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AN EMPIRICAL DESCRIPTION OF CYCLING HOT PROSPECTS: IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIAL MARKETERS TACKLING TRAVEL MODE SHIFT

Abstract
The authors conducted a nationally representative online survey to establish key characteristics of Hot and Warm Prospects for social marketers wanting to increase the numbers of British adults making regular short trips by bicycle. Such an improvement would have a significant positive impact on individual health as well as the health of the local environment. Findings suggest that prospects have a strongly positive attitude towards cycling and that social marketers must develop interventions which go beyond a simple value-based cognitive exchange in order to shift the travel behaviour of this group.

Introduction
British people make only 1-2% of their journeys by bicycle (Gatersleben & Appleton, 2007), and cycling in the UK is perceived as being dangerous and inconvenient (Pucher & Buehler, 2008) due to poor weather, poor facilities and dangerous traffic conditions (Clearly & McClintock, 2000). Cycling in Britain is an unappealing prospect, yet cycling contributes to an individual’s personal fitness and health, reduces congestion and contributes to our ongoing struggle against environmental damage (Gatersleben & Appleton, 2007; Shephard, 2008). Increasing the number of people who exchange cycling for driving on short regular trips has become a political priority in the UK.

The UK has a long way to go before it catches up with Germany, The Netherlands and Denmark (Pucher & Buehler, 2008) and our battle must be double-pronged. There must be policy to change the conditions in which people make travel decisions (e.g. urban planning, taxes and facilities) and there must also be targeted behaviour change interventions to nudge and persuade people to change their behaviour (i.e. social marketing).
In the light of this, the objective of this research was to identify key measurable factors which could contribute to our understanding of the profile of people who could potentially be the ‘hot prospects’ for social marketers wishing to increase the number of adults in the British population who cycle for short, regular journeys. Clearly there will be some segments more likely than others to respond to social marketing activities. This paper will paint a portrait of this group; those who social marketers should be targeting with behaviour change interventions to increase their regular short-trip cycling.

**Methodology**

The survey was conducted using an online interview administered to members of the YouGov Plc GB panel of 275,000+ individuals who have agreed to take part in surveys. An email was sent to panellists selected at random from the base sample according to the sample definition, inviting them to take part and providing a link. The sample definition was ‘GB adult population’ and consisted of 3855 adults representative of all GB adults (aged 16 to 64) by working status, age, gender and socio-economic group. Fieldwork was undertaken between 27th April and 9th May 2010. The research approach was purely inductive, with the intention of developing theory during the analysis of this research stage; the first of a multi-stage mixed-method research programme.

**Findings: Hot and Warm Prospects**

‘Hot’ and ‘warm’ prospects were defined as follows. We asked for agreement amongst non cyclists that ‘I have been contemplating cycling recently for short everyday journeys’ and/or ‘I have actually made plans to take up cycling for short everyday journeys. We asked current cyclists if ‘you are seriously thinking of cycling more often for everyday short journeys’. Our ‘hot prospects’ (whether non or current cyclists) had to strongly agree with either question; our ‘warm prospects’ had to ‘tend
to agree’ with either question. Hot and Warm Prospects for social marketers are those most likely to be ready to shift their behaviour and, with the right persuasion, support and infrastructure, to start regularly cycling for short journeys rather than driving. By identifying a detailed profile of this segment, social marketers will be able to target their efforts for the best ROI. Here we will sketch a portrait of these prospects based on findings from our research and then discuss the implications of this portrait to social marketers.

Hot and Warm Prospects comprise slightly more men than women, more ‘ABC1s’ than ‘C2DEs’ and tend to be between 16 and 39. They make up 32% of the GB population and a quarter of them cycle quite or very often compared with 40% of them who cycle occasionally and about a third who are lapsed cyclists. Around three quarters of them own a bicycle.

Non-cyclists contemplating cycling tended to view regular cyclists in quite a positive light. They saw them as fitness conscious, environmentally aware, independent, confident, and as adventurous, free spirits. In this respect they are little different to the general population. However, prospects also thought the media were too negative about cycling compared with the general population and twice as many viewed successful British cyclists as important positive influencers on thinking about cycling.

For 70% of our prospects, cycling is associated with a sense of wellbeing (compared with only half of the general population) and if they get stuck in a traffic jam, two thirds of them ‘wish they were cycling’ (compared with 43% of the GB population). Nearly half would be willing to drive more slowly to accommodate an increase in cycling. However, a quarter admit that cycling seems like hard work and nearly a fifth see roads as being more for cars than bikes. Nearly 30% admit they have always rely on motor transport for short trips.
It is a promising sign for the future of regular short-trip cycling in the UK that 81% of our Hot and Warm Prospects perceive cycling to work to be completely normal these days and over half perceive cycling to be ‘cool’. In fact 42% of the GB population think cycling has become cool these days. However, confidence on a bicycle is still an issue, with 21% of our prospects not feeling confident enough to consider cycling. Very few (<10%) British people think cycling is the preserve of middle class men or that cyclists are ‘odd’ or alternative.

Unsurprisingly, most (89%) of our Hot and Warm Prospects view cycling as a potentially important weapon in the fight against environmental damage and in the fight against traffic congestion (85%), and many (78%) think cyclists are doing their bit for the environment. However, 35% of our prospects and 39% of the GB population still think global warming has been exaggerated. Nevertheless, 80% of our prospects believe Britain would be better if more people cycled, although nearly half think cyclists often behave badly on the roads. In general, half of our prospects think we are amidst a cycling boom in the UK. Findings suggest that sexy new bike technology may have contributed to this, along with ‘celebrity’ cyclists like David Cameron, Chris Hoy, Boris Johnson and Victoria Pendleton.

**Discussion and conclusion**

This research has identified measurable traits of Hot and Warm Prospects which can help social marketers identify their target group for travel mode shift behaviour change interventions. Prospects have a very positive approach to cycling, viewing it as ‘cool’, as a way of helping the environment, as representing freedom, wellbeing and as being normal in today’s society. This indicates that social marketing to “influence the acceptability of social ideas” (Kotler & Zaltman, 1971) is unnecessary. However, 85% of our prospects do not cycle
very often and 34% of them are ‘lapsed’ and don’t cycle at all nowadays. Our prospects have positive attitudes towards cycling, but are still not doing it in large numbers. We now consider what role social marketing might play in achieving the desired behavioural shift.

When developing the exchange principle as the central tenet of social marketing, Kotler and Lee emphasised the concept of ‘value’; that the marketer has to offer something of value to the consumer in the short term if they are to expect behavioural shift (Kotler & Lee, 2008). Smith calls this the ‘Let’s make a deal’ principle (Smith, 2006). People will change their behaviour but not just because they know about something, but because they get something of value in return. We argue that cycling is already of value to our prospects, so behaviour change tactics need to move beyond the purely cognitive exchange and use more sophisticated techniques to improve the number of prospects regularly riding their bicycles.

To conclude, although policy change (e.g. targeted taxing, more cycle lanes and bike-friendly road layouts) and barrier removal (e.g. training to boost confidence and road sharing skills), are clear imperatives in the battle to increase regular short-trip cycling (and have been important in the successes of Denmark, The Netherlands and Germany (Pucher & Buehler, 2008), social marketing will also play an important part to persuade people to take action, as part of a multi-faceted approach. However, cognitive exchange-based social marketing is unlikely to be effective, given the value Hot and Warm Prospects already see in cycling – much of the cognitive ‘battle’ has already been won. Hence social marketers should employ techniques from branding, sales promotion, relationship marketing and personal selling to change the behaviour of Hot and Warm Prospects through habit change, emotional engagement, nudging and behavioural reinforcement.
References


Note

YouGov were responsible for the data collection but analyses and interpretation are the responsibility of Bristol Social Marketing Centre (BSMC) at UWE Business School and any enquiries should be directed to Professor Alan Tapp (alan.tapp@uwe.ac.uk). BSMC would also like to thank South Gloucestershire Council for part-funding the research.