man in the modern setting seems to abstain. It sets up the expectation that the man in the 60s is being irresponsible, but the modern man isn't. The moment the modern man is arrested for drug driving therefore comes as a twist in the tale.

“They are lulling you into a false sense of this is a drink driving ad but then it takes it to another place.” (Male, Cannabis, 18-24, Leeds)

A lot of the engagement came from the comparison of drink driving and drug driving at the heart of the story. There were many who found this genuinely interesting and thought provoking. It sparked conversations about how strange it was that drink driving was seen as a terrible thing to do, but drug driving was still seen as OK.

But whilst being an interesting advert, it didn't have the same levels of engagement as Lights or Police. Compared to those scripts it was felt to be a good way to make the point, rather than a really involving story with real suspense and drama. As one participant put it, it was an ad that made him *think*, rather than an ad that made him *feel*.

“It gives you the information and the message is clear but it doesn't hit home as much... The other one where the guy is paranoid you can see the actions and the drama that is more gripping and would hit more than just telling someone that something is wrong.” (Male, Class A, 25-34, Leeds)

It communicated the law change particularly strongly

This script was universally seen to be the one that communicated the law change most clearly. There were a few different reasons for this...

As found in previous research comparing drug driving to drink driving was a very effective shorthand to help understand how it is being seen by the law.

“It's saying drug driving is as bad as drink driving and it is just as easy to be caught. Before you were much more likely to get away with it” (Male, Class A, 18 -24, London).

Comparing this year to a year in the 60s worked well to emphasise this was something happening right now.

“A clear message. Drug driving is going to become as bad, as big a deal, as drunk driving and it is going to be easier for them to catch you. The drink driving law changed back then, and now the drug driving law is changing.” (Male, Class A, 25-34, Leeds)

Putting the change in its historical context seemed to give it added weight. The change to drink driving laws was clearly a big deal, and it made the change to drug driving feel like a big deal too.

“In 1964 they put the drink driving law in so it is a significant year for making our roads safer. I think this is saying that 2015 is as equally important as 1964, they are making our roads safer, drink driving and drug driving are equally irresponsible. (Male, Cannabis, 25 – 34, London).

It was something that worked across drug usage

The scene depicted was interpreted by everyone as someone taking class A drugs. It was mostly taken to be realistic although many noted the driver would probably be drinking as well (showing him drinking would obviously muddy the comparison).

Whilst it was so clearly focused on class A drugs, it was assumed the message also extended to cannabis. This was because by saying drugs are the same as drink, it was implicitly referring to all drugs.

The tone was seen to be informative

This script was seen to take a very neutral, informative approach to the subject. As such any issues with heavy-handedness weren't raised.

A small watch out would be making it feel credible the man has taken drugs

In the first iteration of the script it wasn't at all clear that the man had taken drugs. Seeing a man in a pub drinking orange juice actually suggested someone very unlikely to take drugs. In the second iteration of the script this was addressed, and it was much clearer this was a man on a night out. Nonetheless the subject was raised again.

“It's [original version of Here and Now script] a picture of a guy drinking juice and then getting arrested, he could be innocent, it's not obvious drug taking is it, he could have been spiked, you don't know.” (Male, Cannabis, 18-24, Leeds)

In the final film it will be important that a subtle balance is found. On the one hand it needs to come as a surprise that the man is drug driving and has been pulled over, because that is the twist at the end of the script. On the other hand the ending can't come completely out of nowhere, so it needs to feel like an occasion where someone would be likely to be taking drugs (e.g. more of a Saturday night than a Thursday night).

The potential to make people think about their behaviour

As found in previous research, communicating a law change is unlikely to have the same impact as communicating a swab test would

“If they told you what they’re doing to prove you’ve taken drugs, blood tests, hair tests, DNA tests, that is what would make me think” (Male, Cannabis, 25 – 34, London)

However, these scripts clearly had potential to make people think about their behaviour, although they worked in slightly different ways.

Lights/Police drove a much more emotional response. Rather than leaving participants thinking about the law change it left them with a feeling that they should be more wary of being caught by the police. And many felt that this more instinctive response was more likely to change their behaviour.

“You’re still thinking about it aren’t you. If you are still thinking about it that is why it is clever. If it is a powerful enough association it might swing you over”. (Male, Class A, 18 – 24, London)

Here and Now drove a more rational response. Rather than leaving participants with a particularly strong feeling, it left them thinking about the law change and what it might involve. It was more likely to spark conversation about the law change itself, and prompt people to want to know more. Although many said that, because it wasn’t as emotionally involving, they might more easily forget it.

“It makes me think they must have something like a breathalyser to test for drugs now. And the penalties will be harsher. I’d want to find out a bit more about it.” (Male, Cannabis, 18 – 24, Leeds)

Paranoia

The paranoia of the driver was almost too subtle

A big challenge with this approach was that it was subtle to the point that the groups were unsure whether the people looking at the driver were in his mind, or whether they really were looking at him. The majority of participants assumed the latter.

Those who assumed the people really were looking at the driver often became somewhat confused by the message. They mainly saw it as saying ““everyone can tell if you’re driving on drugs, including the police” which distracted them from the main message.

“People are just looking at him whereas in the other there is obviously something going on in his mind. It could draw attention to the fact that it shows how obvious you are when you are driving on drugs.” (Male, Class A, 18 – 24, London).

Those who interpreted the driver as being paranoid sometimes preferred this route to Lights and Police because it felt more realistic. It was very close to the real experience of paranoia to show a driver who feels that everyone is staring at him.

“I liked it. I thought it was more realistic. I could identify with it. You don’t want to get the train home or a bus, you do think they are staring at you”. (Male, Cannabis, 25 – 34, London).

Overall the communication felt a little bit softer

Whereas Lights and Police were dramatising the paranoia of being caught, this was dramatizing the paranoia of being watched. It was still an uncomfortable thought, but ultimately the fear of being caught was more impactful. As a result, consistent feedback on this script was that it felt a little bit softer than others, and less likely to get a response out of the viewer.

“It was softer. If I was driving a car and I saw people staring I think I could ignore them. It wouldn’t bother me that much. I think if I saw a policeman I would panic.” (Male, Cannabis, 18-24, Leeds)

The law change may not have been communicated as clearly

As it turned out, this script didn’t appear first in the rotation in any of the groups (following the feedback in Leeds, other scripts were prioritised in London), so it’s difficult to say for sure how clearly it might have communicated the law change.

However, there was some evidence to suggest that the key message didn’t come through as clearly. Partly because the narrative was less focused on the threat of being caught from the start. Partly because of the confusion around exactly what was intended by the people looking at the driver.

“I put down that you might be drawing attention to yourself without realizing, and other people can clearly see that you are on drugs. But like you say, probably unrealistic that they are going to stare at you” (Male, Class A, 18 - 24, London).

Drug Drivers

An idea that often left people feeling confused

This script was a seemingly simple idea that caused quite a lot of confusion in the groups. The intention was to show the double standards of drug drivers saying they would never drink and drive. The reality was that there were a couple of things being dramatized by the footage of the drug drivers

The script was showing drugs impair you to such an extent that you probably shouldn’t drive, and also showing drug drivers have double standards when it comes to drink driving. It proved to be a bit too much to take in, and many participants became distracted. They focused on the impairment of the driver, more than the attitude to drink driving.

“They were talking and being smug [about not drink driving] and the next minute they have all the side effects. I don’t really know what the message was, I’m not sure this works.” (Male, Cannabis, 18-24, Leeds)

“This one is about showing how control is lost over drugs and how much. As much as it can affect your speech it can affect your driving. They think they are talking normal but really you are not” (Male, Cannabis, 25 – 34, London)

An insight they recognized, but drivers they couldn’t identify with

The idea that drug drivers will say they’d never drink and drive was something that everyone could identify with, and got them to reflect on the stupidity of those double standards.

“The fact that they are talking about drinking and it is such a bad thing and they would never do that, and you see the state they are in, it does highlight the naivety and ignorance” (Male, 18 – 24, Class A, London).

But they often felt that the drug drivers used to dramatise the insight were people they couldn’t identify with. The idea of someone taking drugs, then driving a car, and then talking to camera about drink driving seemed too contrived. The most common complaint was that the drivers weren’t realistic.

“I don’t really like it. Can’t really imagine sitting in a car like that. The last thing that would drop into my mind is that it’s really awful drink driving. Why would I think that? That is not the conversation you are going to have”. (Male, Cannabis, 25 – 34)

Unlikely to communicate the law change

Partly because of the confusion, and partly because of the lack of identification, many of the participants switched off from this particular script. Then often left this part of their private response sheets blank.

Showing that someone has been taking drugs

The best way to show someone has taken drugs presents something of a dilemma, but not a major one.

The effects of cannabis were seen to be fundamentally different to the effects of class As. Cannabis was associated with closed eyes, a slack jaw, and relaxed body language. Class As were associated with dilated pupils, a churning jaw, and wired body language. Participants struggled to identify any cues that might apply equally to cannabis and class A drugs.

That said, it might not be too serious a concern for the communications. There are two reasons for this...

Firstly, both of the recommended creative ideas managed to talk about drug driving in a universal way. Feeling paranoia could be related to all drug use. Comparing drug driving to drink driving automatically encompassed all drugs.

Secondly, a depiction of someone who has taken class A drugs was something everyone could identify with. The cannabis users had often taken class A drugs themselves, and the behavior of someone on class As was generally taken as a reasonably signifier of drug driving more generally.

If the driver is going to be shown to have been taking class A drugs however, it is worth stopping short of more extreme, caricatured behavior. Showing someone looking wide-eyed, wired and sweaty as in the scripts is probably accessible to everyone, but going as far as someone who is bug-eyed, gurning, and wanting to dance might start feeling too specific.

Providing other information on the law change

As expected, a consistent response in the groups was to want to know more about the law change. Interestingly, an understanding of the legal details tended to be very low in the order of priorities, which were...

1. *How will they be testing for drugs?* The issue of testing came up repeatedly. The most pressing concern was knowing how the police were now going to test for drugs. Most guessed some sort of new swab test or blood test, but no-one was sure.
2. *What will the new limits be?* This was partly about how much of a drug you would need to take for it to be detected, and partly about how long it could have been in your system. There was an expectation it would vary from one drug to the next.
3. *What will the penalties be?* Many made the assumption that a change in the law would naturally mean a change to the penalties, or the introduction of penalties for the first time.
4. *What has prompted the change in the law?* A few were looking for reassurance that the law change was prompted by a rise in deaths on the road, rather than being a change for the sake of it.
5. *How is the law actually changing?* Hardly anyone thought of this in terms of a change to the detail of the legislation. But one or two asked to know exactly what it meant.

“I’d definitely think ‘is it getting more serious?’ Check out the laws. Are they going to start checking more regularly? Is it going to go from a fine to a prison sentence?”
(Male, Cannabis, 25 – 34, London)

Conclusions and recommendations

The recommendation from this research would be to progress with Lights/Police, with Then and Now as a potential alternative.

Lights/Police was the idea with the most potential to emotionally engage this audience, and it communicated the key message about the law change.

In developing the execution, the key will be to make sure it conveys the paranoia of driving on drugs in a way that the audience can relate to: a driver who misreads his surroundings, rather a driver who hallucinates things are there when they’re not.

At present the Lights script was seen to come closest to depicting that paranoia, but it was assumed that the Police script could work just as well if re-written.

Other considerations for this script were...

Showing the driver as wide-eyed, wired and sweaty as in the script; using titles that make the law change stand out clearly by referencing the date; making sure the story ends with the driver being caught; being mindful that the tone doesn't become too authoritarian.

Then and Now was also a script with potential. It communicated the law change particularly clearly but didn't have the same level of emotional engagement as Lights/Police.

There are fewer considerations for development with this script, but it would be worth remembering...

Showing the driver is clearly on a night out so it remains a surprise that he is arrested for drug driving, but doesn't come out of nowhere; signaling he has taken drugs with cues such as being wide-eyed, wired and sweaty.