Qualitative research into motivations and barriers to cycling

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Abstract

In 2010 the Department of Transport's (DoT) Bikewest branch commissioned focus group research to explore peoples' motivation for and against making trips using a bicycle. The results were to inform message development for cycling promotion programs.

Potential and current cyclists were recruited for a two hour facilitator-led discussion on the motivations and barriers to cycling. Five groups or types of cyclist were identified during the discussions. (Recreational, car substitute riders, necessity, commuters and fitness trainers)

For three of these five the motivators for cycling, the facilitators, barriers and inhibitors for cycling are discussed here.

The prevalence of these groups and concepts would be worth exploring as part of a quantitative survey with a larger sample.

The concept of what defines a person as a 'cyclist' was also explored. The presence or absence of eight factors in bicycle riders was seen as influencing whether or they were identified as being a 'cyclist'.

Little evidence was found for a progression between types of cyclist, for example from recreational to commuter cyclist.

Introduction

In May 2010 the Departments of Transport's (DoT) Bikewest branch commissioned TNS Social Research (TNS) to explore, in-depth, the motivators and barriers influencing whether or not people take up cycling.

The research objectives were to;
1) Identify the barriers and motivators to bike riding to better understand why people make the decision to ride rather than use other modes of transport
2) Inform DoT about issues relating to cycling from bike riders' perspectives
3) Better understand how to focus marketing and messages to specific segments of the bike riding population in order to increase effectiveness of marketing campaigns promoting the take- up of cycling.

Method

TNS recruited 30 focus group members from their panel of people willing to be contacted for research.

Participants were recruited into one of two main groups, potential cyclists (cycled infrequently) or current cyclists (cycled regularly) and split each of these groups by gender. All recruits for the groups had to have cycled in the previous six months.

Resultant groups were;
1) Potential cyclists, male
2) Potential cyclists, female
3) Current cyclists, male
4) Current cyclists, female.

Members were invited to participate in a two hour focus group at the TNS offices for which they were rewarded a nominal fee ($60).

Members of each group were encouraged to discuss their cycling behaviours including its usual purpose, what made them want to take a trip by bicycle, what helped them make that decision, what did not, and what inhibited them from carrying out that decision.

The 'cyclist types' the facilitator identified during the discussions could be categorised into of five groups. The motivators, facilitators, barriers and inhibitors for three of these are shown in Table 1.

Two categories termed 'Necessity' and 'Fitness Training' were excluded from these results as the groups fall outside the marketing objectives of the Department of Transport. The group labelled 'Necessity' included people who had lost their driver's license with the 'Training' category composed of people for whom the use of a bicycle was incidental to achieving high level fitness or training goals.

Group members were also asked to explore or what defines a person, a *cyclist*.

Results

See Table 1.

Themes of exercise and fitness are motivators for each of the three cyclist groups identified here. This concurs with earlier focus group research (Greig 2003) where the "qualities of cycling most liked by all groups were those with personal benefits – exercise, fitness and health" (p145).

The recreational riders though related more to the scenery/social side of cycling than the commuters. Commuters also refer to improved fitness as a motivator to cycle but also included external factors such as saving money and avoiding parking hassles.

The deterrents for the recreational and commuter groups show a similar dichotomy – the recreational riders mentioning personal reasons as inhibitors such safety, effort and getting organised - whereas the commuters made no

such reference citing instead distance, work commitments and inability to respond to emergencies as deterrents to their riding.

This is consistent with research from Canada (Winters et al, 2010) where 1402 current and potential cyclists listed the factors that most influenced their cycling as "safety, ease of cycling, weather, route conditions and interaction with motor vehicles" (p153). This emphasises the importance of the provision of cycling infrastructure within the road network.

There was no suggestion from the focus groups of moving from one type of cyclist to the other. Each cycling type seems to be fairly discrete with its own barriers and motivations.

Group members were also asked to explore or what makes a person, a cyclist. (See Table 2).

It appears obvious that anyone who rides a bicycle is a cyclist and technically at least this is true.
However, in public discussions about cyclists there are usually particular stereotypes being referred to with associations of Lycra, sports and pack riding etc rather than a 12 year old riding to school or a family on a recreational ride (Greig, 2010).

The results in table 2 lend weight to the narrowness of the stereotype as the responses point to a cyclist as being someone who is involved in cycling sports and has the equipment and club associations to support them in that pursuit.

Table 1 Type of cyclists and factors influencing cycling decisions

	RECREATIONAL RIDERS	RIDE AS SUBSTITUTE FOR CAR TRIPS	COMMUTERS
MOTIVATORS	*AMBIENCE* ◊ Exercise ◊ Fun / enjoyment / pleasure ◊ See scenery / spend time outdoors ◊ Social –cycle with family & friends	*UTILITARIAN BENEFIT* ◊ Economy (save money on fuel) ◊ Increase exercise / fitness ◊ Avoids difficulty of car parking ◊ Save environment	*UTILITARIAN BENEFIT* ◊ Economy (save money on fuel, parking, fares) ◊ Increase exercise / fitness ◊ Avoids difficulty of car parking
FACILITATORS	*JOURNEY AMBIENCE* ◊ Children old enough to cycle ◊ A quality bike ◊ More / better / safer / paths	*CONVENIENCE* ◊ Everyday cycling routine ◊ Cycling clothes / equipment in working order ◊ Kids old enough to cycle ◊ Bike ready and accessible	*CONVENIENCE* ◊ Work is close by ◊ Takes less time than alternative commutes ◊ Availability of good paths ◊ Organised for commute
BARRIERS	*SAFETY CONCERNS DETRACT FROM AMBIENCE* ◊ Safety concerns in traffic ◊ Not organised to cycle ◊ Compulsory helmets ◊ Time commitment	*INCONVENIENCE* ◊ Not able to carry items ◊ No secure bike parking ◊ Need to organise equipment and schedule	*INCONVENIENCE* ◊ Arrive at work sweaty ◊ Takes more time than alternative commutes ◊ Need to carry change of clothes ◊ Inclement weather
INHIBITORS	*BARRIERS DETRACT FROM THE AMBIENCE* ◊ Lack of time ◊ Lazy / tired / no motivation ◊ Kids (too small / too slow)	*BARRIERS UNDERMINE THE UTILITARIAN BENEFIT* ◊ Car is more convenient ◊ Bike is not ready ◊ Schedule does not work ◊ Lazy / no motivation / tired	*BARRIERS UNDERMINE THE UTILITARIAN BENEFIT* ◊ Safety concerns ◊ Riding distance ◊ Helmet hair / no showers at work ◊ Conflicts with work commitments ◊ Conflicts with after work commitments ◊ Unable to respond to emergencies

Table 2
Factors contributing to the classification of a 'cyclist'.

Frequency	Bicycle	Dress	Distance
• Need to ride frequently	• Needs to be 'good enough' • Multiple bikes • Special purpose bikes	• Wears Lycra • Other special clothing • Padded pants	• Needs to ride long, or longer than usual distances
Degree of involvement • Takes part in cycling events • May be a cycling club member	**Equipment** • Will have gadgets such as trip computer, shoe clips	**Intent/Purpose** • Serious attitude about cycling • Rides for a higher purpose such as training, fitness or sport	**Habitual** • It becomes second nature to them.

Discussion

It terms of promoting cycling it would appear that the most viable point of entry for encouraging occasional or low level cyclists to ride more would be recreational cycling as the demands on equipment, effort and skills are lower.

Promoting commuting cycling to recreational riders would call on a different set of messages though the perception of seemingly unsurmountable barriers (long distances, need for equipment etc.) may render change unlikely.

Park et al (2010) discovered that "compared with car commuters transit commuters are more likely to become commuter cyclists" (p317). This, they theorise, is because of an association between car commuting and car dependence.

This will have implications for encouraging people who do not normally ride to make recreational trips. The messages to them will need to promote the fun and sensory pleasures of cycling rather than the hard, practical benefits that appear favoured by the commuters i.e. saving money, fewer parking hassles. To encourage recreational riding then messages promoting things to see on a ride, being able to spend time with family or friends and having fun would appear to have traction with infrequent riders.

It follows that the material benefits of commuter cycling could be promoted to recreational cyclists (as they have already experienced the sensory benefits) but not to non or infrequent cyclists as these are too far removed from their experience. Messages to recreational riders could encourage them to see that the same 30 minute ride they do at the weekend could save them time and money when used to get them to work. Better

to use a time reference in promotional messages as people are more likely to imagine themselves riding a bicycle for 30 minutes than riding for 10km even though, for most people, these will equate to the same thing.

People commuting and substituting a car trip both cited the need to carry items as a barrier to making cycling trips. A secondary message in broader cycling promotions ought to spell out, in text or in incidental images, some contemporary carrying systems for bikes. The law has changed in WA now to allow carriers 'in front of' the handlebars meaning some of the excellent child and baggage carrying systems from Europe can be legally used here.

The results in the second part of this research lend support to the idea that to be considered as a cyclist a range of factors must be in place to indicate a degree of seriousness about cycling and an association in some way with sport or training.

The converse of this may hold some answers about the fiercely negative press (if not road rage incidents) 'serious' cyclists get from some motorists.
If we keep describing all people riding bikes as cyclists, and this terminology has a negative and sporting connotation, then this can perhaps mislead a motorist to take the view that they are not so much sharing the road with a fellow commuter, but with someone who is using 'their' road as a sporting facility.

This may make them less inclined to want to share the road and more inclined to indicate to the cyclist to go somewhere else, especially if the driver is held up or otherwise inconvenienced by the bike/s.

Recommendations
- The degree of movement from recreational rider to commuter would be worth examining in a large-sample quantitative study.
- Messages to promote recreational and commuter cycling need take into account the different motivations for each type cycling and selectively highlight these.

References
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