

Where does cycling promotion fit in media productions?

Introduction

There has been an increased appreciation of the need to better understand urban travel behaviour to encourage modal shift to cycling. However, there are gaps in our understanding of the influences of our broader social context on travel behaviour. These influences could come in different ways such as experiences, observations, conversations (and other social interactions), education, play and through media (mass media and social media). While our experiences and observations that relate to urban travel often come down to transport planning and promotion strategies, the way cycling, and other forms of transport are portrayed in the media doesn't necessarily fall into the conventional domain of cycling policy and planning. However, there may be untapped potential to engage more fully with creative industries and other media producers to promote cycling and enhance the cycling experience. Here we explore this potential with the example of the development of a children's book, and question how mainstream media producers could engage with cycling promotion.

Media production and influence on cycling

Media productions come in all shapes and sizes, from books to news reports to billboard advertisements. They can be found on a spectrum between those that are purely developed as an artistic, engaging or informative endeavour to entertain and inform the audience, and those that are developed purely for promotional purposes, such as advertisements. This is not to say that advertisements can't be artistic, but the intent is for them to promote a certain commercial or social enterprise. Of course, purely artistic pursuits can promote different philosophies, activities or sometimes even products, but this happens by chance. And there are regions in the middle where artists, authors or producers have clear agendas they want to promote, or where product placement or other reliance on income streams can affect content.

With this in mind, we must also be aware of another continuum, which is whether the media content contains messages that are likely to increase or decrease the audience's propensity to cycle. This is very difficult to gauge and quantify. Firstly, the influence of a media product on one's propensity to cycle may not be direct, with media influencing decision makers and other people in positions of influence. It may also affect factors in the cultural landscape, such as drivers' behaviour, that in turn may affect one's feeling of safety while cycling and hence the propensity to cycle. To actually ascertain causal relationships between messages, behaviour determinants and cycling rates would be extremely difficult given the complexity of travel behaviour and the social context of a transport user. However, it is possible to speculate, based on theoretical causal relationships, the possibility that messages affect one's propensity to cycle. To do this I draw upon the list of characteristics of messages considered in my thesis (Hicks, 2013):

- Use of framing (metaphors, presuppositions and implicatures, myths and symbols)
- Information portrayed and received within messages
- Requirements of existing knowledge, shared knowledge and behavioural determinants
- How the audience is exposed to messages and what activates them to use information
- Behaviour of the audience in relation to seeking, noticing and interpreting the message
- How characteristics of the message influence different aspects of the psychology of individuals, namely:
 - Attitude – through enhancing readiness to see and/or express the positive/negative aspects, or through contributing to the pool of knowledge about a mode of transport
 - Norms and values – through demonstrating the prevalence or proximity of using a mode of transport, through judging the appropriateness, or through activating personal norms related to a mode of transport
 - Efficacy – through demonstrating or facilitating the way to use a mode of transport, or through establishing an appreciation of how using a mode of transport is contributing to broader objectives
 - Emotion – through demonstrating the emotional appeal and creating emotional associations with a mode of transport
 - Habit – through enhancing the development of new habits or overcoming the barriers associated with habit

Based on these characteristics of messages, we could start to find potential pathways of influence from being exposed to messages to being encouraged or discouraged to cycle. For example, a car advertisement has clearly been developed with the intent to promote a car brand and/or model. Advertisement are highly variable in their messaging. However, some potential pathways of influence on travel behaviour include those mapped out in Figure 1.

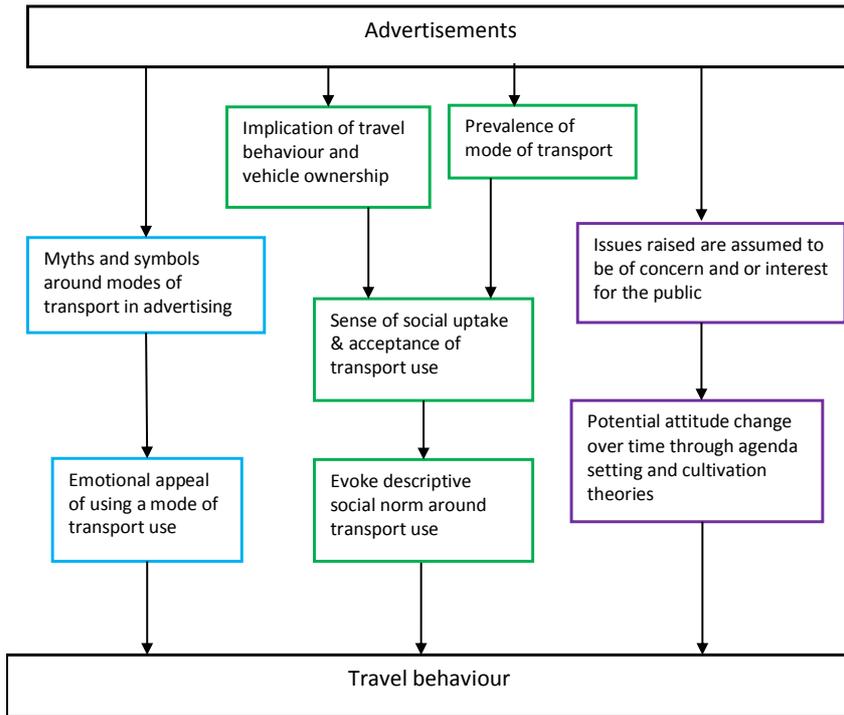


Figure 1 Pathways of influence from car adverting

By observing whether the determinants of behaviour are encouraging cycling or not, we can loosely scope out where they would go on the following diagram, Figure 2, with the influence on cycling on the x-axis and intention of the production on the y-axis. I have very loosely populated this diagram with different general media products (with the location of some, such as News reports and car-centric films, based on findings from my thesis). This diagram could also be used for a specific media production. Note this diagram is about the potential influence of the receiver of the media rather than the influence on the whole population, which would depend on the level of distribution.

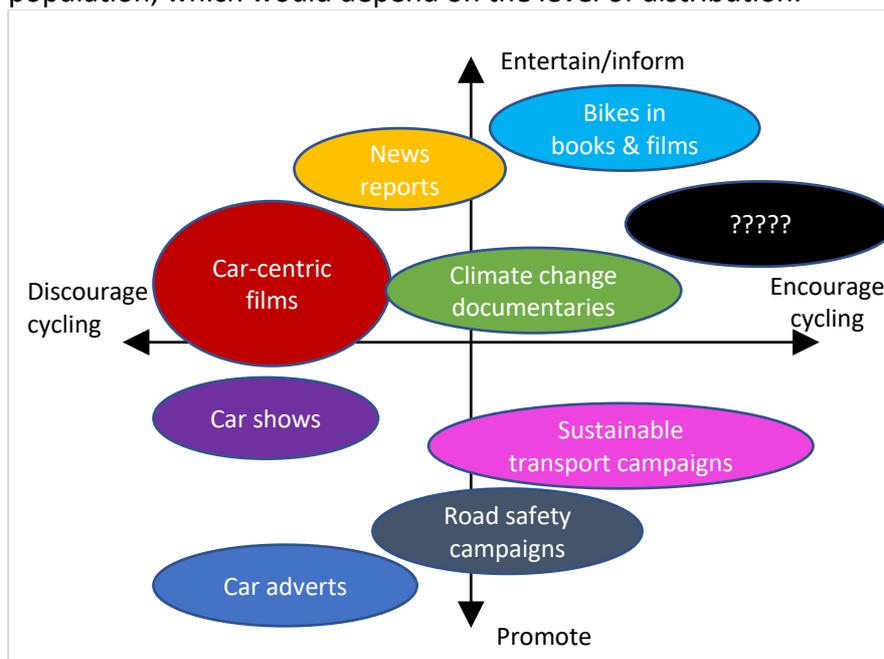


Figure 2 Diagram of intention of media vs influence on cycling

This may prove useful because understanding both media's current influence on cycling, and the underlying intentions of the media creators is important in developing media-related strategies to encourage cycling. How media shifts towards being more encouraging of cycling will depend on how we shift media messages to the right in this diagram, or potentially restrict distribution of media products on the left and encourage more media productions on the right (like the black question marked oval). Here I give an example of the development of a children's book which is hopefully a project that works its way towards fulfilling the requirements to fit in the elusive black oval.

A children's book with a cycling theme

I have studied urban transport and become a cycling advocate over the last 15 years. Therefore, I have a good grasp of the benefits of increasing cycling rates and the importance of cycling within particular populations, such as children. During my studies, I stumbled across the importance of psychology and sociology in travel behaviour and researched these in respect to mode of transport choice. I didn't come from a social science background, and I can't claim to be an expert. Nevertheless, I came to have a good understanding of travel behaviour. Meanwhile, I have dabbled with poetry, painting and other creative pursuits (including filmmaking), but I would never claim to be a "creative". However, it is the meeting of these three elements: the cause of encouraging cycling, the understanding of travel behaviour, and the use of creative methods that has led to the book "Jill's joyful ride home". By teaming up my efforts, with another cycling advocate and transport strategist, who happens to be a talented illustrator, Lori Dean, we are producing a book that we hope inspires children to try (and hopefully love) cycling as part of their daily life.

On Figure 2, it would probably be just above the middle of the y-axis, because we are deeply connected with the cause of promoting cycling, but we have produced this for the entertainment of children. It definitely flowed naturally as an artistic pursuit with some autobiographical elements in there (yes, I was really shy as a schoolgirl). However, in terms of its potential to encourage cycling, there is little doubt that I have been influenced by my knowledge of determinants of travel behaviour in developing this book:

- It gives proximity to Jill (a shy schoolgirl) who loves riding her bike from school,
- It describes positive aspects of cycling such as connection with community and place, building confidence, being playful, and helping thought processes
- It brings up positive emotions around cycling as she is "elated" after her ride
- It builds self-efficacy in demonstrating that even shy Jill can ride with confidence
- It evokes descriptive social norms around cycling, with her schoolmates joining in and that she showed them it's a "joy that's easy to share"

Whether this book is successful in reaching an audience and whether it encourages cycling is yet to be seen. However, its development has made me reflect on the importance of the three elements that make such a project happen: a deep understanding of the cause and related issues; the understanding of the psychology and sociology related to behaviour and behaviour change; and the creative talent to engage with the audience. Could these

elements be integrated in different ways to improve the potential for media productions to encourage (or at least not discourage) cycling? How can we share knowledge, expertise and skills across these three domains to give creativity a bigger and more effective role in encouraging cycling?

Conclusion

While I know there are cycling advocates and enthusiasts who have taken on creative pursuits and produced commendable results (some of which will be on display in conferences such as this), perhaps we should question how to reach other authors, artists and producers, and how to integrate effective behavioural studies work into creative and informative works. Would this compromise the creative products, or could it actually prove to be ineffective anyway? It is difficult to know but it might be worth further investigation. I will finish this paper with some thoughts on where this could lead:

- Research the interaction between these three elements, particular to understand how receptive media producers would be to working with cycling advocates and social scientists (or the materials produced by these groups)
- Formal collaborations between creatives/media producers, social scientists and cycling advocates
- Workshops for creatives/media producers to better understand the potential impacts of their work (or integrating it into their education)
- Guidelines to help creatives/media producers understand the impact of their work related to travel behaviour
- Media and behavioural studies workshops targeted at cycling advocates and transport policymakers
- Funding creative works and creating competitions for media that encourage cycling designed to appeal to a broad audience (not just cycling enthusiasts)

Perhaps there is already work happening in this space, and I'm aware that there is a natural crossover between creativity and cycling, but this is just some food for thought. Either way, I hope you like "Jill's joyful ride home".

References

Hicks, J. (2013). *The social context of urban travel behaviour*. (PhD in Environmental Policy). UNSW,