

Consumption | Individual communication

IC - (21014) - THE IMPACT OF A SOCIAL MEDIA CAMPAIGN ON INDIVIDUAL TRAVEL BEHAVIOUR IN THE UK DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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Background and objectives

Many everyday actions that have an environmental impact are habitual and difficult to change within a stable context. However, disruptions to the context provide an opportunity to modify behaviours. These disruptions, or 'moments of change', can arise from life transitions (e.g. moving house) or can be precipitated by external events (e.g. economic downturns). The COVID-19 pandemic constitutes an exogenous moment of change which has significantly disrupted people's lives. This research project investigates whether a social media campaign to promote active travel in the wake of the first UK lockdown led to changes in transport mode choices among participants.

Process and methods (for empirical research)

During the campaign, which ran in Summer 2020, individuals were asked to pledge to use active travel modes at least five times in a fortnight, or to commit to travelling 100km in a month by active means. Everyone who signed up was invited to participate in an evaluative study; those who did so formed the experimental groups for this project (N=390). A control group was recruited via Facebook (N=100). All participants completed online surveys which assessed whether behavioural change had occurred. The survey was repeated in Spring 2022 to determine whether any changes endured over time. Survey findings were supplemented by material from qualitative interviews to gain a fuller understanding of the enablers or barriers to the adoption of active travel modes.

Main results (or main arguments in the case of critical reviews)

Approximately two-thirds of participants met their pledges while those who did not cited barriers such as lack of infrastructure to support safe active travel. Participants in all groups expressed an intention to walk or cycle more, drive less, and fly less once all COVID-19 restrictions were lifted.

Implications for research and practice/policy | Importance and originality of the contribution

Findings indicate the pandemic represented an opportunity to reconfigure travel habits in a more sustainable direction. This research advances moment of change research by applying a field experiment design during an exogenous disruption.

Palavras-chave : moments of change, field experiment, behaviour change, active travel