



NHTSA

NATIONAL HIGHWAY TRAFFIC SAFETY ADMINISTRATION

Drug Impaired Driving Exploratory Research

The Advertising Council & Ahzul

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Background, Objectives & Methodology

Research Background

- The Ad Council and the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) have been working together for more than 30 years to develop public service communications.
- NHTSA and the Ad Council have partnered for many years on a campaign to get young males (18-34) to think twice about driving after consuming marijuana.
- Exploratory research was last conducted in 2018, so there is a need to conduct a new round of exploratory research due to many changes in the environment since 2018.

Research Objectives

This current round of exploratory aimed to uncover shifts in marijuana consumption, usage and attitudes pertaining to driving behaviors.

- **Understand** shifts in consumption and usage of marijuana post COVID-19 pandemic, legalization across several different states and additional behavioral changes among Gen Z and Millennials given Gen Z's slight propensity toward marijuana usage.
- **Explore** how Gen Z and Millennials approach driving while impaired and their understanding of the consequences associated with driving while impaired.
- **Evaluate** the effectiveness of four potential messaging territories to better understand what type of message(s) might be most impactful for this audience.

Research Configuration & Methodology

Overview

- N=8 Virtual Focus Groups
- Recruited 6 to seat 4-6 per group
- 90 minutes each (plus 15 min tech check)

Research Recruitment Specs

- Males 18-34 (50% 18-25, 50% 26-34)
- Must hold a driver's license and drive on a regular basis
- Consumed marijuana recreationally at least once in past 3 months
- Mix of race/ethnicity, household income, and region across the groups (not within each group)

Focus Group Composition

Groups

Gen Z Males: 18-25

4

Millennial Males: 26-34

4

Total

8

Burning Questions

While we had broad research objectives, we went into research with a handful of burning questions to answer.

- What are the most significant changes in marijuana consumption habits among Gen Z and Millennial males?
- How has their relationship with marijuana evolved over time?
- What things would they and would they not do high?
- What is their relationship with driving under the influence of marijuana?
- Is the fact that driving while high is illegal a deterrent for this audience?
- What types of messages are most effective in influencing their behaviors?

Burning Questions

What are the most significant changes in consumption habits among Gen Z and Millennial males?	How has their relationship with marijuana evolved over time?	What things would they and would they not do high?
Lifestyle changes largely drive changes in marijuana consumption. Most started consuming marijuana in high school and have continued throughout their lives, decreasing or increasing their consumption and/or how they consume it based on situational events.	More than ever, consumers are more educated and knowledgeable about marijuana. There are so many new strains, consumption methods, and information about marijuana, leading consumers to feel like experts, not only about marijuana but also about their own consumption.	Most avoid activities that require high concentration and cognitive function or could threaten their reputation while high. These activities include work related tasks, attending formal events, learning new skills, or caring for young children.
What is their relationship with driving under the influence of marijuana?	Is the fact that driving while high is illegal a deterrent for this audience?	What types of messages are most effective in influencing their behaviors?
Most know they should not drive while under the influence of marijuana. However, some do, despite believing they should not. That said, drivers overall seem less confident in their ability to drive high as compared to previous NHTSA research.	Illegalization alone is not a strong deterrent to prevent young males from driving while under the influence of marijuana because most believe they won't get caught, and that if they do, they can avoid legal or other consequences.	Messages that speak to the idea of responsibility for oneself and for others, and the idea of making a educated choice were positively received. That said, any message needs to be accompanied by stats and evidence that can dispel misconceptions about the safety of driving high.

Marijuana Consumption and Usage Among Gen Z and Millennial males

Marijuana consumption changes over time, depending on a person's life stage and current situation.

For Millennial and Gen Z males, **marijuana consumption did not seem to be significantly influenced by external factors** like emerging from the COVID-19 pandemic. **Instead, their consumption varies over time and from person to person—some using more, others less—based on personal events and life stages.**



Both Gen Z and Millennial males who are **parents** report a decrease in marijuana consumption as they take on more active parenting roles and their personal responsibilities grow.



As males transition out of college or settle into more **consistent work routines**, their free time diminishes, leading to less frequent marijuana use. Instead, they reserve smoking for evenings or specific nights when they have more time.



Others, however, have increased their consumption due to changes in living situations, such as **moving to a new state with more free time or having a larger social circle to smoke with in social settings.**



Consumption increased during COVID-19 for a few but has since **leveled out** as things have gone back to normal.

“

I do the tinctures into a seltzer water, obviously non-alcoholic. Doing both (marijuana & alcohol), I think I used to do that pretty regularly in my 20s, especially my early 20s, but I just can't hang anymore. I'm, like, older and have full-time parenting on my brain.

- White, Millennial, Male

“

Going from not using it at all in the military to now, [my consumption has] definitely increased. I try and use it whenever I don't have anything else going on because I don't want to be dependent on anyone to give me a ride or anything like that. So usually at nighttime.

- White, Gen Z, Male

Marijuana is seen as a drug with diverse applications and used in a variety of settings.

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- **Millennial and Gen Z males primarily use marijuana to relax, unwind, and bring excitement to everyday activities.**
 - Both Gen Z and Millennial males report that marijuana is mainly used at home to **unwind, feel calm, and/or for stress relief**. For most, feeling high has a very relaxing effect on the body and can heighten the senses, making even mundane activities feel fun and interesting. As a result, simple tasks at home, such as chores, watching a movie, listening to music, playing video games, or eating become more entertaining and interesting while high.
 - Marijuana consumption also aids in **inducing sleep** for some.
- **Some say they use marijuana to bond and create connections in social settings.**
 - Some respondents believed consuming marijuana with friends is a way to bond, become more talkative and sociable, think more creatively, and provide a catalyst for entertaining moments. These moments usually occur at someone's house, as marijuana is not legal in many states and smoking is generally prohibited in bars, restaurants, parties, and clubs. However, its use can extend to these social settings in other forms.

In their own words

“

[Marijuana] relaxes me. My mind is already going at 1000 miles. That stress builds up. And I need something quick in that moment, if I don't want to try to go to the gym or something. So, something like a good edible takes the edge off.

- Black, Millennial, Male

“

My friends have different lives, so we're all busy, we're all working, so it's not like we can always get together and just hang out and smoke. So that's mainly the reason why I typically do it by myself. And then again, it's for me, it's more of a relaxing thing. So, I'm an introvert, so if I'm alone, or when I'm alone, I prefer to just be by myself.

- Black, Gen Z, Male

“

In recent times, it's been with like, one or two co-workers. In the past, I used to [use marijuana] with a bunch of my college roommates. It would be while watching a movie or TV show at the end of the night. But I agree with most of these people. It just makes things funnier.

- White, Gen Z, Male

“

For me, it turns the mundane into something super euphoric and interesting. You take edibles or smoke, and out of nowhere, you could be watching the news, and it's the most interesting thing you've ever seen. Anything becomes really interesting, so it's more fun, I really enjoy it, aside from relaxation, you just overall feel a lot more.

- Hispanic, Gen Z, Male

Respondents felt marijuana gave them a sense of control.

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- Respondents believe marijuana allows them to take control of their experience based on the amount they consume and the method of consumption. They like that it isn't accompanied by a hangover, unlike consuming alcohol.
- That said, most users still choose to consume marijuana during times when they have fewer responsibilities or tasks to complete, **ensuring it does not interfere with their obligations**. Exceptions do exist, but intentional consumption remains a priority for many.

“

I always felt like I was always in control, and that was kind of my big pet peeve with alcohol. Now I have a happy medium of relaxation, and not the pain and discomfort that comes from drinking too much.

- White, Millennial, Male



“

I smoke flower. Sometimes I have a pen, I also do edibles. So, it depends. I feel like edibles are a longer commitment. It lasts longer, versus the pen, you can control the high, because it doesn't get you that high. The flower gets you, really high, quickly, but then it doesn't last as long as the edible.

- White, Millennial, Male

Gen Z and Millennial males know about and experiment with a variety of strains and formats.

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- **There are more strains and more formats of marijuana than ever before, allowing for more experimentation and personalization.**

- There are numerous ways to consume marijuana, including smoking (flower or bud) through pipes, bongs, papers, pens, or blunts (a mix of tobacco and weed), as well as edibles such as elixirs, drinks, foods, tinctures, and specialty items. This variety leads users to experiment and discover what works best for their specific needs.

“

There's so many different offerings that you can consume. With marijuana, I've been getting really into these tinctures, where you can mix them into drinks or any type of liquid, and they have a great kind of sustaining, relaxing kind of effect to them.

- White, Millennial, Male

“

There's different strains. If you want more of a pick-me-up kind of energy, you have sativa, and if you need something more relaxing, you have indica.

- Black, Millennial, Male

- **As a result, users today are more educated about types, potency, and forms of marijuana compared to the past.**

- This increased knowledge often leads Millennial and Gen Z males to perceive themselves as marijuana experts, which can give them a sense of overconfidence in managing their experiences while high.

Edibles have increased in popularity because of their flexibility.

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- **Furthermore, the variety of consumption methods has influenced the rise in edible consumption in recent years.**
 - As some males aim to reduce inhaling smoke, many have developed a preference for edibles in certain situations. The popularity of edibles is due to:
 - **Concealed smell:** Edibles do not produce a noticeable odor, making it easier to prevent others from knowing they are high.
 - **Precise dosing:** In states where marijuana is legal, edibles provide precise dosing options, allowing users to select the exact amount they desire, whether it's 10mg or 100mg.
 - **Longer-lasting effects:** Edibles are believed to have a longer half-life, making them a preferred choice for specific activities or for achieving a particular type of high.

“

I have two kids. So, I don't smoke at all. I don't want the smell around me, I'm pretty strict about that. I'll do occasional edibles and sometimes vapes. I don't mess with the smell. I value convenience and being able to be clean and also respectful of others.

-Hispanic, Millennial, Male

“

If I need to be subtle or low-key about something, an edible is good because, again, there's no smell or anything, but it kind of just depends on the situation.

-White, Millennial, Male

Mixing alcohol and marijuana is not a common practice.

- **Most users report avoiding combining the two substances, as their interactions can be unpredictable.**

- However, some do indulge in both during nights out in social settings.
- When consuming both alcohol and marijuana, many users are **mindful of the effects and typically avoid getting "crossfaded"**— a state in which one feels the combined effects of being both high and drunk. Instead, most report having a drink or two before getting high, particularly in situations where it is socially expected to have a drink, such as at a bar.
- Users recognize that **marijuana consumption provides a sense of control, and they are aware that mixing it with alcohol can diminish that control.** This awareness often leads them to approach the combination cautiously, if at all.

“

Yes, sometimes I would mix it. I would smoke and then go out and we're drinking. So, it would just happen. So usually, that was the scenario, most of the time. And then sometimes just smoke by itself.

- Black, Gen Z, Male

“

If I smoke, I won't want to drink as much. So, I usually start with drinking and smoke at the end of the night, to chill out. Because if I smoke, then I don't want to take shots. It doesn't taste that good. It already tastes bad when pounding shots, when you're high.

- White, Millennial, Male

“

I am a lightweight, so I feel combining marijuana with alcohol is not really a very good idea, so I tend to stick to one.

- Asian, Gen Z, Male

Being high is often a binary experience of either high or too high.

Most users define the stages of getting high in simple terms: “sober,” “high,” “too high,” and on the “comedown.” In contrast, previous alcohol research focused on Buzzed Driving showed that respondents could identify multiple stages of intoxication.

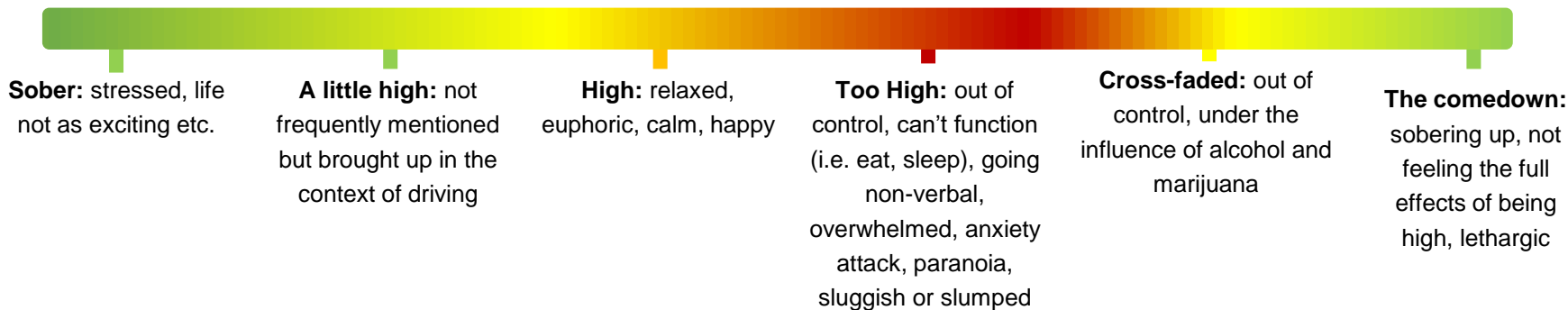
The **majority of marijuana occasions are categorized as “high,”** with far fewer classified as “too high” and even fewer classified as “a little high.” “Cross-faded” was also mentioned, though this refers specifically to the effects of being both drunk and high at the same time.



Being too high is when I feel real, real lazy and real sluggish, and I just, I just feel like I just want to sit there and and wait and not do nothing. Being high is normal. I can still operate, like on a normal day to day basis.

- Black, Gen Z, Male

Spectrum of “High”



Unpacking The Impaired Driving Mindset

Most have a clear idea of what they can do (and what they should not do) while under the influence of marijuana.

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There are clear delineations between what Gen Z and Millennial males think is ok and not ok to do while under the influence. Activities that are seen as “not okay” are those that tend to require more **mental focus and attention** or **require them to be in full capacity of their bodies**, or those that require **high cognitive function**.

“Do’s”

- Watching movies
- Enjoying art
- Doing light chores
- Playing video games
- Eating or preparing a meal
- Relaxing before bed
- Listening to music

“Don’ts”

- **Activities requiring high levels of concentration** (e.g., work, interviews, emails)
- Sports-related activities for some (e.g., running, swimming, lifting)
- Driving or operating machinery
- Attending formal events (e.g., weddings)
- Heavy lifting or intense physical activity
- Being around kids
- Learning new things or **engaging in tasks that require high cognitive function**
- **Switching activities frequently** or engaging in multitasking

In their own words

“

I have to code a lot for my job, and I would just not do that when I'm high, just because of various consequences. Just messing up one layer of code could be a mess. Stuff like writing emails, I don't want to have a typo, and that just reflects on my work.

- White, Millennial, Male

“

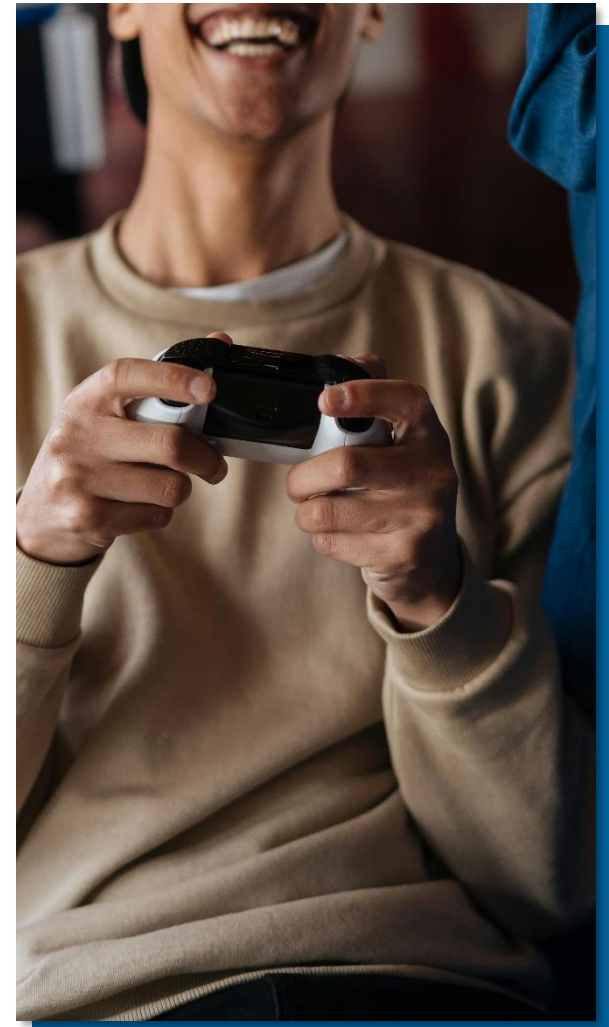
Pretty much the only thing that I avoid doing is like lifting while high. I'll like run, or walk, but lifting is the one thing I don't do. It's a little more risky while high. I just can't not have proper form for a lot of things.

- Hispanic, Gen Z, Male

“

I try to get everything done. Usually I do it alone, mostly watching videos, playing video games, food tastes pretty amazing, too. Although I try not to order too much food, I try to make myself something because either way, tastes delicious.

- Hispanic, Millennial, Male



There is a lot of overlap with activities they would never do high, and the skills required to drive.

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Overall, Gen Z and Millennial males seem less confident in driving high than in past research.

Unaidedly, about **two-thirds*** of participants identified driving while under the influence of marijuana as unsafe behavior.

When prompted, most indicated that driving is generally unsafe or socially discouraged.

- There is a **small contingency** of folks who firmly believe you should never drive while high and have even tried to stop friends from doing it.

That said, many simultaneously feel it can be done safely depending on the driver's skill and tolerance levels.

Despite avoiding activities that could impact their reputation, affect their safety, or require a high level of mental concentration while high, some **still do not believe driving falls into this “don’ts” category.**

- **Daily users** are more likely to say they drive while high than less frequent users, who often feel less confident in their ability to drive safely.

“

For some reason I don't feel like I'd be able to swim if I was super high. Driving, though, I think I can drive high. I think it gives me a level of focus. I do notice that my reaction time is a little bit slower, but I noticed that it also makes me, like, a bit safer, in a sense. I can't say that it's completely 100% safe. I don't know if there's a certain percentage of accidents that happen while people are intoxicated, while they're high, but I do believe that it's safer than drinking and driving.

- Black, Millennial, Male

“

There's a lot of variables, different strains, different strengths, different products. Once I familiarized myself with the variants and experiences, I became more comfortable with driving. I hate to say this, but it makes me feel a little more careful and paranoid, I tend to hyper focus, like I won't get distracted at all. I've never found myself almost crashing or running a red light or anything like that.

- Hispanic, Millennial, Male

Gen Z and Millennial males justify their behaviors through a set of rules and beliefs about the perceived risk of driving under the influence of marijuana.

Perceived Low Risk	Overconfidence	Tolerance & Experience	Situational Factors	Avoiding Edibles	Discreet Methods
Perception of low or zero risk of crash while driving high - Belief cops are not looking at high drivers in their city	Belief that they can get away with it	High tolerance for marijuana	Short distances No highway driving / slow lanes	No driving while under the influence of edibles (last longer in the body and create a "body" high)	Concealed consumption (e.g., vapes, edibles, eye drops)

“

So, in the past, I've driven short distances, five or six blocks just to get home, but I'm very wary to not be too high before I get behind the wheel anything longer than that. I feel like it's okay, but also it depends on what you're doing. I drive manual cars, so it's easy to know whether or not I'm functioning, right? Yeah. If I'm smoking or taking an edible, I'd wait, like, an hour and a half before I go to leave somewhere.

- White, Gen Z, Male

“

The scale of the danger varies. If I'm high and I'm driving in a car and I'm following all the rules of the road, turning signals, blind spots, mirrors, the likelihood of an accident is very low, whereas, if I'm in the car, music turned up, joint lit smoking. Now it's very high [the risk of an accident].

- Black, Millennial Male

In their own words

“

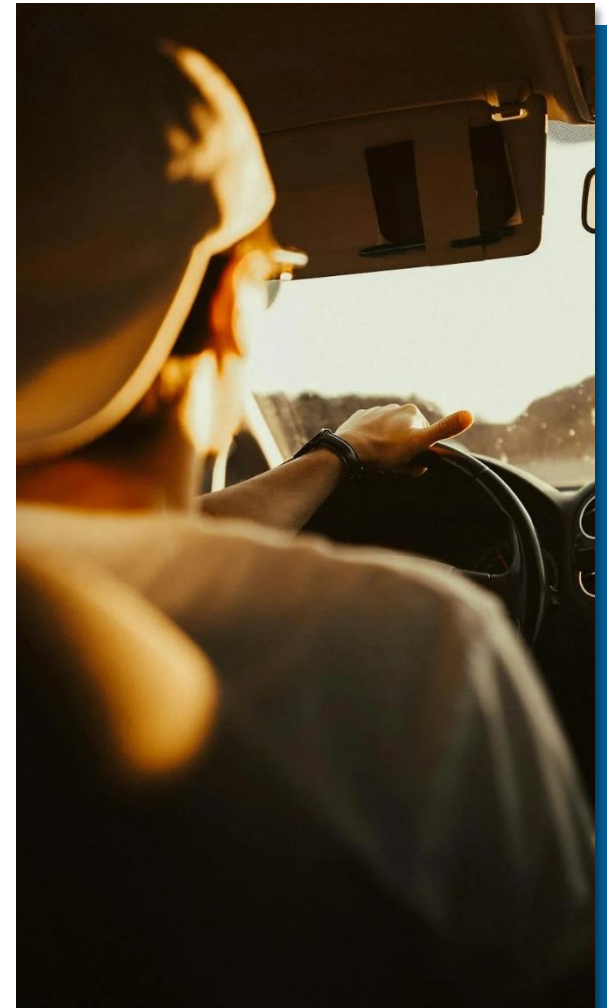
I do drive when I'm high, but I'm not too high. I'm not to a point where I don't know what I'm doing. I feel pretty comfortable because I know my limit, or like I can control myself while I'm driving. I know not to like speed. I am super cautious and attentive to what other people are doing. But I feel like that has come with smoking often and being an experienced driver. But I wouldn't recommend that for people in general.

- Black, Millennial, Male

“

I've never done it [driving while high]. I'm terrified of it, and more. A couple months back. A friend of mine, he almost got into a car accident while high because he was taking edibles, and he was dropping me off and he didn't see the red light. And I told him at the last second, there was a car, we were very close to crashing.

- Hispanic , Gen Z, Male



Drivers also rationalize driving while high with a set of contradicting beliefs.

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While drivers may offer justifications, such as avoiding highways or knowing their tolerance, many also contradict themselves. **These contradictions often stem from a lack of understanding of the risks and consequences, as well as an overreliance on and over confidence in their abilities,** leading to behaviors that do not always align with their actual capabilities.

Common Contradictions

- **The belief that one can become a safe driver while high through practice** stems from overconfidence and opposes the concept of "safe driving." Practicing an unsafe behavior (driving while high) does not lead to safer outcomes objectively and only reinforces the risky habit.
- **The idea that key driving skills, such as focus and caution, are actually enhanced while under the influence, despite slower reaction times,** directly conflicts with the belief that activities requiring high concentration should be avoided while high.
- **The notion that driving while high poses no significant risk because it's a familiar task and doesn't require much thought** assumes that familiarity with a task negates the risk and downplays any impairment, which they are aware of since they avoid certain familiar tasks such as lifting heavy objects.
- **The belief that driving doesn't require intense concentration, unlike work related tasks such as writing an email,** dismisses driving as a low-concentration activity even though it requires constant attention similar to writing an email. Yet, the perceived stakes are lower with driving.
- **The contradiction of willingly riding in a friend's car when they're high but refusing to drive high themselves, or vice versa, driving high themselves and refusing to get in a friend's car who is high,** conveys conflicting perspectives and attitudes about responsibility and how dangerous the activity is.

The fact that driving while high is illegal is not a strong deterrent for most.

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Most Gen Z and Millennial males have not given serious consideration to the potential consequences of driving under the influence of marijuana.

- Most **have not thought about the consequences** of driving under the influence of marijuana. The idea that they could cause a crash seems like a relatively low risk, and the thought that the police could pull them over rarely crosses their mind as a possibility.

Most feel that they could get away with it if they were caught.

- Even though the possibility of getting pulled over exists, many **feel confident in their ability to handle the situation and avoid serious consequences**, whether by quickly sobering up in the moment or using eye drops to mask signs like red eyes.
- Additionally, most are unclear about **how the officer would even identify that they are driving high**. They are curious to know what the procedure would look like and believe they could get away with it.

“

I try to live by my moral compass. If it's right to me, I'm going to consider it, and if it's wrong, I'm not, so I want to say it doesn't matter [legality]. But at the end of the day, it's a pretty big deal getting a DUI. So, I want to say it matters, but I guess the best way that I can answer the question is, I still drive, if I need to, I don't really think about it too much. There's never been a time where I'm about to step in the car and I'm like, "Oh, I could get pulled over." So, I guess, deep down, it really doesn't matter that much.

-Hispanic, Millennial, Male

“

I still don't know how they could prove that you're high or have had marijuana. I guess they could do some kind of test or something like that. But I feel like it's harder to prove than if you were drunk or wasted. I feel like it's just the cop's judgment, like, he could pull any average Joe over today, and be like "Oh, are you high?" And they could be, but they could not be. I feel like it's kind of random unless you're really speeding or doing something bad.

- White, Millennial, Male

Many are unaware of the specific laws or legal consequences of driving under the influence of marijuana.

.....

Most Gen Z and Millennial males are **not fully aware of the legal implications of driving while high** or the full extent of the consequences and what that entails.

A few know that a significant potential consequence is a DUI, but most others are less certain. Those who are aware of the laws and consequences to the full extent tend to be more likely to avoid driving while high since they understand that dealing with a DUI is not easy.

Beyond the need for more education, drivers express interest in **social incentives** that discourage driving under the influence, and implementing ride-sharing services or encouraging people to ride with a designated driver when they are high.



“

Some people respond more to the consequences, the penalties. If you drive [high] many accidents can happen, and then some kind of statistic. I'm just thinking of cigarette packs, they put all those sentences in other countries, with pictures of black lung. Scaring you into not doing it. So, a little bit more of a scare tactic would work, but I feel like even if it's a DUI or a penalty, that would make people think twice.

White, Millennial, Male

“

I feel like if the offenses [for driving while high] were worse, even though they're already pretty bad, if it was a felony, I might reconsider it. And lastly, if there was some sort of way that they could use it to say that I'm endangering my kids or I'm not a fit parent then I would never do that again.

-Hispanic, Millennial, Male

Sample Message Territories

Sample Message Territories

Four sample messages were tested with audiences to understand which type of messaging would be most effective.

Please note that these were not intended for actual campaign use, but rather as a learning opportunity to gain sentiment from respondents and inform future work.

Stats, education and personal responsibility in messaging are most believable and impactful*.

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- **Clearly communicating the consequences and their responsibility to be a safe driver is impactful.** Young males were seeking education on the issue and preferred direct and definitive language like “Smoking and driving can lead to XX” rather than more suggestive language like “if you smoked, don’t drive.”
- **Leveraging family, friends, and emotional connections to emphasize safety can also be effective for some males.** Many were moved by messaging that mentioned loved ones or friends, as it spoke to them emotionally, such as “look out for your friend” or “your crew is counting on you.” However, most would prefer a more inclusive term, such as “loved ones” or “family”.
- **Lighthearted or overly optimistic messaging can feel out of touch and doesn’t tend to resonate with the target audience.** Positioning the message in terms of “heroes” and “movies” tends to trivialize the severity of the issue.

“

I feel like this phrase [Real Heroes Make Smart Choices] is out of touch. I would have, I would have preferred if it included the consequences of smoking and driving. That would make it sound more believable. I feel like it would make people have a change of heart. Maybe if you smoke and drive, you're going to get a fine. Or maybe if you smoke and drive, you could get into an accident and hurt someone, or maybe, get into an accident and die, things like that.

- White, Gen Z, Male

“

Get more dramatic. Put on your seat belt or you're gonna die. I don't know who's behind that. It's kind of funny at this point, but I think those actually work better, because for the people that are actually doing this already, if they're smoking and driving, I don't think a sign that is trying to tug at their morals is necessarily the best. I don't know, it just seems a little bit cheesy. I think something that's a little more shocking.

- Asian, Millennial, Male

Your Friends Are Counting on You:

.....
Your crew looks up to you.
Set the example—if you've
smoked, don't drive. Get
home safe.

- Effective Elements
- Elements that Raise Questions
- Elements that Fall Short

What's Working

- This message is most effective at making people think twice about the issue because it taps into their emotional connections, such as with their friends. Including a more inclusive term, such as "loved ones," is preferred, as it encompasses more people.

What's Not Working

- Some felt that the issue of driving impaired is about doing what's right, not just because friends are relying on you to set an example, but because it's simply the responsible choice for a safe driver.

“

I like the accountability angle. I think many of us feel like we can live our life without any consequences. So, I get the sense of what it's trying to convey here. Make this choice for your friends and set an example. I agree with Jordan too, it is kind of like a peer pressure message.

- White, Millennial, Male

Drive Smart, Live Bold

.....
True bravery isn't just about taking risks—it's about making smart choices. When you smoke, don't drive. Be bold enough to make the right call.

- Effective Elements
- Elements that Raise Questions
- Elements that Fall Short

What's Working

- “Drive smart” and make “smart choices” clearly communicate the message of not driving impaired.
- Overall, this message feels like it is for an adult audience.
- True bravery stands out as a catchy opening.

What's Not Working

- “Live Bold” and “Be bold” send contradictory messages because it seems to encourage people to smoke and drive and live life boldly.

“

It almost sounds like it's suggesting smoking or something. I don't know. The “Live Bold” part is kind of throwing me off. I think it's kind of missing, like the negatives, or the consequential part of driving and smoking, or being high and smoking.

- Black, Millennial, Male

Respect the Ride

.....

Your life and the lives of others are worth respecting.

If you've been smoking, take a moment to think—don't drive. Show respect for yourself and those around you.

- Effective Elements
- Elements that Raise Questions
- Elements that Fall Short

What's Working

- The idea of respect resonates with some because they view driving as a privilege and something that should not be taken lightly, especially in today's climate.
- The tone is reflective and more serious than the other messages.

What's Not Working

- While the tone is effective, most feel that the message would not work in real life because no one really respects each other.
- Some also felt that the message came across as condescending and felt like they are being talked down to.

“

In America, we can drink alcohol, and we can smoke, and we can drive cars wherever we want. We can do all three of them together. But I think that we kind of take it for granted, and we kind of, we don't respect our privilege to be able to drive these vehicles.

- Black, Millennial, Male

Real Heroes Make Smart Choices

.....

Heroes aren't just in movies; they're the ones who look out for their friends. If you've smoked, be the hero who chooses not to drive. Safety is the ultimate power move.

- Effective Elements
- Elements that Raise Questions
- Elements that Fall Short

What's Working

- “Safety” is the ultimate power move generally resonates with most because it is a positive message, and the focal point of these messages should be about encouraging safety and making smart choices.

What's Not Working

- Heroes and movies are seen as a little childish, cheesy in this context.
- Most are unsure who the audience is for this message and believe it is for a much younger crowd.
- The idea of an ultimate power move feels a little dramatic and out of touch.

“

I like the message, but I feel like hero is like setting the bar a bit too high, like you're saving the day by not doing it. I don't know. I'm not sure. I do agree. It's a good move. It's pretty thought provoking in the sense that it communicates like, oh, I can make a good choice to those around me by thinking about what I do and being safer.

-Hispanic, Millennial, Male

Final Thoughts

Final Thoughts

Show drivers they're not as skilled as they think when driving high.

Gen Z and Millennial drivers often believe they can drive safely while high. There is an opportunity to challenge this perception by showing how marijuana impairs their motor skills and reaction time.

Final Thoughts

Break down their justifications.

Gen Z and Millennial drivers often believe they can safely drive while high by following self-imposed rules—such as only driving short distances, avoiding edibles, taking back roads instead of highways, or driving only when they’re “a little” high.

There is an opportunity to challenge these justifications and show that no shortcut makes impaired driving safe. Educating these drivers on the risks of marijuana impairment can reinforce that even “just a little” can slow reaction times, impair judgment, and make driving dangerous.

Final Thoughts

Educate drivers on the consequences of driving high.

While most Gen Z and Millennial males recognize that driving under the influence of marijuana is not ok, a subset continues to engage in the behavior due to overconfidence, a lack of awareness about the legal risks, and a belief that they can manage the consequences if caught.

There is an opportunity to educate these drivers on the risks in terms of legal and other potential repercussions. Show that law enforcement has specific tools and techniques to detect impairment, making it harder to get away with than they think. Explain the seriousness of a DUI and other legal implications.

Raising awareness about the legal, social, and potentially physical consequences, including injuring yourself or others while driving high, could challenge their false sense of control and discourage risky behavior.

Final Thoughts

Address consumers as educated.

With legalization and increased access to information, consumers believe they are more educated about marijuana strains, methods of consumption, and its effects than ever before. This knowledge fosters a sense of expertise but may also contribute to the overconfidence among those who drive while high.

Knowing that consumers believe they are educated when it comes to marijuana, it is important to address them as knowledgeable and position them as individuals who understand the risks. It is equally important to avoid speaking down to them.

Final Thoughts

Messages should be direct and reflective.

Effective messaging must be evidence-based and direct. Respondents tended to dismiss messaging that did not include statistics or was not grounded in facts. Ensuring that campaigns include hard-hitting statistics where possible can heighten the importance of the issue for those who do not believe there is a risk.

Of the messages tested, messaging that emphasized the impact on loved ones was most effective with this audience. Consider messages that are more reflective and serious in tone, emphasizing the audience's responsibility to do the right thing—not only for their loved ones, but because it is the right thing to do.

Thank you!

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