

Drug Drive Creative Development Research Topline

18th December 2014



Methodology and Sample

8 mini-group discussions of four participants were conducted in Leeds, Birmingham, Brighton and Bristol on the 9th, 10th and 11th December 2014.

In the majority of cases participants were recruited in friendship pairs. The lead participant of the pair had driven after taking drugs within the last 12 months and their friend had either done the same or been a passenger in a car driven by someone who had taken drugs within the last 12 months.

The groups were split on drug type, and then by gender, age and rural/suburban as per the table below.

#	Type of drug	Gender	Age	Suburban / Rural	Location
1	Cannabis	Male	18 – 24	Suburban	Bristol
2	Cannabis	Male	18 – 24	Rural	Brighton
3	Class A	Male	18 – 24	Suburban	Leeds
4	Class A	Male	18 – 24	Rural	Bristol
5	Cannabis	Male	25 – 34	Suburban	Birmingham
6	Class A	Male	25 – 34	Rural	Birmingham
7	Cannabis	Female	18 – 34	Rural	Leeds
8	Class A	Female	18 – 34	Suburban	Brighton

Three creative routes were tested, in script form only:

- Effects
- Invincible
- Switcheroo

A tricky challenge for communications

The first part of the challenge for communications would appear to be relatively straightforward: to communicate that the law is changing to make it easier to convict drug drivers.

However, as previous research has found, this isn't straightforward for communications at all. It's information that doesn't mean very much to the target audience, and is unlikely to make them think about their own behavior.

This means the challenge for communications has a second part to it: to communicate the law is changing to make it easier to convict drug drivers *AND* to do so in a way that will make them think about their behavior.

This has proved to be a particularly tricky challenge, and in the creative work we essentially had two approaches to this...

The first was to talk about the way drugs impair driving (Invincible and Effects) and then go on to explain that the law has changed. With development this approach has potential to be thought provoking. But the message about the law change is inevitably secondary.

The second was to point out that drug driving should be seen as exactly the same as drink driving (Switch) and that the law has been changed to reflect that. The thought at the heart of this idea had considerable potential. Whilst maybe not as thought

provoking as the impairment idea, it was a relatively clear and engaging way of explaining the law change. However it was executed in a way that was ultimately seen to distract people from the message.

Three pointers for talking about the law change

There isn't anything about the law change itself that really stands out. In the first scripts tested it was expressed as: "the law has now changed to make it easier to convict". It was a phrase that too easily slipped by unnoticed in the scripts. There are three small things that might help to give it more impact...

1. *More clearly signaling there has been a change*

The subtle shift from "the law has now changed" to "the law is changing in March 2015" helped to signal a change.

"If it said at the end 'from January 2015 it is illegal to be caught on drugs at the wheel', then it is a warning. At the moment there is nothing in the ad that is speaking of a law change." (Male, 18-24, Class A, Leeds)

2. *Making something vague feel tangible*

A common complaint was that the phrase was too vague. Whilst we know it isn't possible to explain the detail of the change there might be ways of making it more tangible for people. Either by explaining the real difference they might see (e.g. the police will be cracking down") or most effectively by framing it in a way that they can relate to (e.g. drug driving will be treated the same as drink driving).

"If they said the law is changing and that means "bang, bang, bang" something that your really get, that would give it more meaning." (Male, 25 -34, Class A, Birmingham).

3. *Adding a sense of threat*

It's worth considering a tone that carries more of a sense of threat (e.g. the law is tightening around drug drivers, the police are cracking down on drug drivers). The idea that "it's easier to convict" was felt to be too mild to really have an impact.

"It doesn't add any weight really. It is like a warning as opposed to a threat. A threat would stop you or make you think twice. A warning is just saying you shouldn't do it. We know we shouldn't do it. A threat like we are coming after you and we can catch you at the roadside." (Male, 18 – 24, Class A, Bristol).

Talking about impairment

Impairment had the potential to make the audience think

The first two routes discussed in this debrief took the way drugs impair driving as their starting point (Effects and Invincible). They had varying degrees of success, but when they worked they really made drivers think.

This was because at the heart of these routes was quite a powerful insight: drug drivers think they're driving well but they can't be sure. This is likely to be because they mistake *focus* for *awareness*.

Many of the drug drivers we've spoken to have argued that drugs don't impair driving in the way that drink would. The argument is essentially about focus. Unlike drink, drugs are seen to help the driver focus on the road (cocaine heightens alertness, cannabis makes you less anxious, even MDMA brings a feeling of clarity).

But we've also observed in these drivers an acceptance that they're not entirely sure about this argument. They think they're fine. But at the end of the day they accept the drugs alter their perception.

"You do feel invincible. You think it is fine. I am completely normal. Then you realize you have snaked down the road and hit three parked cars." (Male, 18 – 24, Cannabis, Bristol)

What the scripts sometimes touched upon (particularly Invincible) was the fact that even though a driver might feel he is totally focused on the road, he might not be completely aware of what is going on around him. The driver might be fixating on the road to such an extent that he misses something:

"You'll be watching the road, and while you're staring at it everything else is a blind spot, someone could step out and you wouldn't know." (Male, 18 – 24, Cannabis, Bristol).

Highlighting this through communications clearly had potential to get people thinking.

But it risked feeling removed from the law change

Inevitably the main message taken from Invincible and Effects was about impairment. The action in both these scripts dramatized the perception of someone who has taken drugs, then switched to the reality on the road.

Essentially these scripts communicated a logic in three stages: 1) drugs alter your perception when you're driving 2) this makes you a danger on the road 3) which is why the law is changing to make it easier to convict.

"The bit that hit me was at the end that you are risking people's lives [in Effects]. And the police are cracking down on it. And there was a date and everything." (Male, 18 – 24, Class A, Bristol)

It may be that this story is something that can be told more clearly in the final films. But from hearing the scripts, participants rarely got as far as taking in the change to the law.

The response to Effects

Participants struggled to identify with hallucinogenic scenarios

The script was felt to be dominated by the effects of hallucinogenic drugs: primarily the pink rabbit and to an extent the superimposed Cheshire cat grins. Whilst impactful these were scenes that they struggled to identify with.

Most participants didn't take hallucinogenic drugs (and indeed often feared them) and thus felt the ad was less relevant to them. The minority of participants who had

experience of taking hallucinogenic drugs felt the rabbit was a clichéd depiction of the effects (typically a trip would involve distortions of what you see rather than something totally incongruous appearing).

“It sounds like a politician’s view of drugs, haven’t got any experience of it, got it from films, bit out of touch.” (Male, 25-34, Cannabis, Birmingham)

But importantly it was universally felt that no-one they knew would be foolish enough to get behind the wheel of a car if they were experiencing hallucinations of the magnitude of a giant pink rabbit.

“It could lose credibility. People could look at that and think ‘who does that?’” (Male, 18-24, Class A, Leeds)

But they could relate to the other vignettes

The other vignettes were easier to identify with. In particular the strange feelings you have interacting with the outside world when you’re on drugs: paranoia that other people are staring at you and the challenge of keeping it together in the petrol station.

“It breaks that bubble, you always think you are under the radar, if you have loads of people staring at you it sort of breaks that whole thing, makes you feel vulnerable.” (Male, 18 – 24, Class A, Bristol).

The chatty driver scene was felt to be accurate for those taking Class A drugs, but wasn’t a scene that was recalled.

The ad was often seen to be demonstrating the effects of different drugs

This was mainly driven by the pink rabbit, which could only be the effect of mushrooms or LSD. Other effects were a little more ambiguous. Cheshire cat grins could relate to particularly trippy MDMA. Chatting in the car related more to cocaine, speed and MDMA. The effects that related to taking drugs then venturing out into public (standing in the aisle of a petrol station, or feeling paranoid) were seen to apply more broadly.

Overall, however, the script was seen to be rooted in the thought that “different drugs have different effects”. This wasn’t felt to be a particularly thought provoking starting point, indeed for the more experienced drug takers it felt like a particularly obvious point to make about drugs.

“For people who take drugs generally, having a line of coke or smoking a spliff you know drugs effect you differently, it isn’t telling you something you don’t know. It is like they are addressing the general public.” (Male, 25 – 34, Class A, Birmingham)

The ad wasn’t felt to make a clear point about how drugs impair driving

The point about the different effects of drugs wasn’t seen to translate into the effect that drugs have when driving in a thought provoking way.

The pivotal point in the ad, when the driver crashes because he doesn’t react in time, was focused on the pink rabbit. Because this was a scenario that participants couldn’t relate to, it lost much of its impact.

“It makes me think about the effects of drugs but not on driving. It doesn't say anything about them swerving or speeding it's all about the rabbit and the elongated aisles and the paranoia. The focus for me was on the effects of drug taking, not drug taking and driving.” (Male, 18-24, Class A, Leeds)

However, there were some who could see a potentially powerful message in it. They also questioned the use of the pink rabbit, but they related to the idea that you might be fixated on something on the road, and not notice other hazards.

The strongest ending was hitting a pedestrian

It was unanimously felt that the advert should end by hitting a pedestrian. As has been found in previous research, the thought of hitting a tree and injuring themselves wasn't as disturbing as the idea of hitting and injuring someone else.

“It's your choice to drive off your nut and kill yourself or whatever but you have done that to somebody else and that somebody else wasn't on drugs, wasn't being stupid, just walking down the road.” (Female, 18-34, Class A, Brighton)

Participants didn't pick up the change in the law

The ad was felt to tell the story of impairment, and the potential consequence of killing someone because you don't notice them soon enough. The information about the change in the law was often missed at the end.

“That message isn't conveyed. Visually, the actual narrative isn't telling you that it's going to be easier to get convicted.” (Male, 25 – 34, Class A, Birmingham)

The potential for development

Developing this script would mean aiming to tell a thought provoking story about the way drugs impair driving, with the law change as a secondary message. Key points to consider would be...

Featuring scenarios that the audience can relate to (especially by avoiding extreme hallucinations). It might be worth concentrating on the strangeness of going out in public after taking drugs: trying to keep it together, feeling like you're being watched, staring at the world around you.

Making sure the overall message isn't simply “different drugs affect people in different ways” which wasn't felt to be too insightful. It might be more interesting to play on the thought that drugs can change the way you see the world and make you fixate on things.

Bringing the story to a clearer conclusion where a drug driver is focused on one thing, but isn't aware of something else, leading to a tragic consequence (killing someone else).

Bridging the gap to the law change as clearly as possible... Drugs impair your driving, which makes you dangerous on the road, which is why the law has changed.

If possible considering the pointers outlined above to try and make the law change stand out more clearly in the final advert.

The response to Invincible

Generally felt to be an engaging story

Overall this was an ad that participants felt they'd find engaging. This was particularly the case for anyone who hadn't seen *The Wolf of Wall Street* as they were seeing the idea for the first time. Those who had seen the film (almost half the sample) still thought it was clever, but were slightly less engaged because they'd seen the twist before, and had seen it executed so memorably by Leonardo DiCaprio in his white Lamborghini.

"The first thing I thought was Wolf of Wall Street. It is actually a hard hitting message but it was one of the best bits of the film. If it was done before Wolf of Wall Street then fair enough." (Male, 18-24, Class A, Leeds)

An insight that many could identify with

Most of the people we spoke to recognized the idea that when you've taken drugs you think you're fine to drive, indeed you probably think they've given you even more focus on the road.

"I liked this one. It made me think. From my own experience you think 'I'll be fine' and when you are driving you think 'I'm fine' you are sticking to the speed limit, lulled into a sense of security, you kind of kid yourself." (Male, 18-24, Class A, Leeds)

But they were also willing to accept they might have this perception slightly wrong. In particular there might be things outside of their immediate field of vision that they aren't paying enough attention to.

"When I was talking about my own experience that is kind of what I thought would happen, that I would get out the car and it would look wrecked or the lights weren't on or things like that. So at the bottom (of the private response sheet) I've written 'just don't do it'." (Male, 18-24, Class A, Bristol)

There were two groups (the cannabis groups in Bristol and Brighton) who felt the scenario was too extreme. They argued that the driver shown would have taken a particularly heavy dose of drugs, and that they couldn't identify with driving in that condition.

"I was thinking more that shows heavy drugs. I can see where they're coming from because drugs do alter your perception however I can't relate to it in a personal way because I don't have that sort of experience." (Male, 18-24, Cannabis, Bristol)

The rest of the groups didn't have the same issue. They accepted that the scenario was exaggerated, but fundamentally identified with the insight about impairment.

"It's more about the concept or idea than it is literal. The idea that he thinks he is fine and driving perfectly but the reality is he isn't fine." (Male, 18-24, Class A, Leeds)

Often expecting a more serious consequence

The most common development point given by the groups was that the consequence of the driver's actions should be more severe. I.e. he thinks he's fine, but when he's pulled over it's because he's caused an accident.

“Maybe when he turns round and looks instead of bins all over the place, maybe he has knocked someone over. That would make more of an impact.” (Male, 25 – 34, Class A, Birmingham).

Re-purposing the script to focus on giving yourself away

One consequence of impairment is that you might cause an accident. Another is that you inadvertently give yourself away to the police by the way you drive.

There was some interest in this (drivers felt they might possibly give themselves away to the police by clumsily pulling away at junctions, driving too slowly, driving erratically). But most felt they would be making such an effort to drive smoothly that they wouldn't alert the attention of the police. As such, re-purposing the script in this way might not work.

“There is that atmosphere in the car, where you are tense and you feel like the police would know, but of course they couldn't. You know you're going to shake it off for that brief second when you drive past.” (Male, 18 – 24, Class A, Bristol)

The law change didn't come through clearly

Even though this script ended with the driver being stopped by the police the focus of the ad was still felt to be on impairment not and so as a result the law change tended not to be picked up on.

“The advert works irrespective of the law change. You're driving all over the place, hitting bins, you are getting caught anyway.” (Male, 18-24, Class A, Leeds)

The potential for development

As with Effects, if this script were to be developed it would probably be most effective as an impairment script, with the addition of the law change at the end.

Considerations for development would be..

Whilst not a major issue, as far as possible it would be worth creating an execution that doesn't invite comparisons with The Wolf of Wall Street.

Given it was consistently raised, it might be worth considering a more tragic consequence for the story.

Bridging the gap to the law change as clearly as possible... Drugs impair your driving, which makes you dangerous on the road, which is why the law has changed.

If possible considering the pointers outlined above to try and make the law change stand out more clearly in the final advert.

Comparing Drug Driving to Drink Driving

As is explained in the next section the execution of this idea didn't quite work. But the idea itself clearly had potential.

A reasonably thought provoking idea

It's true to say that asserting "drug driving is as dangerous as drink driving" didn't prompt the audience to reflect on their own behavior in the way that considering the extent to which they might be impaired did. However, it was still an interesting idea that prompted quite a lot of thought and discussion.

This audience almost universally see drink driving as bad, and drug driving as OK. There are a number of reasons for this: not feeling impaired, not thinking about consequences, not feeling a social stigma, low awareness of penalties, and a belief they won't be caught.

"If I look through my friends those who take drugs and drink, eight out of ten of them would take drugs and drive, whereas only one out of ten of them would drink, people don't realize that drugs are just as serious as drinking." (Male, 25 – 34, Cannabis, Birmingham).

"I know people who would rather drug drive than drink drive..there has been more adverts for it, there are things in the paper, you hear about it more, it's more in your face drink driving. You think you can get away with drug driving." (Female, 18-34, Class A, Brighton)

Asserting that drug driving is just the same as drink driving provoked an interesting response. Participants were surprisingly willing to accept this might be the case, and often began questioning their opinions: perhaps they might be impaired, maybe people are killed as a consequence, potentially it could be seen as socially unacceptable, maybe the penalties are the same. And most importantly... maybe the police are going to treat both the same.

"Because of the stigma attached to drink driving is so negative if people think about drug driving in the same way I really think it will hit home." (Male, 18-24, Class A, Leeds)

"A lot of people wouldn't drive when they've had a drink whatsoever but they think that when they have had drugs it is OK when it has worn off a bit. Comparing that to the fact that it is just as bad as drink driving will make people think well why would I not drive when I have had a drink but I would drive when I have had a drug?" (Female, 18-34, Cannabis, Leeds)

The potential to clearly present the law change

Suggesting drug driving was now being treated exactly the same as drink driving was the clearest expression that something in the law had changed.

"It is more about the law and the changes than anything else...it is saying you can't get away with it. You think I can do drugs and get away with it but you can't, it's like drink [driving]." (Male, 18-24, Class A, Leeds)

Admittedly it was often misinterpreted slightly: it was seen to mean the police were taking it much more seriously, wouldn't turn a blind eye to it, and probably had an equivalent of a breathalyzer to test for it.

But it was the one idea in this research that started to get the audience to appreciate there was a change in the law, and convictions might be more likely.

“Some adverts can be straightforward and get the point across. If they had one of those with drug driving, saying it is now classed the same as drink driving you kind of understand it. Most people know what drink driving does to your life so it does get the message across.” (Male, 25 – 34, Cannabis, Birmingham).

The response to Switch

This was felt to be a particularly impactful creative idea

Showing open drug use clearly grabbed attention. People found it quite shocking and like nothing they had ever seen before. It was seen as memorable and something you might share and talk about with others. Though important to note the talkability was coming from the open drug use and not the idea that drug driving is the same as drink driving.

“It will catch people.... You wouldn’t expect them to show that which is why it is so interesting.” (Male, 18-24, Cannabis, Brighton)

Though some felt it was to “ady” to get the point across.

“It is exactly like an advertising campaign. But it should be above that. It should be more serious than that.” (Male, 25 – 34, Cannabis, Birmingham)

The core thought was ultimately communicated

Participants generally understood the ad to be saying that drug driving is just as dangerous as drink driving, and should be taken just as seriously, as discussed above.

However the creative execution was seen to focus on widespread drug use

The main part of the script was seen to dramatise the idea that taking drugs is just the same as drinking alcohol. Some didn't dwell on this: they saw it as a creative way of drawing attention to the main point about drug driving and drink driving. But for others it was seen to dominate and took the focus away from the main point.

Those who saw the scenes of drug taking as the focus often described the main message of the advert as “everyone is taking drugs these days, and drug driving is just as dangerous as drink driving” with the focus on “everyone is taking drugs these days”.

“It’s people from all walks of life. Not just aimed at the kids that would be doing drugs but the old people, it is basically saying that it is not going to be only young people, anyone does drugs.” (Male, 25 – 34, Cannabis, Birmingham)

Significantly, the idea of everyone taking drugs took over the discussion. It was seen as quite a plausible point to be making. It wouldn't be beyond the realms of possibility to walk into a pub where people are snorting cocaine, dabbing MDMA etc. It would be quite likely to be people of all ages too.

“It’s easy to get drawn into it [drug taking]. Everyone dabbles in everything these days and it isn’t hard to get hold of.” (Female, 18-34, Class A, Brighton)

The only truly incongruous thought was the idea of two old men taking ecstasy.

“It sounds like the Park Hotel, it’s standard, run of the mill, it’s what happens. If you took the two old people out that’s exactly what happens.” (Male, 25 – 34, Class A, Birmingham)

This was more of an issue with the multiple locations

The script that focused on different locations tended to exacerbate the issue. Rather than highlighting that this was intended as a ridiculous conceit, it drew more attention to the scenes of drug use and took more focus away from the ultimate message about driving.

“The one with the wedding in I got lost a bit. You are still thinking about the advert, why was somebody doing a bong at a wedding? I know what they are trying to say at the end but I was thinking more about that.” (Female, 18-34, Class A, Brighton)

The law change was still missed by many

As discussed above, comparing drug driving to drink driving had a lot of potential for highlighting the change in the law.

This execution however was seen to say drug driving is just as dangerous as drink driving, but didn't take the next step to saying that it would now be the same in the eyes of the law.

This was largely because the crash was the denouement of the story, particularly given the suggestion that the driver has quite possibly killed his mate. The idea of the law change was felt to be somewhat incidental after this.

“I don't think you could have hurting someone and getting done in the same advert, you have to pick one or the other, because if you have both of them you are going to focus more on hurting someone and forget about getting done.” (Male, 18 – 24, Class A, Bristol)

The potential for development

The distraction caused by showing open drug use was raised consistently across the groups. As such it might not be worth developing this particular script.

However, there might be potential in taking the thought that drug driving is now the same as drink driving in the eyes of the law, and developing work in that area.

As discussed, communicating the law change is particularly tricky to do, and using drink drive as shorthand was something that worked well.

Talking about penalties

Penalties clearly had potential for communications

As with previous research the penalties for drug driving had an impact on participants when they were shown.

Initially they were seen to be much stronger than expected. Although on reflection they were assumed to be on a par with drink driving penalties.

Generally speaking the penalties that would change their lives were the ones that stood out, particularly because of the way they would damage prospects for employment. For those who needed a car for work this related to losing their license for 12 months, for others it was getting a criminal record.

*“That one is the scariest you’ll get a criminal record, that could affect your job.”
(Female, 18-34, Cannabis, Leeds)*

“Imagine that [12 month driving ban]. Imagine getting up in the morning for a year, imagine being 15 again. But you are over 18 and you can’t get in your car.” (Male, 18-24, Cannabis, Brighton)

The record on a driving license, and the fine of up to £5000 were also seen as difficult to take. Although it was felt that after getting through the financial pain, they could carry on with life as before.

Many felt these penalties would make them think twice about driving after drugs. There were some however who also argued that they know they’re taking a risk by drug driving, but they don’t expect to be caught. So they would ultimately decide to take the risk regardless of the penalty.

“It doesn’t put me off that much. With drink driving I know that if am drink driving and I get stopped I will be breathalysed and I will be over the limit but with drugs I am not certain that they are going to be able to find out that I have taken drugs.” (Male, 25 - 34, Class A, Birmingham)

And some felt that the penalties weren’t as motivating as more serious consequences.

“When you see these drink driving adverts you always think of death as a consequence, that is what is hammered into you, you don’t want to crash because a crash could kill someone else, that is what puts me off.” (Male, 18 – 24, Class A, Bristol).

But mentioning a penalty didn’t help communicate the law change

Despite the impact of the penalties, adding them to communications might not be the right thing to do. The key challenge is likely to be communicating the law change, and adding information about the penalties didn’t help with this. Indeed the responses would suggest participants were less likely to mention the law change when penalties were mentioned, because the end of the scripts became too crowded with information.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The key issue with the three drug drive creative routes that were researched was their ability to communicate a change in the law. In all three routes it was seen as a secondary part of the communication, and was often missed altogether.

Bearing this in mind there are two potential options for development...

1. *Developing a thought provoking ad about impairment, with the law change as a secondary part of the communication*

This research would suggest that there is potential to make people think twice about drug driving by highlighting how it impairs them. In particular, pointing out that the focus they attribute to making them a good driver is no substitute for awareness.

Invincible was the script that showed most potential for communicating this. Although, with development it might be possible to make Effects work too.

Crucially, this approach will mean accepting that the law change is a secondary part of the communication.

That said, it might be possible to create a bridge in the communication between impairment and the law change. And the law change itself could be expressed in a clearer way.

2. *Developing new creative work around the idea of drug driving laws being the same as drink driving*

We wouldn't recommend developing the current scripts in this area because the dramatization of people openly taking drugs was such a distraction from the message.

However, it's worth noting that the idea of positioning drug driving as the same as drink driving clearly had potential. Partly because it provoked some thought, but mostly because it was a relatively clear explanation of the law change.

If it were possible to develop work in this area it might work well as an answer to the brief.