NHTSA

NATIONAL HIGHWAY TRAFFIC SAFETY ADMINISTRATION

MARIJUANA IMPAIRMENT MINDSET RESEARCH

07. 08. 2022

AGENDA

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1 **Purpose and Scope**

2 **Research Design**

3 **Key Findings**

4 **Detailed Findings**

Purpose

This exploratory, qualitative research was designed to help get inside the minds of the target audience (males 18- to 34-years-old) who consume cannabis and better understand:

- **Consumption Habits**
- **Nomenclature / Language Preferences**
- **Driving after Consumption**
- **Role of Advertising**

Results will stimulate and inform thinking around the development of new creative assets to discourage marijuana-impaired driving.

Scope–Research Objectives

1. **Explore attitudes toward marijuana usage**
2. **Uncover attitudes toward marijuana-impaired driving**
3. **Understand known/perceived consequences for marijuana-impaired driving**
4. **Discover what role advertising can play in shaping thinking and influencing behavior**

RESEARCH DESIGN

Methodology

QUALIFICATION CRITERIA

- ✓ National audience
- ✓ Males
- ✓ Has a driver's license
- ✓ Ages 18- to 34-years-old
- ✓ *Segmented by*
  - ✓ Age
    - ✓ Ages 18- to 26-year-olds (six groups)
    - ✓ Ages 27- to 34-year-olds (six groups)
  - ✓ Marijuana legality
    - ✓ Legal states (eight groups)
    - ✓ Illegal states (four groups)
- ✓ Has a valid driver's license
- ✓ Drives regularly (at least 10 miles per week)
- ✓ Consumed cannabis in some form in the past 30 days
- ✓ Lives in an urban or suburban area
- ✓ Mix of demographics (income, education, employment, census region)

Spanish-Speaking Audience Specific:

- ✓ Hispanic (or of Latino origin)
- ✓ Speaks Spanish most of the time at home
- ✓ Watches TV in Spanish at least some of the time at home

MODE

Online Focus Groups

- 75-minute groups
- 8 English Groups (n=47)
- 4 Spanish Groups (n=24)

DATES

May 16–19, 2022

GROUP SCHEDULE

Group 1: English; Legal; Ages 18–26 (n=6)
Group 2: English; Legal; Ages 27–34 (n=5)
Group 3: English; Legal; Ages 27–34 (n=6)
Group 4: English; Legal; Ages 18–26 (n=6)
Group 5: English; Illegal; Ages 27–34 (n=6)
Group 6: English; Illegal; Ages 18–26 (n=6)
Group 7: English; Illegal; Ages 18–26 (n=6)
Group 8: English; Illegal; Ages 27–34 (n=6)

Group 1: Spanish; Legal; Ages 18–26 (n=6)
Group 2: Spanish; Legal; Ages 27–34 (n=6)
Group 3: Spanish; Illegal; Ages 27–34 (n=6)
Group 4: Spanish; Illegal; Ages 18–26 (n=6)

Note: This is qualitative self-reported, perceptual data meant to understand mindset and is not projectable or directly comparable to behavioral data.

Discussion Flow

- Warm-Up/Initial Discussion
- Cannabis Use
- Driving Behaviors
- Consequences of Driving on Cannabis
- Role of Advertising
- Ad Assessment
- Wrap-Up and Close

KEY FINDINGS

CONSUMPTION HABITS

- Cannabis is most commonly referred to as *weed*.
- Smoking is the most prevalent means of consumption–usage of edibles and transdermals are popular when users want to be more discreet.
- Most common benefits/reasons for usage are to help relax (unwind and help to get to sleep), manage anxiety and reduce stress.
- Users typically prefer not to mix with consumption of alcohol.
- Changes in legalization haven’t had/won’t have a major impact on usage.

IMPAIRED DRIVING

- Driving after consuming cannabis is not consistently seen as a risk–many have ridden in a vehicle with an impaired driver or driven while impaired.
- Other risky behaviors such as drinking & driving and texting & driving are considered more dangerous.
- Many feel impairment alone would not lead to being stopped by law enforcement.
- There is a lack of understanding around the legal consequences of driving while under the influence of cannabis.
- The strong majority recognize that it is illegal to drive after consumption, but there is a lack of consistent understanding around the severity of the law.

ROLE OF ADVERTISING

- Advertising can play a role in helping raise awareness and educate the public.
- Tone should be serious–humor is not appropriate.
- Needs to be linked explicitly to consumption of cannabis–otherwise people will assume other substances are to blame.
- Educate the public about the risks of impairment and that DUIs are not limited to alcohol.
- Law enforcement is a credible source to explain the law, risks and consequences.
- Current taglines help convey the main idea, but there is some confusion over the use of “DUI” in relation to cannabis usage.

SUBGROUP COMPARISONS

Differences observed by age, legality and language

Differences between age groups are mostly seen in consumption levels.

Younger (18- to 26-year-olds)
- Most consume daily and multiple times a day.
- Less likely to know if it is illegal to drive while impaired.

Older (27- to 34-year-olds)

- Still use regularly, but typically done after work or before bed to relax.
- More likely to use edibles or topicals.
- Even less likely to mix with alcohol as some have had a bad experience.

There are few variations among states where cannabis is legal as legalization does not change consumption behaviors.

Legal States
- Respondents enjoy being able to buy from regulated sources.
- They also report not having to "hide" their consumption.
- Cannabis is seen as more expensive.

Illegal States
- Respondents feel more anxious about consuming and, as a result, tend to do so in the privacy of their homes.
- Some concern over any legalization's impact on cost.

Results are consistent between English and Spanish-speaking respondents.

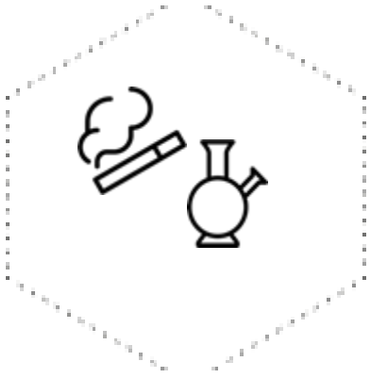
Spanish-Speaking Market
- Respondents use mostly English-language words to describe cannabis, but some use mota, vamos a gas and pacheco.
- Increased mentions of usage outdoors (parks, beach, forests) coupled with a sensitivity with consumption around children. Several remarked that while they consume outdoors, they only do so when children are not around.

DETAILED FINDINGS

Language Preferences and Consumption Habits

Most commonly referred to as “weed”

Cannabis is most commonly referred to as weed while less common terms are pot, Mary Jane, grass, gas and tree.



It is consumed in a variety of ways, but smoking, either via joints or glass products, such as bongs and vapes, is the most common form.

While under the influence, users are referred to as getting high, baked or stoned.

Users consume regularly

While users consume cannabis regularly regardless of age, those who are 18- to 26-years-old use it more times a day and/or on a more frequent basis as opposed to those who are 27- to 34-years-old.

"I'm [spending] anywhere from $600 to $1,000 a month in cannabis. ***I'm a daily user."***

– General market, Age 18- to 26-years-old, Recreationally Legal State

"I used to smoke a lot, it was more just relaxation after work and stuff. Nowadays, it's more social than anything."

– General market, Age 27- to 34-years-old, Recreationally Legal State

"In my 20s, [I smoked] 2-3 joints a day. Now, I'll smoke about once a day and usually just at home."

– General market, Age 27- to 34-years-old, Recreationally Legal State

"I think [less consumption] is [due to] age, responsibilities. ***When you're younger, [usage] is more frequent,*** *and now that we're adults, you can't waste a lot of time. It's also an expense."*

– Spanish-speaking market, Age 27- to 34-years-old, Recreationally Legal State

Benefits vary by user

Most Common Benefits		
	Relaxation/Anxiety Relief–MOST COMMON **Typically consumed at home alone, either after work or before bed. Some take it to relieve anxiety from driving or daily stresses.**	***"[Marijuana is good for] anxiety relief for stress relief. It's a great way to decompress, especially when you're thinking about a lot of stuff. It helps clear your mind."*** *– General market, Age 27- to 34-years-old, Recreationally Legal State*
	Sleep/Hunger Aid To help fall asleep faster or aid in hunger (either making food taste better or encouraging appetite).	*"I use [marijuana] to sleep, because it's difficult to sleep, to relax, and sometimes I'll use the ointment."* *– Spanish-speaking market, Age 27- to 34-years-old, Recreationally Legal State*
	Medical To help with backaches, joint pain, stiff neck or relieve symptoms of ADHD.	*"I go to the gym a lot. Sometimes I'm really sore and [using cannabis] helps."* *– Spanish-speaking market, Age 18- to 26-years old, Illegal State*
	Social/Consumed with Friends Consumed in small social settings (e.g., playing video games, going to the beach).	*"I'm eating and I play PlayStation video games with my friends."* *– Spanish-speaking market, Age 18- to 26-years-old, Illegal State*

Usage occurs with friends or alone

There is a mix of use among friends and while being alone, depending on the purpose or reason for consumption.

With others

When using with friends, it is part of the social atmosphere. It's not necessarily a party drug, but it is consumed in social settings (playing video games with friends, going to the beach, etc.).

Some respondents note that many of their friends and family also consume and it's a normal part of them being together.

Alone

For those who consume it for relaxation, it tends to be at home by oneself and after work and/or before bed.

Those who take it for medicinal purposes consume it as needed throughout the day.

Users typically do not mix alcohol and marijuana

Users typically do not consume cannabis and alcohol at the same time, although a small portion do. For some who are 27- to 34-years-old, it is due to having a bad experience.

*"It just depends. Sometimes I will [mix alcohol and marijuana]. **I don't like to mix both of them.** If I had a little too much, I might just hit the blunt one time, but **I prefer to do one or the other.**"*

– General market, Age 27- to 34-years-old, Illegal State

*"**I had one really bad experience** with [mixing alcohol and marijuana] when I was probably 23, which is when I regularly started smoking, but after that, it hasn't been an issue. I also don't drink nearly as much as I did back then."*

– General market, Age 27- to 34-years-old, Medically Legal State

*"I **try to stay away from mixing.** I'm usually doing one or the other."*

– General market, Age 27- to 34-years-old, Recreationally Legal State

*"**I usually keep [alcohol and marijuana] separate.** I just like to smoke primarily. I actually don't drink very much, so just smoking for me is okay."*

– General market, Age 18- to 26-years-old, Illegal State

*"If I'm going to be out with friends [for] a long weekend, I'll mix [marijuana and alcohol], but **normally, I don't like to mix both**… when I was younger, I could handle it but now… I wake up the next day like 'what the hell happened.'"*

– General market, Age 27- to 34-years-old, Medically Legal State

Legality* does not change consumption

The impacts are in how marijuana is obtained, the associated costs (legal is more expensive, but also better regulated) and personal confidence in possession/usage.

Legalization provides the benefit of being less anxious, not having to "look over their shoulders" when consuming and being less concerned with getting pulled over.

"I feel a lot [calmer] about [using marijuana] I suppose… I think [legalization] makes [using] a little bit easier because I don't have to look over my shoulder… ***It's not so much [changing our] behavior, we just have less anxiety."***

– General market, Age 18- to 26-years-old, Recreationally Legal State

Those who reside in states where it is illegal mentioned that it is easy to get, and they do not feel any potential legalization would impact their consumption levels.

Many respondents mentioned they do not drive with it physically in the car. *The concern is more about having the substance on them as opposed to in their system.*

"I don't think [legalization] is going to change anything because I use [marijuana] for the benefits… ***I guess [legalization] might make it easier to [get] and [use marijuana] socially."***

– General market, Age 18- to 26-years-old, Medically Legal State

*Note: If users lived in a state where it is medically legal and had a medical card, they were considered to be from a legal state. If they did not have a medical card, they were considered to be from an illegal state.

DETAILED FINDINGS

Marijuana-Impaired Driving

Driving after consuming cannabis is not seen as a risk

Consuming cannabis is such a part of their routine, and is consumed so regularly, that they do not see themselves as acting differently after consuming it.

While cannabis users admit they may be slower to respond while driving, **many do not feel cannabis impairs them** enough not to drive. Cannabis users realize they may drive slower, but ***they don't see it as an impairment***–they see it as being a more cautious driver.

*"I've always seen that I'm more focused, more chill… **I look up at the speedometer and I'm going the speed limit**. If not, at most 5 [mph] above [the limit] … I don't have to do anything. I [don't] have to change my habits or anything."*

– General market, Age 27- to 34-years-old, Medically Legal State

*"For me, **the few times I do drive when I'm stoned, I'm always alert and I'm always careful**… I'm trying not to speed and I'm trying not to get my car too close to anyone. I'm just trying to stay on the road and go slowly. I'm more focused on getting home or getting to where I want to go."*

- General market, Age 27- to 34-years-old, Recreationally Legal State

*"**I think when you smoke, you drive slower, you respect the law more.** You don't want to bring attention to yourself [because] you're high, so **the least risky [substance] for you to drive after [using] is marijuana**."*

– Spanish-speaking market, Age 18- to 26-years-old, Recreationally Legal State

Many have driven while impaired

Many respondents admit to driving after consuming cannabis or being in the car with others who have consumed and are quick to mention that the level of impairment depends on a variety of factors, such as strain consumed, amount consumed, time and one's personal tolerance level.

"I would have to say that I've unfortunately mastered how to drive high. ***I feel a lot better than if [I were] not smoking****… I feel heightened senses and alert, so it allows me to be more proactive and present."*

– General market, Age 27- to 34-years-old, Illegal State

Driven while impaired^

Ridden in the car with someone else who was impaired^

^Question was not asked in every group. Bases sizes (n=17) reflect the total number of respondents who were asked the question.

Other behaviors are seen as riskier

Other behaviors such as drinking alcohol and driving, texting while driving and speeding are seen as more dangerous than consuming cannabis and driving.

Driving under influence of alcohol is more dangerous

*"I think that **driving drunk is a lot more dangerous**. I feel like when you're drinking and driving, it's a little bit **hard to gauge how much you're impaired** as opposed to smoking cannabis."*

– General market, Age 18- to 26-years-old, Recreationally Legal State

Texting while driving is more dangerous

*"I'd say **texting while driving is a bit more dangerous… it takes your concentration away from the road** and you might receive a very… weird or disappointing text… [while] you're still driving at a very high speed… that would be more dangerous than being high."*

– General market, Age 18- to 26-years-old, Illegal State

Speeding is more dangerous

*"I feel like they're being a little bit **more reckless, and you** might not be able to react accordingly."*

– General market, Age 18- to 26-years-old, Recreationally Legal State

Cannabis would be a secondary reason to be pulled over

There is a belief that law enforcement would pull someone over for something else, such as speeding or running a light, and cannabis consumption would be the secondary offense.

Respondents struggle to think of ways that law enforcement could tell if someone has consumed cannabis prior to being pulled over. A few respondents mention seeing someone driving slowly, braking frequently, driving erratically or potentially observing consumption/seeing smoke come out of the car itself. Once pulled over, bloodshot or glossy eyes and the smell would be key indicators.

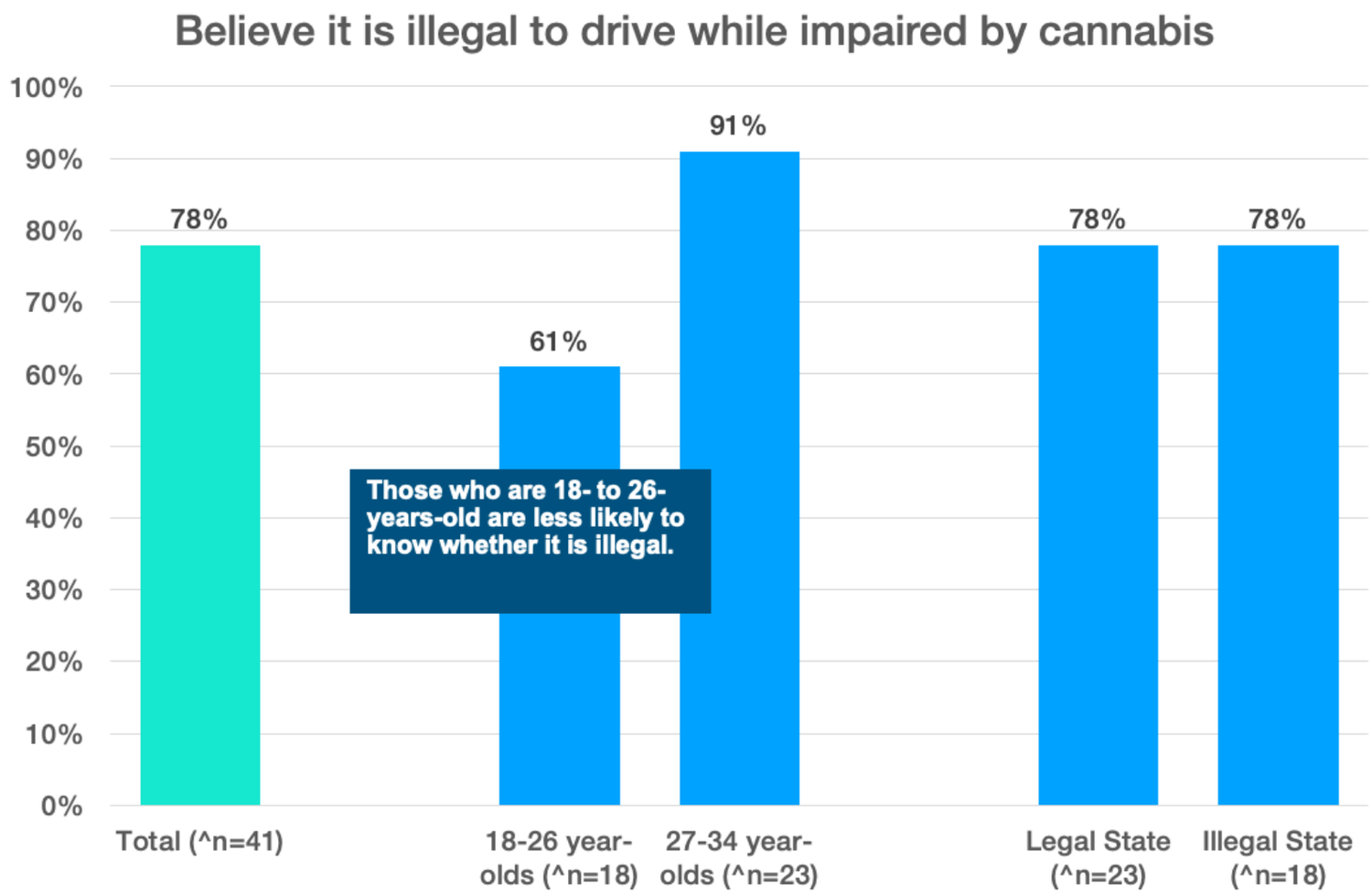
*"I guess for me **it would probably be pretty random** because I feel like the few times, I've been moderately high while driving, I'm not really doing anything differently so it would sort of just be unlucky."* – *General market, Age 18- to 26-years-old, Recreationally Legal State*

Some believe there would be a sobriety-like test administered if the law enforcement officer believed the driver was impaired while others mention having blood or urine tests done once at the station.

Because of this, and the belief that it does not impair their driving, many do not plan for sober rides. Some report waiting until they feel safe enough to drive, which is anywhere from immediately after to a few hours post-consumption.

There is confusion over the legal consequences

Most respondents are aware that consuming cannabis and then driving is illegal, but many do not know the actual legal consequences. There is an assumption that consequences would be similar to an alcohol DUI, but the term is more closely associated with alcohol than cannabis.



"I think that the cannabis may be less severe for the driving, but the fact that it's illegal could bring additional penalties. On its own, ***driving under the influence of marijuana, I wouldn't think would be as severe,*** *but… it could be an additional penalty for even having the weed."*

– General market, Age 18- to 26-years-old, Illegal State

"I think ***we're all a little unsure of the specifics in regard to getting a DUI while driving versus driving high****… I'm pretty sure it's just a DUI… but I don't really know."*

– General market, Age 18-to 26-years-old, Recreationally Legal State

^Question was not asked in every group. Bases sizes reflect the total number of respondents who were asked the question.

DETAILED FINDINGS

Role of Advertising

Most believe advertising can shape behavior

Many cite drunk driving campaigns in general or other safety campaigns (such as Click it or Ticket) as examples of campaigns that have been successful.

"I think [advertising] could have an impact… Let's say [the consequences were] stated clearly how severe they are. I supposed ***the penalties could affect my decision making*** *when it comes to if I'd want to drive and smoke."*

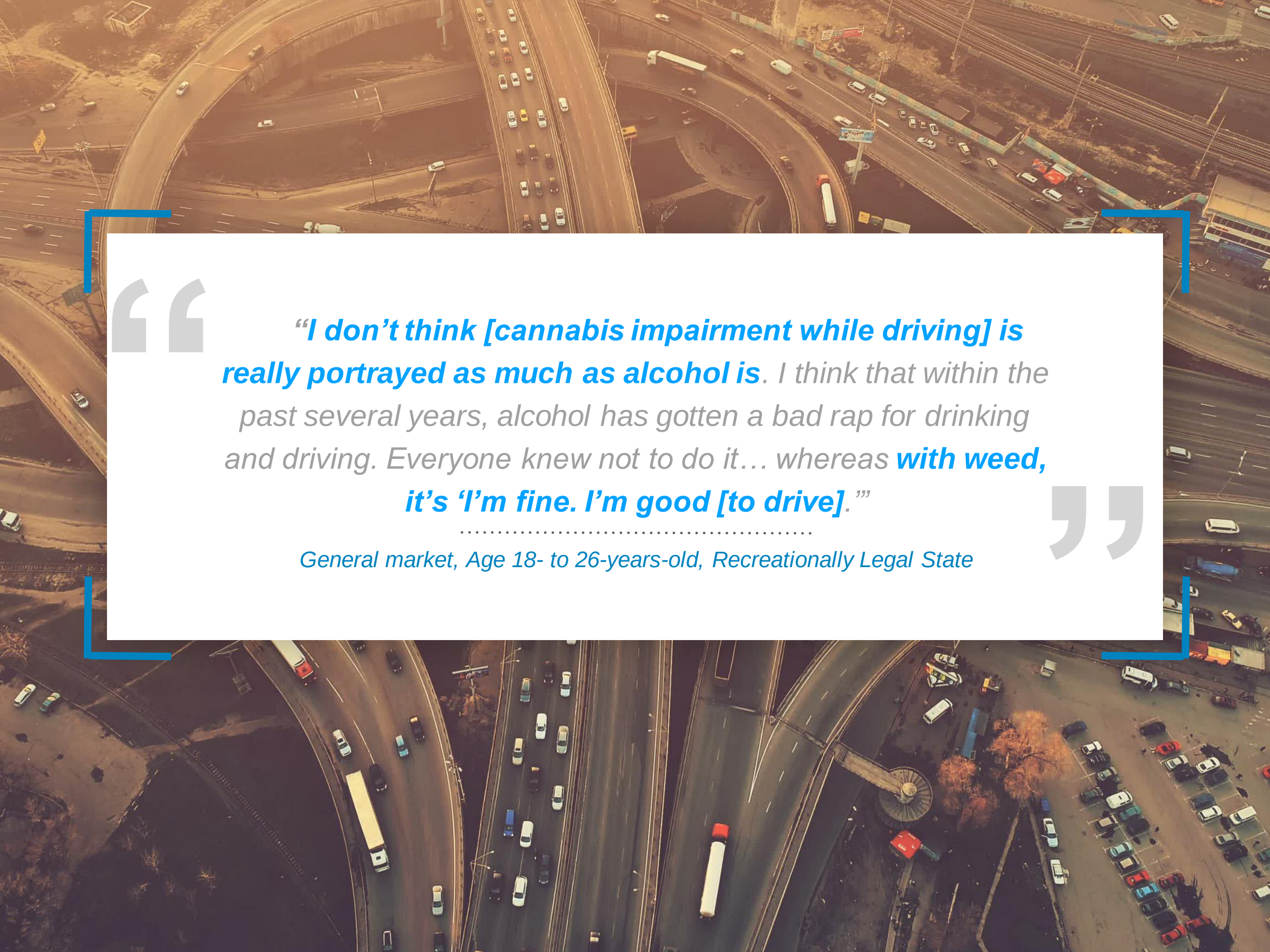
– General market, Age 18- to 26-years-old, Illegal State

*"****Advertising can change your perspective*** *on something, especially if you don't do it that much. Even if you did [use marijuana] that much, it can. [Advertisements] give you a new perspective and you're going to think about it."*

– General market, Age 27- to 34-years-old, Recreationally Legal State

*"****I think it's important that people do know what the consequences are of getting DUI while smoking****."*

– General market, Age 27- to 34-years-old, Recreationally Legal State



*"**I don't think [cannabis impairment while driving] is really portrayed as much as alcohol is**. I think that within the past several years, alcohol has gotten a bad rap for drinking and driving. Everyone knew not to do it… whereas **with weed, it's 'I'm fine. I'm good [to drive]**."*

General market, Age 18- to 26-years-old, Recreationally Legal State

There is a need for advertising to be educational, realistic and relatable

Educational	Realistic	Relatable
• Participants want to hear about potential legal consequences, such as fines, jail time, etc. • They also want to hear stats on how cannabis impairs someone (e.g., reaction times, crashes, etc.). • They would like to see the comparison to alcohol impairment.	• There needs to be a clear connection to impairment and cannabis usage. The impairment cannot be confused or muddled with the use of other substances. • Respondents want the consequences depicted to be real in order to help them understand the seriousness of driving while impaired.	• They want to see situations where they would typically consume, such as playing video games (not a "party" scene). • Law enforcement is seen as a credible source to educate cannabis users on the potential legal consequences. However, care should be taken in their overall demeanor and interaction with cannabis users.
"For me it would take groundbreaking research and it would have to be a pretty big deal or some legal changes." *- General market, Age 18- to 26-years-old, Recreationally Legal State*	*"I think they were having other substances like alcohol… it would be more effective if [the ad] at least focuses more on weed alone, excluding other substances."* *– General market, Age 27- to 34-years-old, Illegal State*	*"I think [law enforcement] needs to be shown as enforcing the law, not them personally going after you because they have something against you. It's the law and they're there to enforce it. So, the tone would be that [law enforcement is] not there to beat you up, it's that [they] would like to talk to you and make sure you understand the law."* *– General market, Age 18- to 26-years-old, Recreationally Legal State*

Advertising Assessment

Feel Different	**Spotted Driving High**	**Testimonio**
• Confusion over reason for impairment due to poly-use. • Confusion over actual consequences since they were not shown. • Party scene was not relatable for cannabis usage.	• Liked hearing the consequences. • Overall tone was too humorous/light-hearted. • Didn't understand the use of the cheetah.	• Liked hearing the consequences. • Voice over was too dramatic. • Character was not seen as relatable due to how serious he was. • Tagline resonates.
"The one thing that I noticed in the [ad] is that they were using… marijuana in a social environment where I would also think that alcohol would be utilized… [frame the ad so] there's no drinking involved, just utilizing marijuana." *– General market, Age 27- to 34-years-old, Medically Legal State*	*"The only thing I would say against it is that it felt kind of too funny, too light…those are very real things that they were talking about, but it was just a silly cheetah."* *– General market, Age 18- to 26-years-old, Recreationally Legal State*	*"Drive high, get a DUI, that's a good message. It's catchy. You remember it… like Click it or Ticket."* *– Spanish-speaking market, Age 18- to 26-years-old, Illegal State*

CONSIDERATIONS + RECOMMENDATIONS

CONSUMPTION HABITS

Weed is the most commonly used term when referring to cannabis and should be used in any dialogue of future concepts–especially if consumption is related to smoking.

Since cannabis is typically consumed in small groups or alone, without alcohol, usage should not be shown in a “party” atmosphere. Social situations are ok, but parties are associated more with drinking.

When depicting usage, also avoid any other substances, as they will become the reason for impairment over cannabis. There needs to be a clear connection to cannabis usage, the impairment and the ultimate consequences.

Be mindful of usage as one ages: while still frequent users, they consume less regularly and are more likely to use edibles and topicals.

IMPAIRED DRIVING

There is a strong need to educate cannabis consumers on the legal consequences of driving while under the influence–particularly among those who are 18- to 26-years-old.

Consumers want to see statistics–especially with how cannabis impairment compares to alcohol impairment. This comparison would help respondents understand the seriousness of driving while impaired by cannabis.

Consequences should be explained from a credible source, such as a law enforcement officer, and be relatable (e.g., what the fine is, how much jail time, etc.).

Personal stories and testimonials could be used to showcase consequences.

ROLE OF ADVERTISING

Special care should be taken for how law enforcement interacts with users. The demeanor of the law enforcement officer should be educational and informative as opposed to purposely trying to arrest people.

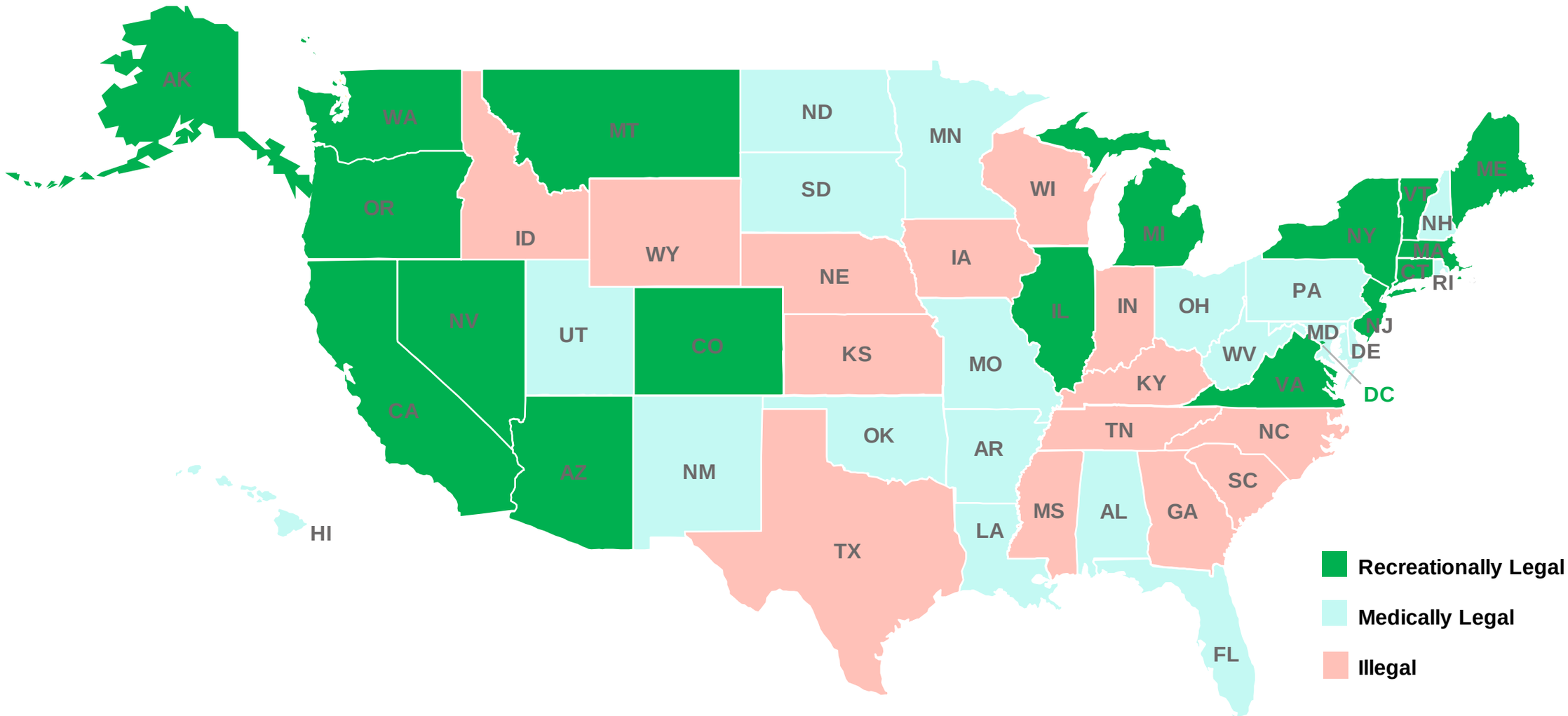
The statements “If you feel different, you drive different” and “Drive high, get a DUI” help to convey the main idea in a succinct and memorable way and should remain in future concepts.

However, there is some confusion over the use of “DUI” in relation to cannabis usage. There will need to be some education to make the correlation to cannabis and beyond alcohol.

Future concepts cannot be humorous as it makes the topic too light-hearted and diminishes the seriousness of the topic.

APPENDIX

Legality of Marijuana Usage



Legality as of 5/16/22

If users lived in a state where it is medically legal and had a medical card, they were considered to be from a legal state.

If they did not have a medical card, they were considered to be from an illegal state