



# **Convenience Advertising**

**MASS MEDIA INFORMATION  
CAMPAIGN ON CANNABIS 1996**

SUMMARY OF CONTENT

Trimbos Institute

June 1997

## Mass media information campaign on cannabis 1996

### Summary of content

**The first mass media information campaign on cannabis began on 1 November 1996. The campaign ran until 31 December 1996. The organisation behind the campaign was the Information bureau on Drugs, a part of the Trimbos Institute. The Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport funded the campaign. The campaign targeted the parents of children aged between 12 and 18. The main aim of the campaign was to convince parents that it is important to be well-informed about cannabis (and other drugs) in the context of raising children. In concrete terms: parents had to feel compelled to request the free cannabis brochure and read it.**

### **Background**

Although there is no need to regard it as an enormous problem, it can be said that a substantial section of Dutch youths come into contact with cannabis (use). Many young people regard cannabis use just as normal as the use of alcohol, even though only a small minority actually use cannabis on a regular basis.

It is a known fact that fewer problems arise if parents and children can talk about cannabis. The problem, however, is that most of them are insufficiently aware of the facts to be able to talk about cannabis constructively. Many parents with children aged between 12 and 18 are torn between a lack of knowledge and fear regarding their children's possible use of cannabis. They would rather evade the issue and limit themselves to warnings and prohibitions without providing any proper grounds for same. This is often counterproductive. The need for information had been apparent for some time, judging by the number of questions about cannabis received by the Drugs Information line. Many of these questions were asked by parents. And professionals working at related institutes were often confronted with such questions. Which is why we opted for a mass media national approach, so that all parents could be reached.

## **The campaign**

The campaign consisted of the following components:

- **Two different TV infomercials** pointed out how important it is for parents to have information on cannabis in the context of raising children. The infomercial closed with the message that the free brochure 'Cannabis: the answers' was available from all post offices, libraries and municipal information points.
- The **brochures** on cannabis at post offices, libraries and municipal information points contained all key information on cannabis. Factual, objective information.
- The brochure answers questions such as:
  - What is cannabis?
  - Where does it come from?
  - Who uses cannabis?
  - What are the effects?
  - What are the risks?
  - What does the law say?
- If people required more information, advice or assistance, they could contact a staff member on the **Drugs Information line**. This national service is permanently open for drug-related questions and free information packs. People can also find out which specialised organisations operate in their area. Two other supporting brochures were also made available:
  - 'Raising children and drugs';
  - 'What everybody should know about drugs'.

The campaign was backed up with advertisements placed in the written press. Free publicity in the written press, as well as on radio and television raised awareness of the issue even further.

## **Evaluation**

The campaign was evaluated by an independent research bureau. The research focused on the following aims:

**Primary:** to stimulate the target group to acquire information on cannabis and cannabis use, in particular by indicating where this information could be collected. The 'target group' consisted of parents and carers closely involved in the issue, for instance because they have children or have children in their charge who experiment with cannabis.

**Secondary:** to increase the Dutch public's openness to (mass-media) information on drugs.

The main results were as follows:

### **Results**

More than a third of those questioned immediately said they had seen the television infomercial. One quarter remembered seeing them after being given a brief description of the Infomercials (assisted awareness). This means that a total of 58% of those questioned had seen one of the infomercials.

A total of 225,000 copies of the brochure 'Cannabis: the answers' were distributed via post offices, libraries and municipal information points. This is some 20% above the average number distributed so far in comparable campaigns. Of the people who saw a television infomercial, 9% actually picked up a brochure. This is much higher than in comparable campaigns (Source: government information service - RVD). The brochure itself was very much appreciated. Virtually everyone who picked up a brochure found it to be clear, useable, sufficiently informative, not difficult and not threatening. Of these, 63% said that on the basis of the brochure they had actually discussed the issue with their children, and 83% said they found the content helpful in this context.

At the time of the campaign, the Drugs Information line was receiving 100 calls a day. Roughly half of the questions related to cannabis.

The evaluation study makes it clear that there is a great need for information on drugs. Roughly 85% of those questioned said it was important to be well-informed on this issue. The campaign had a broad base of support: 95% of those questioned thought it a good initiative. More than 80% found the information given to be useful. We can conclude that this campaign adopted the right tone.

The data from the evaluation study are of vital importance to the development of information campaigns planned for the coming of years.

### **Follow-up campaigns**

Partly on the basis of the evaluation of the above-mentioned campaign, the catch phrase 'inform yourself' has been turned into the key message of future campaigns. This is effective with both young and old, with users and non-users. Research shows that at the moment, mass-media information campaigns are not effective in influencing drug-use behaviour, because people are insufficiently acquainted with the issue. What can be achieved, it seems, is to motivate the target group in any event to acquaint themselves with the available information, including information about the related risks. This transmits the message that you take the right action unless you have the right information:

- young people are not aware of the choice they are making when they experiment with cannabis - or other drugs. They are not aware of the risks;
- parents do not know how to discuss the subject effectively with their children, nor how to respond to experimental use;
- users are not aware of the short or, long term risks they run if they continue to use. The kind of use and frequency of use play a role in this.

This is why the transmission of information is the key to subsequent campaigns. The more awareness is increased, the more emphasis will be placed on influencing behaviour related to drug use. This will be either more or less insistent, depending on the risks attached to drug use.

### **Information campaign on cannabis aimed at young people**

The next campaign is a follow-up campaign on cannabis, this time targeting young people. The campaign will begin in October 1997 and again includes television infomercials, tailored to the lifestyle of young people and broadcast on youth channels and around youth programmes. The campaign will be backed up by advertisements and large posters in schools and other places where young people gather, such as discotheques. A brochure specially designed for young people will be distributed via all schools for further education and other locations.

In addition, activities will be developed for young people using drugs. Parents will be involved in this campaign via the distribution of a special brochure. This campaign will also be accompanied by an evaluation study conducted by an independent research bureau.