

EVALUATION OF THREE YEARS "FAMILIE OUDENRIJN" AND THE ASSOCIATED
INFORMATION POLICY

R-91-11

R.D. Wittink & M.P. Hagenzieker

Leidschendam, 1991

SWOV Institute for Road Safety Research, The Netherlands

CONTENTS

1. Subject of this study
2. Set-up of the study
3. Results
4. Follow-up study

1. SUBJECT OF THIS STUDY

A study has been conducted into the effects of the television series "Familie Oudenrijn" and the information concept on which it is based. The series started in 1988; every year, sixteen new programmes were broadcast. The series was styled like a 'family comedy', and aimed to draw a broad public through its entertaining approach.

Road safety and, during the last year of the series, the addition of environmental issues arising from road traffic, were interwoven with the experiences of the family. In this way, an attempt was made to bring the subject to the attention of people who would otherwise give little thought to their own behaviour in traffic.

The underlying concept is known, in short, as 'organiser'. In line with the playful approach of the television series, traffic spectacles were organised in some major towns. These were promoted by the series, and the personalities from the series also participated in the spectacles. The spectacles offered a mixture of play, information and demonstrations. In this way, an attempt was made to create a link between the television series, which attracted national attention to the traffic problem, and regional and local activities, so that road users could be more directly confronted with these problems and the role they play themselves.

In this way, the television series was intended to fulfill a mobilising function towards both the road user and towards bodies that are active in the field of transport. Only at a regional and local level does the opportunity present itself to confront road users directly with their own behaviour and their own responsibility for the traffic problem. This is where the true influence on behaviour must be brought about. When, through the television series, a large part of the population is reached and the series evokes recognition, this could be used to advantage in regional and local campaigns. In this way, integration of communication is made possible.

2. SET-UP OF THE STUDY

The study was divided into two parts every year. In the first part, measurements were conducted amongst the population. In the second part, emphasis was placed on the organiser concept.

SWOV ordered the research institute r + m, Research & Marketing bv, Heerlen, to carry out all these studies. R + m reported their results and SWOV integrated all these to a final report to the Ministry of Transport, that financed the evaluation-study.

The measurement among the population was in the first place related to the viewing and rating figures for the television series, and the evaluation of the traffic spectacles. An interest in, and assessment of, the information product represented an initial precondition to realise effect.

The aim of the information campaign was, of course, more complex than this. The public had to be more directly confronted with the subject of road safety, and at a later stage the environmental issues associated with traffic, in order to create greater public awareness and promote an attitude where road users themselves assumed greater responsibility in an attempt to reduce these problems. In principle, a mass medium can fulfill a function in this regard. The ultimate aim is for behaviour to move in the desired direction, but for this purpose mass media information campaigns can do no more than create a favourable environment.

The intended effect of the television series - to stimulate awareness and engender a feeling of responsibility amongst the population - cannot be seen separately from other influences, however. For example, other information campaigns, publicity surrounding accidents or environmental pollution, police enforcement etc. That is why the study only conducted repeated measurements with respect to behaviour in traffic, opinions about this and opinions about information campaigns, to see whether trends could be detected, rather than trying to locate their source. This offers a better foundation for future information measures. In addition, over the last year of study a distinction was made between the persons questioned, on the basis of age, mode of transport and partially on the basis of distances travelled on the road every year. The target groups were compared with respect to their reported behaviour, risk assessment, opinions about choice of transport mode and road hazard, views on road

information campaigns and rating figures with respect to the television series. People were also questioned about their concern for the traffic problem. Other studies have shown that the degree of involvement is a strong determinant for the type of message that appeals. Those who were 'highly involved' were generally looking for information with which they could achieve something, while those with 'low involvement' had to be interested in a product or idea through more indirect means. With the concept of involvement, an attempt was made to create an association between the backgrounds of undesirable behaviour and the attitude towards information campaigns. A link was made between watching the television series (yes or no) and the rating aspects. In this way, a better insight is obtained into the need and possibilities of differentiating information per target group and the potential of a television series to represent one of these information measures.

In the second part of the study, interviews were held with experts in the field of communication science, in order to delve further into the potential of the information concept. At the time of the traffic spectacles, it was investigated to what degree regional and local bodies responded to the television series and the familiarity that the principal characters had meanwhile achieved. After it became apparent that the programme's appeal was fairly low, interviews with regional and local officials were held to investigate their need for national policy, support and collaboration. To avoid confusion, we must point out that this was not a study into the functioning of regional and local government bodies, but to clarify opinions within these bodies about their own information policy and that of national government.

3. RESULTS

Figures about the series

On average, 8,6% of the Dutch people watched the programmes of the series. That corresponds to more than 1,1 million persons.

Table 1 shows how people who were known with the series, assessed it on different aspects.

I quickly got bored	61%	2)
A programme specially for drivers and the environment	19%	1)*
A nice relaxing programme	69%	2)
An original idea to focus on road safety	79%	1)
We have enough of this type of prog. on Dutch tv	85%	2)
An important program for selective use of car	41%	1)*
An informative series	64%	1)
I recognise traffic problems very well	50%	1)
It relates traffic and environment on an original way	66%	1)*
The stories are silly	52%	2)
A programme specially for road safety	24%	1)
It is most amusing	36%	1)
It is important because of road safety	50%	1)
It is important in showing alternatives to using the car	32%	1)*

1) = % agree; 2) = % disagree

* comparison with measurement some months before, otherwise with measurement one year before.

Table 1: Image profile for the tv programme "Familie Oudenrijn"

(Source : r + m Research & Marketing, 1990).

Involvement

The involvement in road safety has increased in comparison with 1989. The rise is due to a slightly larger number of persons who say that they wish to be informed on aspects of road safety and who discuss road safety, and a clearly larger percentage that says the subject concerns them. Of this

latter group, the proportion that believes they are 'strongly' involved in the subject has also increased.

In comparison with this, the number of persons who state that they are concerned about the environmental problems associated with road traffic is equivalent. The proportion that is 'strongly' involved with these problems is greater, while the proportion of people that says they wish to be kept informed is less. The topics are subject of discussion with an equal number of people.

For both subjects, it is true to say that the number of people who agree with both questions is fairly small, when compared with other subjects that are posed in the same way in other studies. For example, there is a large discrepancy in involvement with respect to the issue of household waste in relation to environmental protection. This means that for the latter subject, more people actually look for concrete solutions and information and seem to be more prepared to offer a personal contribution to help reduce the problem.

Diagram 1 and 2 show the percentage of 'highly involved' in road safety, traffic and the environment on the basis of age groups and on the basis of type of mobility.

As those who have a 'low' level of involvement have a relatively low need for applicable information on behaviour in traffic, a family comedy that asks attention for a serious problem in a playful way fulfills a useful function in helping to draw attention to the problem. The tv series drew a fairly large public, that gave a good rating figure, on average. Amongst children aged up to 17, the number of 'highly involved' was lowest, while the programme was more popular with this group than with older age categories. Drivers that use their cars most represent the category with relatively the greatest number of people 'highly involved' in road safety, while the programme was least popular with this group. The television programme therefore received the highest appreciation from those for whom it was most intended.

Attitudes to road safety

In attitudes towards road safety, there were no changes noted during the past year. The social dilemma seems to be clearly defined. In general, 'road users' are seen as being primarily responsible for accidents. But

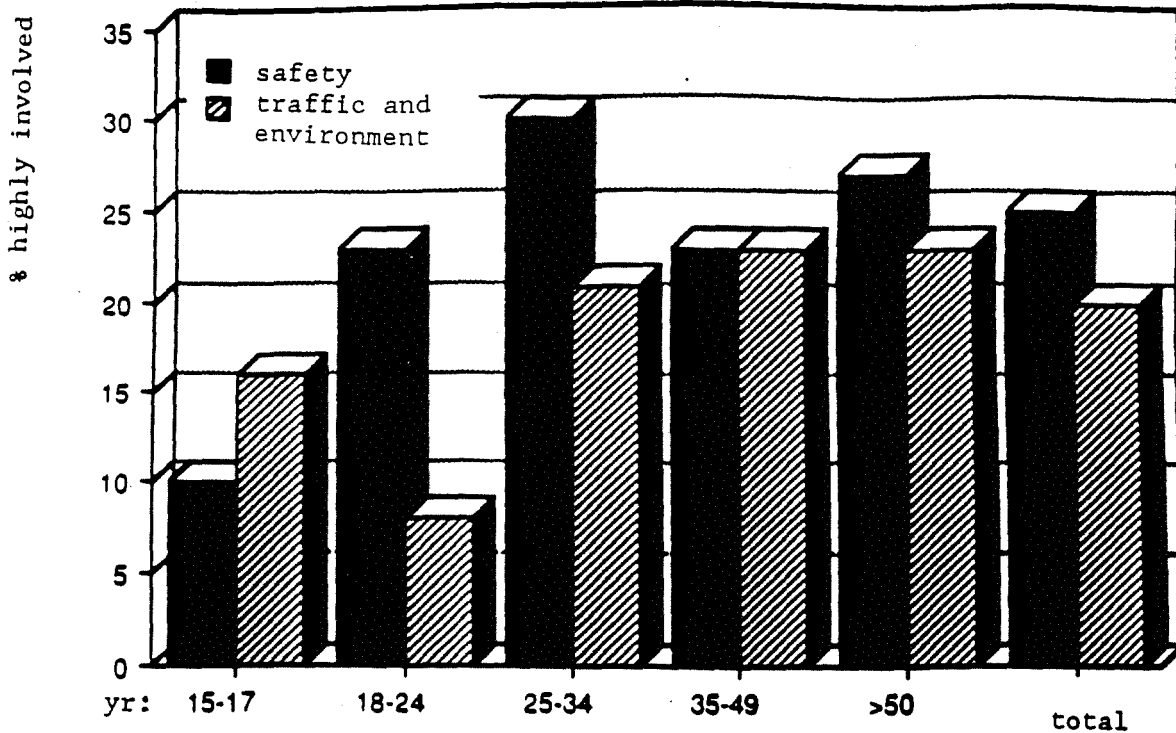


Diagram 1: Percentage of 'highly involved' in road safety, traffic and the environment on the basis of age groups.

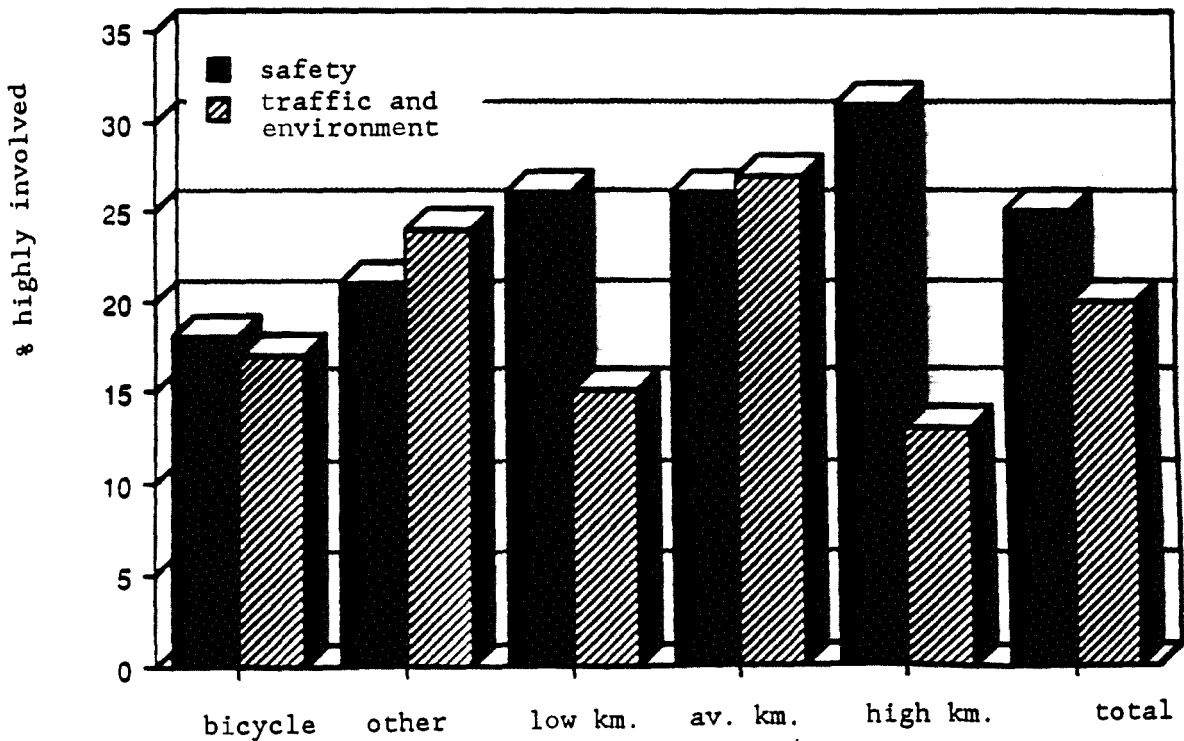


Diagram 2: Percentage of 'highly involved' in road safety, traffic and the environment on the basis of type of mobility.

when questioned about their own behaviour, this contribution was hardly referred to. The personal responsibility for road safety is obviously fairly invisible, so that there is little inclination towards preventative behaviour. This is most clearly shown amongst drivers that are on the road most often.

Reported behaviour with respect to road safety

In the reported behaviour and risk perception with respect to the spearheads of road safety policy, significant trend developments were noted, almost all of them positive.

The reported behaviour considered the driving speed on 80 km/hour roads, alcohol and seat belts. Other studies conducted by the SWOV have shown that the observed behaviour with respect to alcohol and seat belts has also improved.

With respect to risk perception, more people considered the legal regulations affecting the speed limit on 80 km/hour roads and alcohol as being important. Strangely enough, the importance of the compulsory wearing of seat belts was given less emphasis.

Table 2 shows the development from 1988 to 1990 in risk perception and reported behaviour amongst car drivers with respect to use of alcohol before driving, speed limits and seat belts.

Percentage of car drivers that says	'88	'89	'90
Probability of accident after 3 alcoholic drinks is (much) greater	85	85	89
Has never/rarely driven after consuming 3 or more alcoholic drinks	75	78	87
Exceeding speed limit of 50 km/h is (very) dangerous	55	63	65
Always/usually keeps to a speed limit of 50 km/h	56	64	69
Exceeding speed limit of 80 km/h is (very) dangerous	21	29	42
Always/usually keeps to a speed limit of 80 km/h	34	54	61
Probability of injury with accident is (much) less with seat belt	88	86	79
(Almost) always wears seat belt	73	84	88

Table 2.

It is important to maintain these positive changes and to direct part of the information campaign towards these subjects. The behaviour of other road users appears to exert an important influence on the individual behaviour of most road users.

As only part of the behaviour of others is observable, road users themselves receive little feedback about any processes of social change. Information in this regard can function as a reward for those who comply more often with the regulations. For the remaining offenders, this information can be a reason to join in with the positive trend, to 'belong to the group'.

The tv series can in its subsequent programmes make use of this fact, by placing more emphasis on the matter-of-factness of the desired behaviour or by giving brief reminders. For such a strategy, the informative message does not have to carry much rational information. In this way, a contribution is offered towards reducing the social dilemma, while the increasingly smaller group of offenders will probably be further alienated.

The 'hard core' of offenders with respect to driving speed appears to be over-represented by businessmen who are on the road a lot. They quickly fall outside the appeal of a 'family comedy', which explains why their rating for the tv series was less than the average.

This is also the group of quite experienced drivers. It is apparently not 'business-like' to get behind the wheel after drinking too much.

Alcohol offences were mostly perpetrated by drivers who belong to the middle group with respect to their driving performance and age, i.e. adults aged 25 to 50, including a relatively large number of commuters.

Attitudes to mode of transport

Opinions about choices for mode of transport were first measured in 1990, so that no trends can be indicated as yet. The most obvious result is that public transport has a largely negative image, even amongst frequent users, in contrast to the frequent users of the bicycle and passenger car.

As the car offers so many advantages, improvement of the image of public transport will probably have more effect than attempts to bring down the image of the car. In this way, the issue of environmental protection will be needed as motivator to lend greater weight to the decision to change the mode of transport. These are the contributions that information

Passenger car:

Convenience, accessibility	+	73%
No disadvantages	+	45%
Cost	-	33%
Freedom, independence	+	23%
In relation with work	+	23%

Public transport:

Inconvenience, waiting/transferring	-	34%
Convenience, no worries	+	23%
Dependent on departure times	-	23%
No disadvantages	+	20%
Longer travelling time	-	18%

Bicycle:

Ease	+	53%
Health	+	53%
Dependent on weather	-	48%
No disadvantages	+	31%
Freedom, independence	+	18%

Table 3. Most commonly cited reasons for, or disadvantages of using, mode of transport with which one most often travels (spontaneous responses).

campaigns can offer to the set policy aims, in order to cut back on the use of the car; this is where the tv series can also play a role.

The organiser and the comedy

It has been shown that the organiser function of the tv series aimed at regional and local bodies has not been effective. Based on interviews with regional and local officials, it has been shown that there is a need for various policy measures through national government with respect to information campaigns. But strong emphasis is placed on different responsibilities for various levels of government and on the autonomy on regional and local level.

In addition, the regional differences must be respected. Taking over an information concept that was conceived at central level and was intended to offer a theme for information policy at regional level is probably too much at odds with the need of local bodies to express their own profile. The tv series was thought up elsewhere and not developed in consultation with regional or local bodies.

In addition, a comedy-like approach did not appeal to some of the officials. The question can be put whether a comedy approach is really suitable for policy at regional or local level. A possible alternative, without placing too heavy an accent on the transfer of information and without becoming immediately serious and 'heavy', is to act out social dilemmas.

4. FOLLOW-UP STUDY

For future study, it is important to further elaborate the target group segmentation. An effective information policy is dependent on this. Segmentation is needed on the basis of choice of transport, behaviour in traffic and the likelihood of accidents. Measurements of attitudes, behavioural intention and reported behaviour must also be directed much more specifically towards the target group. In this way, a better impression can be obtained of choice alternatives and dilemmas of choice, of the influence of social norms and other behavioural considerations. In addition, information policy requires knowledge about involvement and other factors that determine how road users can be approached. Involvement is currently measured with respect to road safety and the association between traffic and the environment. These subjects could be further differentiated. Involvement with respect to alcohol and driving may be 'higher', for example, than with road safety in general.

It is also important to relate the function of information campaigns to other measures. Information campaigns are often regarded as stimulating measures. First, awareness of a problem is required, after which arguments can be added and insight provided, on the basis of which a change in behaviour can be elicited. But another sequence is also possible. When behaviour is encouraged, this can stimulate further knowledge and a change in attitudes. In that case, attitude change comes after behavioral change. That is why more insight is required into the way processes of change can occur and where the greatest potential lies for a particular change in a particular group. Information can stimulate, but the weakness is that the message is used selectively, mainly to confirm existing opinions. Information campaigns can also reinforce and provide arguments for the elicited change in behaviour. It must be able to respond to trends. The developments with regard to reported behaviour and risk perception show that opinions among road users can change quite quickly. A series such as 'Familie Oudenrijn' can also fulfill a role in this, by linking up with what is already part of public awareness. The influence of a mass medium is probably greater when a message evokes recognition and then adds an idea or concrete information to that, rather than when it is contradictory to prevailing opinion.