

EASTERN REGION AUTHORITIES

A STUDY INTO THE ATTITUDES OF YOUNG DRIVERS TOWARD DRIVING, ROAD SAFETY AND VARIOUS PUBLICITY CONCEPTS

• EXECUTIVE SUMMARY •

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BACKGROUND

For the past five years, a number of local authorities in the Eastern Region have been working together to encourage a change in attitude towards speed. This regional work has dovetailed with national publicity campaigns developed by DETR. The campaign that has underpinned this work in the Eastern Region is 'Make the Commitment' (MTC). MTC has undoubtedly been a success – over 100,000 motorists have now pledged support for the campaign. But MTC appeals to 'Middle England' – responsible people, probably aged 35+ who generally support speed reduction initiatives.

The participating authorities now wish to turn their attention to the 17 –25 year old age group - a much tougher audience. But before embarking on a new campaign the group wanted to find out more about this new target audience and as such this research project was commissioned early in 2001.

AIMS OF THE RESEARCH

The following aims were set at the outset of the project by the participating authorities:-

- 1) To identify what are likely to be the best media tools to communicate with the 17-25 year audience.
- 2) To establish campaign messages likely to achieve the best results with this particular age group – in terms of changing both attitude and driver behaviour - with regard to speed.
- 3) To establish what (if any) are the differences in the way the sexes should be addressed in this campaign.
- 4) To identify particular words/phrases/expressions that may be deemed as positive by the target audience - and to identify those that are not.
- 5) To establish whether youth culture is common across the Eastern Region or whether there are differences that would require a different approach in different parts of the region.
- 6) To test the MTC sign up approach to establish whether it is likely to be taken up by the target audience, and to establish whether MTC would be likely to bring about a change in driver attitude/behaviour with regard to speed.
- 7) To develop concepts that will form the basis of the next phase of speed reduction publicity in the Eastern Region.

Respondents were recruited to attend these focus groups on the subject of 'cars and driving' rather than 'road safety', which could have been a turn-off for this age group. The aims of the exploratory focus groups were:-

- a) To check attitudes towards driving, speed, accidents, and road safety. Has anything changed since previous research, or is anything changing right now?
- b) To explore what experiences/concepts might influence prevailing attitudes. Would the death of a friend/girlfriend be of more concern than a driver's own death? Would disablement of a passenger have more effect than death? What would be the impact of the death of a child?
- c) To provide ideas and input for the second stage of research.

While it is widely accepted that males in this age group are more likely to have accidents than females, it was felt that the effect of females on the male psyche could also influence attitudes and views. The 'macho' youth may be more evident in the presence of females, and differences in attitudes more apparent with the two sexes together. For these reasons, the groups were of mixed sex.

The profile of the four groups, which were held in Broxbourne, Harlow, Ipswich and Huntingdon were:

The approach included a quantitative element in order to test findings within a larger sample base to provide greater confidence in the findings. At this stage of the research, campaign materials were introduced and MTC was also tested.

The aim of this stage was to establish leads in three key areas:

- a) What are the right emotions to try and tap into?
- b) What are the right kind of words/phrases/images, and what should be avoided?
- c) Has MTC a role to play?

Following this final stage of research, the concepts that performed best were refined and put forward to the Eastern Region Authorities as having the potential to form the basis of a future campaign. Four concepts survived to this stage.

QUALLI HALL TEST RESULTS

Self classification and driving behaviour

Respondents were asked to classify themselves, in terms of their driving.

Of the 30% who classified themselves as a 'very calm driver' there was a significant bias towards females. This was in stark contrast to those classifying themselves as 'quite fast' - 30.9% of males compared to just 7.1% of females placed themselves in this category. No male respondents classified themselves as 'nervous'.

78.1% of respondents classed themselves as 'very confident' or 'confident'. This compares to 17.7% who classified themselves as slightly cautious/cautious. Male bravado is very evident - 83% of males class themselves as very/confident, compared to 47.1% of females.

48.8% of respondents said that they were very or quite easily irritated by other drivers.

Other findings were:

Thoughts that occur while driving

Respondents were offered a number of possible thoughts they might have while driving. Of those offered, the one most likely to occur was: 'I could get caught in a radar trap and get points' (80.5%). The next most likely thought was: 'I could cause an accident and hurt someone else' (52.4%). Only 29.3% stated that they could ever have the thought: 'I could get killed'.

Thoughts that occur about having an accident

Respondents were asked what worried them most about having an accident. They responded as follows:-

The possibility that you could kill someone	43.9%
The possibility that you could hurt someone	28.7%
The inconvenience and hassle	15.2%
The cost that might be involved	11.0%

It is interesting to note that while points on the licence, cost etc are considered serious motoring risks, these 'softer' consequences are considered unimportant when considering the possible outcome of an accident.

It is interesting to note that while 'going too fast' is the second most likely factor, exceeding the speed limit is perceived to carry almost no risk.

This result confirms that 'Going too fast' is a more appropriate phrase to use than 'speeding' in the context of road safety..

It is interesting to see how these results confirm that self-paralysis is considered worse than death, but in the case of friends the opposite is true. This was not quite what we expected, bearing in mind the findings at Stage 1. Harming or killing a family member is seen as more worrying than harming/killing a friend – perhaps a slightly surprising finding?

- Suspect drivers are those who classified themselves as one of the following earlier in the interview: fairly pushy, quite fast, rather irritable, very confident, very fast, easily irritated, regularly exceeds the speed limit, regularly races other drivers or regularly drives too fast. It is interesting that this group identifies speed as the fact or most likely to lead to an accident.

Make the Commitment

One of the objectives at the outset of the research was to establish whether Make the Commitment, or a similar ‘sign up’ campaign, might appeal to this age group. Feedback from the first focus groups indicated this was unlikely, but it was decided to attempt to confirm this finding at the hall test stage.

Females are slightly more likely to sign up than males. Of greater importance is the type of driver who would **not** sign up for a campaign. Those who said they are likely to sign up classified themselves as ‘considerate’ or ‘calm’ drivers. The vast majority of those who classified themselves as ‘quite fast’ said they are unlikely to sign up to an MTC style campaign.

Although over half the sample (53.7%) said they would be very/quite likely to sign up, it is quite clear from this information that the effect that this would have on their driving is likely to be minimal.

Respondents were then shown a series of MTC merchandising samples including tax disc holder, key fob and various windscreen stickers etc. Their response was:-

“Good for other people rather than themselves”

"I think they look alright but I wouldn't want to promote it to the world"

"My mates would seriously take the mick!"

STAGE 3 FOCUS GROUPS – ADVERTISING RESEARCH

Respondents were shown twelve advertising concepts that were developed on the basis of information gleaned from the qualli hall tests and stage one focus groups. Findings were:-

1. Concepts based on the death of a passenger (or someone else), and the driver surviving, had greater impact than concepts involving the death of the driver.
2. A feeling of sympathy for the driver can emerge if there is an element of doubt as to whether the driver is totally to blame. If there was any doubt, respondents would draw their own conclusions, and this invariably led to excuses being created on behalf of the driver.
3. Many respondents stated that if you do not know a person, 'you can only feel a certain amount of sympathy'.
4. While some respondents preferred obvious visual concepts, concepts that left something to the readers imagination performed equally as well.
5. This does not hold true for text. In general, presenting the stark facts of an accident had more impact than leaving things to the readers' imagination.
6. Respondents liked the idea of concepts using factual information relating to their specific geographical area. However, these facts need to be hard-hitting and to relate to the 'local' area - county level was often seen as not local enough. This may be difficult to achieve in a regional campaign.
7. Respondents had difficulty putting statistics into context and often drew their own (and often incorrect) conclusions as to the likelihood of adding to the statistic. For example, six young people dying is awful - but if a respondent does not believe that they could be part of the statistic, then they take the attitude 'that could never happen to me'.
8. Language is important. Phrases such as 'young driver' allow the reader to put his or her interpretation upon this. Many respondents stated that a 'young driver' would be those with less than a couple of years driving experience. Similarly, 'driving too fast' has a completely different meaning to 'breaking to speed limit'.
9. The research shows that images featured can be subtle and yet still hard-hitting.
10. Thought provoking or/and hard-hitting image concepts are more effective without large amounts of text or explanation.

Other information from stage three

Reasons for 'Driving too fast'

Reasons for driving too fast were explored (although the issue is a research project in its own right).

Respondents gave the following reasons for driving too fast on occasions.

- a) 'Lateness' – many respondents commented that getting to or from work was the most likely scenario for driving fast when late.
- b) 'Showing off' to friends was mentioned. The older groups (21 - 25 year olds) cited occasions in the past when this occurred, whereas the younger groups believed it to be a current problem amongst their age group. It may be that a transitional period occurs at some point between the age groups, although this would need to be explored further in future research.
- c) 'Peer Pressure' - Respondents commented that their friends would comment on their driving to try and promote faster driving. Some respondents also admitted to 'racing' friends when travelling in separate cars.
- d) 'Bad Mood' – it was suggested that driving fast can release anger. Respondents commented that this is more likely to occur when an argument has occurred with a boyfriend or girlfriend.

Interestingly many respondents admitted to driving their current car 'as fast as it can go' when asked.

CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

The 17-25 year old age group is very 'campaign aware', and as such there is a danger that they will treat any campaign as just that – a campaign, and not directly related to them or their driving. If this happens they will take no notice of the messages within the campaign.

The chosen campaign should use short messages that are either based on fact or are direct in approach. Content that is indecisive allows the reader to make excuses for the driver, or to side-step issues.

Imagery used does not necessarily need to be so direct. Initially, this age group is more drawn to visual stimulus than text. Therefore the visual(s) must generate an immediate reaction if attention is to be held, even for a split second.

The image of flowers on the roadside was seen as a direct and clear link to road deaths. Every respondent understood the background and outcome relating to this image. This is an image that every respondent had seen – and in many cases sees on a daily or very frequent basis.

The high impact image of a badly crashed car can play an important role. However, a very badly crashed car can imply that the driver has died – in the absence of other qualifying information (the text may not be read). Although the thought of a driver dying is not pleasant, it allows the reader to decide that this is a very unlikely outcome of his or her own driving ('it won't happen to me').

The chosen concept must not allow the reader any excuse to feel sympathy for the driver. This was evident in the response to the text in two of the concepts where respondents decided that there were likely to be other circumstances that led to the accident other than just 'driving too fast'.

The amount of information to include needs to hit a fine balance. Too little information can sometimes let the reader side step by filling in the details themselves. Too much information can also be a problem – in terms of losing impact by including too much text or too much information.

To conclude, several of the concepts tested produced a feeling of guilt among respondents. However, both image and text must be given careful consideration to take into account that the reader will often try and conclude that the driver is not totally at fault. When this occurs the sympathy turns from the victim to the driver. If the accident is seen as being caused by complete stupidity, the reader will not relate to the driver, and thus 'that could not happen to me'. The fine balance between the level of information to be supplied must not be underestimated.

THE FINAL CONCEPTS

The final four concepts put forward to the Eastern Region Authorities at the conclusion of the research project are overleaf.

It is tempting to explain these concepts in detail – but the ‘young people’ seeing the campaign will not have this luxury.

They should be strong enough to stand up in their own right.