

ROAD RAGE!



Blaring horns, flashing lights, rude gestures - and that's just on a Sunday joyride according to respondents polled on driver aggression. Scott Miller, CEO Synovate Motoresearch, discusses how a recent survey examining the growing phenomenon we call 'road rage' has opened unexpected avenues and interest.

"The idea for the Road Rage survey was put forward by Alicia Kan, Synovate Global Marketing Director," says Scott Miller. "Alicia and her team did a wonderful job of showcasing several things which included our global reach, the uniqueness of each market we work in and the relevance of seeing how differing cultures deal with congestion and driving behaviour. The marketing team pursued the idea because it crossed automotive, human interest and societal trends."

Synovate's study reported on information obtained internationally. Over 4000 respondents gave details of their experiences showing that road rage is a cross-cultural malady. Using the appropriate sign language in the direction of an offending driver is not isolated to any one culture. No matter where you travel, there is a universal language of 'get out of my way'.

Each area does seem to have a preferred method. For example, persistent flashing of headlights is favoured in South Africa with respondents reporting the occurrence at 64%. Blaring horns are the method of choice in Greece at 67%, while rude gestures are overwhelmingly favoured in the UK at 81%. Actual physical confrontations are relatively

low across the board, but injure a pedestrian in India with your vehicle and you may well face a vengeful mob armed with whatever is handy.

“The most frequent question we are posed in light of the findings”, says Miller, “is ‘what can be done to improve the situation?’ The answer to the question is that anything which reduces the urgency people experience when they drive has the potential to alleviate the pressure they experience.”

“There are a lot of different parties who would be interested in how to address the evolution of road rage”, he continues. “The sectors which could benefit would be public, including city planning and governmental agencies that deal with road safety and congestion planning.

Automotive vehicle designers will get more out of the survey than we had originally thought. It can be used to find ways to bring people closer to the world they are rushing to get to while they are in their vehicle. So they’re not as panicked about traffic congestion.”

“If you want to know who I think will benefit most from this study”, says Miller, “it’s really Synovate. It was an interesting topic; it makes research interesting and it makes market research germane to the average consumer because we are looking into their lives. The average person who picks up the newspaper and has little awareness or interest in market research or activities would find this study interesting. It showcases Synovate’s curious nature and our ability to hit on a unique topic. It showcases our global reach; it’s interesting for people to read about how road rage is manifesting itself in different places; how different cultures are dealing with it.”

Finding people to take part in this study was a science unto itself. Synovate relied on their Omnibus products to tap into a cross-cultural, general representation of each market involved. But, how do we know that respondents who freely admit to their experiences on the receiving end of road rage would actually admit to perpetrating it

themselves?

“We don’t”, says Miller. “It is symptomatic of research in general. There is definitely an inclination for people to inflate or reduce according to the topic. If you ask people how much they will pay for something, they will typically tell you more than they would really pay, and if you asked them if they would do something ‘bad’, they are less likely to tell you they would. There’s a certain degree of decorum, of public acceptance that infiltrates our issues and that’s why experienced researchers will typically craft a variety of surveys when trying to get at sensitive issues because what people say is not always what they may think or feel. Censydiam’s art is in looking deeper into what things really mean in terms of responses.”



Our utter frustration with driving conditions has brought a whole spectrum of behaviours that we would never indulge elsewhere. Whether we admit to doing them or not, it happens and is a direct result of our environments. As cities become more crowded and people seek refuge in calmer areas with uninterrupted road space, the sensitivity can grow.

“The most surprising finding for myself, being from the US,” says Miller, “is that there are people over the age of 25 who have not at least experienced a rude gesture, or something of that nature while driving. I would have expected the numbers to be higher. It may be because our tolerance for pain, so to speak, has increased due to all the aggressive driving we have here.”

“There’s a lot of bravery that a bunch of sheet metal around you can bring”, he adds. “If you think about it, where would you get out? If you get out in a parking lot or on the side of the road it places you in a very vulnerable position. There’s a certain protection that the vehicle provides. You can see people yelling and saying, “c’mon man, you want a piece of me?” Hoping that the guy they are directing it towards doesn’t see them.

“When I was younger and just learning to drive”, muses Miller, “my friends and I would

joke that you can make hand gestures as long as it was below the dashboard so people couldn't see."

But before you shake an indignant fist at someone, you should be aware that aggressive driving behaviours may soon collide with law enforcement.

"In Michigan, you can be cited by law enforcement for what they term as aggressive driving", explains Miller. "It's probably necessary because there is no way to build more roads in older cities due to the infrastructure that is required. Highways will become more and more crowded. People's schedules are not getting easier and they will become rushed, panicked and impatient. Those things combined will possibly create a situation where municipalities will have to become more active in limiting the behaviours."

All of this signals opportunities for follow-up by Synovate's team.

"I think what we've learned from this study is while we deal with a lot of technical or sophisticated issues", says Miller, "we can't lose sight of the fact that simple human nature issues are of great interest to the population and the press. I think our follow-up will be to look for other similar human interest issues and link them back to the types of strategies that our clients are pursuing. There's a lot of mileage that Synovate and Synovate Motoresearch can gain from a survey that is very 'general consumer' focused." ●



So, has **Scott Miller** ever been guilty of Road Rage?

"I haven't in the last week", he laughs. "Actually, I was cut off about 2 or 3 days ago, and I don't know if you would call it rage, but I pulled up next to the guy and I put my arms out to the side and said 'c'mon man!' He needed to know that he was not driving responsibly. I don't know if you'd call that rage but it was perhaps an aggressive gesture; although he had it coming. He deserved it."

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