

1 **THE EFFECT OF INCENTIVES TO PROMOTE CYCLING: A MOBILITY LIVING**
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6 **Bingyuan Huang, Corresponding Author**

7 Centre for Transport Studies
8 University of Twente
9 Room Z238, The Horst,
10 Tel: +31 (0) 53 - 489 5203; Email: b.huang@utwente.nl

11
12 **Tom Thomas**

13 Centre for Transport Studies
14 University of Twente
15 Room Z222, The Horst, Enschede, The Netherlands
16 Tel: +31 (0) 53 - 489 2449; Email: t.thomas@utwente.nl

17
18 **Benjamin Groenewolt**

19 Keypoint Consultancy
20 Enschede, The Netherlands
21 Tel: +31 (0)53 – 482 5703; Email: Benjamin@keypoint.eu

22
23 **Tiago Fioreze,**

24 Centre for Transport Studies
25 University of Twente
26 Room Z212, The Horst, Enschede, The Netherlands
27 Tel: +31 (0) 53 - 489 4322; Email: t.fioreze@utwente.nl

28
29 **Eric van Berkum,**

30 Centre for Transport Studies
31 University of Twente
32 Room Z228, The Horst, Enschede, The Netherlands
33 Tel: +31 (0) 53 - 489 4886; Email: e.c.vanberkum@utwente.nl

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ABSTRACT

As part of the Horizon 2020 project EMPOWER, this paper presents results from a case study on the impact of positive incentives on cycling behavior for around 70 participants in the Twente region of the Netherlands. This was done by using the SMART app in a real-world living lab environment. The SMART app uses challenges with rewards, feedback, and message functions to promote cycling. In this particular case, participants were challenged to cycle at least 10 times along a newly paved cycling road and get rewarded upon completion of the challenge. A post-challenge survey was sent through the app to evaluate participants' behavior. We found that the campaign resulted in new bike trips, on the newly paved road, made by users who completed the challenge, even after the campaign had ended. According to the survey, 44% of participants responded that their behavior had changed due to the campaign, and that they would keep on cycling more often after the campaign. Most users who did not complete the challenge said they do not need to use this road, but 20% of them indicated that they would cycle more if they got challenges and rewards more suited to their personal situation. This implies that challenges are more effective when they are customized based on individuals' historical travel patterns.

Keywords: Travel behavior, Living lab, Smartphone, challenge and rewards, soft measures.

1. INTRODUCTION

Road transport contributes to about 25% of the EU's total emissions of CO₂ (1). As the main component of global greenhouse gas (GHG), CO₂ emission is the main contribution to global warming. Therefore, the European Union stressed the urgent need to reduce the levels of CO₂ emission. In addition to the negative impact for the environment, car driving is also associated with unhealthy behavior (e.g., Gordon-Larsen et al., 2009 (2)). Active modes of transport (i.e., cycling and walking) are not only environmentally friendly, but also seen as healthy alternatives (3)(4), in particular for relatively short trips within cities.

Fiscal regulations to discourage car use are effective measures to stimulate alternative transport modes, but are sometimes controversial regarding socio-economic equity (i.e. poor people cannot afford to use the car anymore, whereas rich people are less affected or not at all) and often lack public support. Instead of 'stick' measures, positive incentives such as travel planning, subsidies, marketing, rewards, and PT discounts could also stimulate the use of sustainable transport options. Positive interventions or "soft measures" are used within voluntary travel behavior change (VTBC) programs or active traffic and demand management (ATDM). We found several case studies in which such interventions were used to promote cycling (e.g., Baum, 2008 (5), Dubuy et al., 2013(6), Steven & Avineri, 2011 (7) and Y. Zhang et al., 2010 (8)).

However, in most of the cases, stated preference surveys were used to measure the intention for change, which is not the same as actual changing behavior. This situation is improving and changing with the use of information technologies, such as smartphones, where high-bandwidth connectivity and the growing adoption rate are said to be transforming the public realm and the way we live and interact in urban areas (9). These rapidly advancing technological are able to automatically detect travel behavior, offer real-time information about the traffic and provide rewards accordingly. There are some positive incentive programs that used mobile technologies to provide interventions for travel behavior change studies (e.g., Hu, Chiu, & Zhu, 2015 (10), Sanjust, Meloni, & Spissu 2014 (11), Ben-Elia & Ettema 2011 (12), Usui, Miwa, Yamamoto, & Morikawa, 2008 (13) , and Zhu et al., 2015 (14)), which all have proven that interventions through mobile technologies can successfully raise sustainable travel behavior change. These interventions are: rewarding sustainable behavior, providing feedback about behavior, encouraging behavioral change by goal setting and planning, and raising awareness of sustainable travel options by providing travel information. For example, Spitsmijden (12) focused on the effectiveness of rewards, CAPRI (14) used feedback by comparing behavior with others and by giving rewards accordingly. Casteddu Mobility Styles programs (11), Osaka, Japan, and Metropia (13)(10) used a combination of incentives.

One of the problems of aforementioned studies is that subjects are fully aware of the fact that they are participating in an experiment. This may induce them to behave in a more positive way in order to please the experimenter (15). Furthermore, direct measurements of the effects are often lacking and behavioral change is often measured indirectly. For example, Metropia sent emails during the experiment to ask participants about their habitual behavior, and Casteddu Mobility Styles program used surveys to ask participants' potential behavior change, without using smartphone sensors to track the real behavior change. The smartphone app usage inconvenience, the experimental look and feel of the used apps, and the use of surveys to measure effects, are limitations of these studies. Even though those studies are valuable, they do not gain rich insights into the complex interactions of the user with the environment, or the user context (15) (16). Living

1 lab experiments, on the other hand, can overcome those limitations and provide real-life contexts
2 (17) (16). Living Labs are a rather new phenomenon which started to emerge in the beginning of
3 2000. The initial focus of Living Lab was to test innovative technologies in home-like
4 environments (18). As the concept has grown, a real-world context is one precondition in a Living
5 Lab experiment.

6
7 Last but not least, aforementioned studies were not specifically focusing on cycling. Metropia and
8 Spitsmijden analyzed peak hour avoidance, CAPRI studied a parking behavior program, Casteddu
9 Mobility Styles programs focus on mode change to a light rail service. Osaka, Japan involved
10 cycling behavior analysis, but the main focus was all non-auto transport modes. This is unfortunate,
11 because as mentioned earlier, cycling (and walking) can capture a significant share of car trips
12 within cities. Therefore, there are already numerous commercial apps such as Strava, CycleMaps
13 that promote cycling by using gamification methods. Other apps such as BetterPoints, Fietstelweek,
14 CommuteGreener are providing real rewards to promote cycling. All those projects show a
15 potential to encourage cycling, but lack rigorous scientific analysis to evaluate their effects.

16
17 This study is part of the Horizon 2020 project EMPOWER (19), in which positive interventions
18 are used in real-world Living labs to promote sustainable travel behavior (change), such as cycling.
19 Within EMPOWER, the SMART (jointly developed by Mobidot and the municipality of
20 Enschede) app has been used to promote cycling. The objective of this paper is to test the
21 effectiveness of positive interventions in a living lab environment.

22
23 The paper is organized as follows: Section 2 explains the methodology and the design of the
24 interventions strategies, the SMART system, and reviews the pilot study; Section 3 presents the
25 results of the discussions; and Section 4 provides conclusions and future works.

28 **2. METHOD**

29 **SMART App**

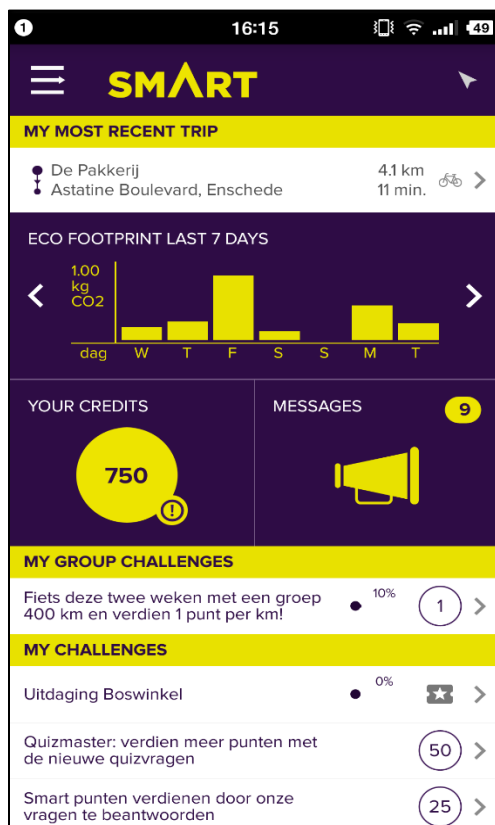
30 The positive incentives were provided through the SMART app (20). In this subsection, we
31 describe the SMART app based on the principles of persuasive technology. TravelSmart (21) and
32 Casteddu Mobility Styles programs (11), for example, have successfully adopted the principle of
33 persuasion (22) to promote travel behavior change. The persuasive system design (23) is used for
34 the design of software and information systems to reinforce, change and / or shape attitudes and
35 behavior. The design consists of four principles and the application of the persuasive design
36 principle in the SMART app is shown in Figure 1, Figure 1(a) depicts the SMART app dashboard.
37 Users can explore the whole functions of the app from this page. The remaining figures are
38 enlarged screenshots from other pages of the SMART app. The following shows the four design
39 principles.

40
41 First, the principle of task support design presents the user's primary task and supports the user in
42 finalizing this task. In the SMART app, we present the task by challenges, and we provide feedback
43 on historical behavior (i.e. on trips made in the previous days and weeks). In doing so, we provide
44 the user with information on the progress of the challenge (Figure 1(a,b)). This is done by
45 continuously tracking (using GPS, accelerometer data, etc.), and using advanced algorithms that
46 combine travel speeds and travel routes to determine which transportation mode the traveler is
47 using. The observed trips (including route and mode) of the user are shown in the front end. The
48 operator can provide challenges and messages to users, which also will be shown in the front end

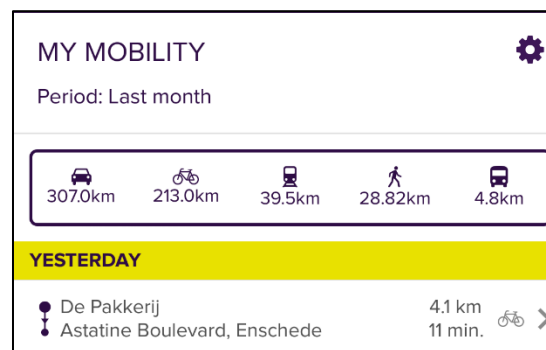
1 (Figure 1(c)).

2
3 Secondly, the principle of dialogue support stimulates users to keep moving towards their goal or
4 target behavior. In SMART, rewards are provided upon completion of the challenge (Figure 1(d)).
5 If the challenge is accepted by the user, the system starts to keep track of the targeted behavior,
6 and shows the process in the front end. When the challenge is fulfilled, the system will immediately
7 give the corresponding amount of points. The earned points can then be redeemed for various
8 discounted products and services. Note that non-cash incentives may ultimately make users more
9 satisfied (24), and that from an earlier study we also concluded that in kind gifts from a web shop
10 have a more positive impact than cash rewards (25). Furthermore, event and traffic information
11 are also offered through messages (Figure 1(e)). SMART can give useful information about the
12 actual local traffic situation and notifies users in case of road works or large scale events that lead
13 to extra traffic. Based on this, SMART can also suggest travel alternatives to help the user to
14 optimize their travel plans.

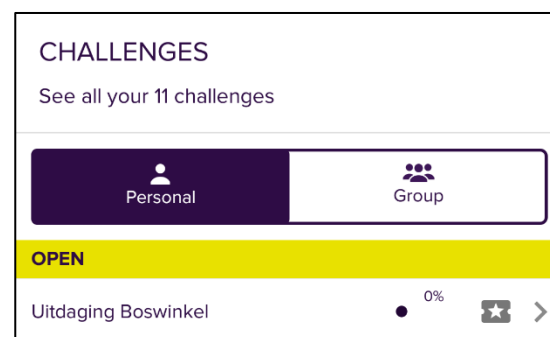
15
16 Thirdly, the principle of system credibility provides to the user with credible and authentic
17 information from an acknowledged source. For example, a mobile application with good reviews
18 that is regularly updated by its developer(s) and supported by trustworthy source(s) is expected to
19 be credible. The SMART app is regularly updated and maintained by Mobidot and supported by
20 the municipality of Enschede. Moreover, its users are informed in advance about privacy protection
21 and the travel mobility data is updated every day. At last, there are new challenges updated
22 regularly as well as well-known shops to redeem vouchers (Figure 1(f)). All these features help to
23 support the system credibility of the SMART app.
24



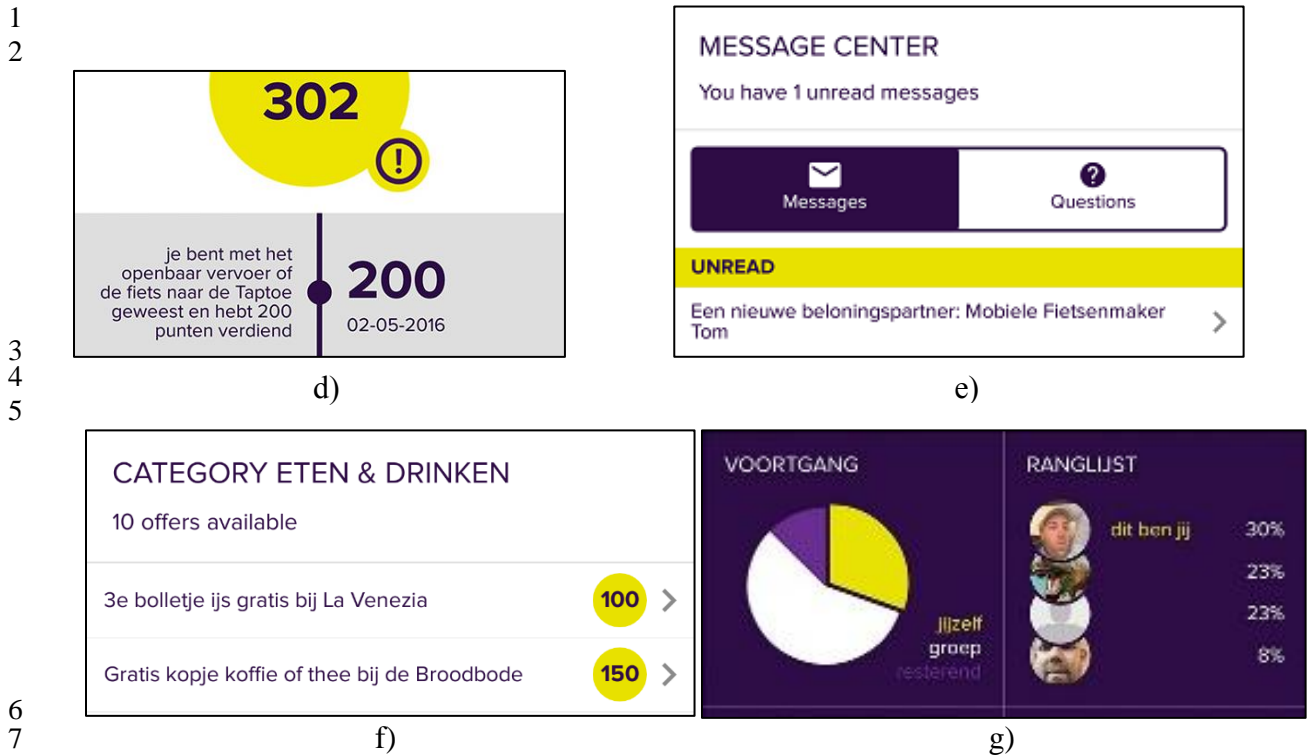
a)



b)



c)



8 **FIGURE 1 a) Dashboard, task support, feedback and monitoring; b) Task support,**
 9 **monitoring; c) Task/challenge, d) Dialogue support, reward result, e) Dialogue support,**
 10 **messages, f) System credibility, third party redeem stores ; g) Social support**

11
 12 Finally, social support motivates users by leveraging social influence. The SMART app involves
 13 group challenges in which participants can invite friends to fulfill the challenge together (Figure
 14 1(g)). However, in the Boswinkel campaign, social support was not included.

17 Case study design

18
 19 The case study includes two parts, first the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the
 20 challenge and rewarding scheme, and secondly post-challenge survey to evaluate the participants'
 21 view on their behavior. The whole case study was designed and carried out through the SMART
 22 app.

23
 24 In this cycling promotion campaign, named the Boswinkel challenge, participants were challenged
 25 to cycle at least 10 times along a newly paved cycling road (in the Boswinkel neighborhood). The
 26 campaign period was from the beginning of October to the beginning of December 2016 (week
 27 41-49 in 2016). During this time period, there were no other challenges. Users who downloaded
 28 the SMART app needed to select and join the challenge. After finishing the challenge, a voucher
 29 was awarded to the user who could redeem it in the local shops. The case study was carried out in
 30 the city of Enschede, a mid-sized city in the Netherlands with approximately 158,000 inhabitants.

31
 32 Participants who used the SMART app were recruited via different municipal communication
 33 channels in which the main objective was to promote the cycling city ambition in general, and to

1 promote the use of the newly opened Boswinkel route in particular.

2
3
4 Participants were not told that they were participating in an experiment and could join at any time
5 within the duration of the campaign through the SMART app. As a result, we created a real-life
6 context—a living lab to truly analyze the traveler’ behaviors. However, as the participants could
7 immediately use all functionalities of the SMART app, we are not able to do a before measurement,
8 which is an important drawback of this study. Moreover, we cannot disentangle in this experiment
9 whether either the added comfort of the new route itself or the challenge with reward lead to extra
10 cycling trips.

11
12
13 To tackle the question whether and why participants change their behavior, we used the SMART
14 experience sampling question service, which allows to send personal questions triggered by
15 specific events. The questionnaire was sent out immediately after completion of the challenge or
16 after the campaign for participants that did not complete the challenge. First, participants received
17 the question why they did or did not complete the challenge. Then they were asked whether they
18 had cycled more along the Boswinkel route during the challenge and whether these trips were new
19 trips, trips that were previously made by car or public transport, or trips that were previously made
20 by bike but along a different route. In the case that participants had indicated that they had cycled
21 more along the Boswinkel route, they received two follow-up questions. In the first question, they
22 were asked about the reasons to cycle more (due to the new infrastructure, due to the challenge &
23 reward, or due to some other external factors). In the second question, they were asked whether
24 they would keep on cycling more often.

25 26 27 **3. RESULTS**

28 29 **Trip data**

30 In total, 139 SMART users joined the Boswinkel challenge. However, 59 users did not have more
31 than 4 weeks continuously GPS travelling data, and were therefore excluded from the analysis. Of
32 the remaining 70 users, 32 completed the challenge. Those users were labeled as Finish Group
33 (FG). The other 38 users who did not complete the challenge were labeled as Did Not Finish Group
34 (DNFG).

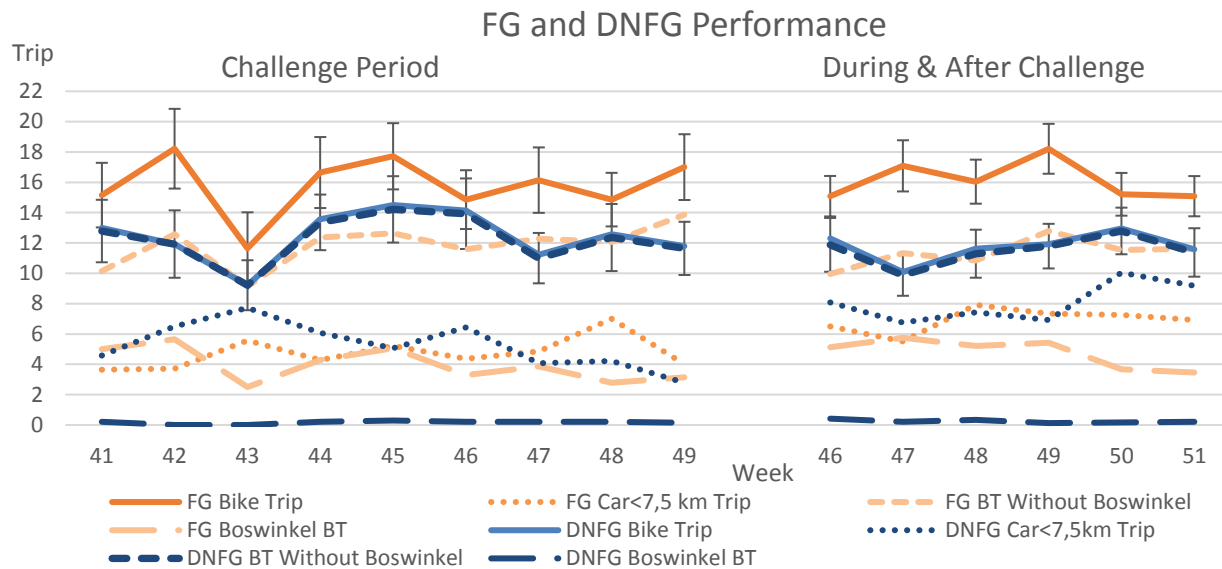
35
36 As mentioned earlier, due to the set-up of this campaign, we do not have measurements before
37 week 41 when the campaign officially started. However, we have measurements after the campaign
38 ended in week 49. Users downloaded the app over the entire course of the experiment, where
39 almost all 70 users accepted the challenge immediately when they downloaded and registered for
40 the App. Unfortunately, this means that the challenge period is not the same for each user as most
41 users downloaded the app after the start of the campaign. Although this mimics realistic real-world
42 behavior, it complicates the evaluation. Only 14 users in FG and 14 users in DNFG have
43 participated during the whole campaign. This first sample was used to evaluate the campaign
44 period. Fortunately, as most people only started in the second half of the campaign, more people
45 were tracked during the end and after the campaign. To compare the behavior during and after the
46 campaign, we used a five week period from week 46 until week 51. For this second sample, we
47 had 24 users in FG and 24 users in DNFG. The two samples do not overlap completely for FG, 11
48 users in challenge period sample were in the during and after challenge sample. For DNFG, all

1 users in challenge period sample were also in the second sample.

2

3 In Figure 2, we show the weekly average trip frequencies per person for the first sample from week
 4 41 – 49, and the same trip frequencies for the second sample from week 46 - 51. We distinguish
 5 between bike trips and short car trips (smaller than 7.5 km) that could in principle be made by bike.
 6 We also show the bike trips that didn't go along the Boswinkel. The difference with the total bike
 7 frequency indicates to what extend the Boswinkel challenge was successful. Remember that the
 8 campaign promotes cycling along the Boswinkel route, not necessarily cycling in general.

9



10

11

12 **FIGURE 2 Trip frequencies during the campaign and Trip frequencies during the last few**
 13 **week of the campaign and after the campaign**

14

15

16 Figure 2 shows the difference between the cycling frequencies of both groups. This difference is
 17 statistically significant for the second sample (week 46 – 51), which can be seen from the standard
 18 error bar in Figure 2. For car trips, the standard error is bigger than bike trips, so the difference
 19 between the two groups are not significant.

20

21 For both samples, the cycling frequency is consistently higher for FG than for DNFG. This
 22 difference can be attributed to cycling trips along the Boswinkel route, given that when we exclude
 23 the Boswinkel cycling trips, there is no significant difference in cycling frequency between the
 24 two groups. However, the fact that half of FG participants did not cycle more to finish the challenge
 25 (as reported from the post-challenge survey), gives a bit of uncertainty to our behavior change
 26 analysis with respect to the FG group. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of the campaign is supported
 27 by the post challenge survey. For the 24 users in the second half of the campaign, 14 out of the 24
 28 users answered the survey, and 9 out of 14 users reported that they cycled more on the Boswinkel
 29 route under the challenge, which implies that the campaign has likely resulted in new bike trips.
 30 Additionally, in case that there are users who did not cycle more on Boswinkel route in FG, so to
 31 exclude the extra new bike trips made on the Boswinkel route, FG made more cycling trips than
 32 DNFG. This suggests that FG is more cycle minded than DNFG.

33

1 However, there is no statistical evidence that the campaign had an effect on the number of (short)
2 car trips. Although car trip frequency is on average higher for the DNFG group, this result is not
3 statistically significant. Moreover, it is not clear if such a difference could be solely the result of
4 the challenge. The DNFG group also has a somewhat higher rate of long distance trips (> 20 km).
5 For example, 4.4 trips per person for DNFG (which corresponds to 12.6 % of the total number of
6 trips) versus 2.6 trips for FG (which corresponds to 8.5 % of all trips). These trips are typically
7 made by car. When people use the car more often for longer trips, they may also be inclined to use
8 the car for short trips.

9
10
11 When comparing the situation during and after the campaign, results are inconclusive. Figure 2
12 shows there is some indication that the bike frequency decreases and car frequency increases for
13 DNFG after the campaign. This might be related to the fact that the challenge has ended. However,
14 again this result is not significant. There is no evidence for a steep decline in cycling trips along
15 the Boswinkel route after the end of the campaign. On the contrary, during the short measurement
16 period (of two weeks) after the campaign, participants of the FG keep cycling along the Boswinkel
17 route.

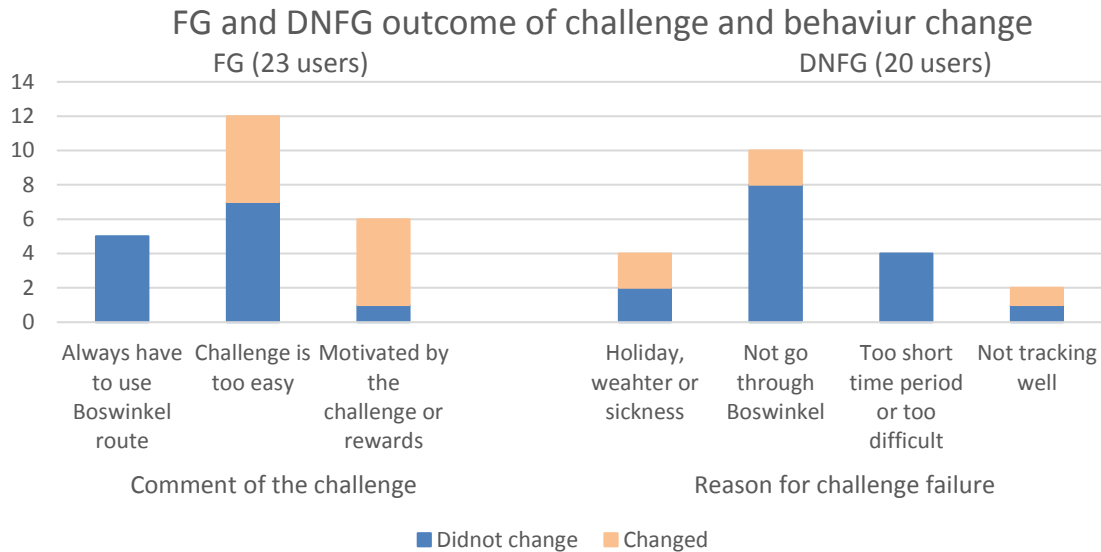
18
19 One of the reasons results are inconclusive is that there is quite some natural variation from week
20 to week in the trip frequency. The relative week-to-week variation for is more than 10% (standard
21 deviation with respect to the mean) and about 20% for the bike and short car trips respectively.
22 This result suggests that it is quite hard to disentangle the effect of positive incentives from natural
23 variation. Traditional before and after measurements of one day (or a few days) may only prove
24 an effect when it is very large. For smaller effects, before and after measurements of weeks are
25 needed to provide enough data to prove a positive incentive has an effect. Of course, the relatively
26 small sample size may amplify the natural variation. However, there are indications that some
27 (significant) part of this variation is caused by external effects that influence the whole group rather
28 than a few individuals. Although not statistically significant due to the limited number of weeks,
29 there seems to be a negative correlation ($r = -0.6$) between the weekly car and bike frequency for
30 FG, and a positive variation between the weekly bike frequencies of both groups ($r = 0.5$). Such
31 correlations are expected due to, for example, changing weather conditions. For example, week 43
32 showed quite some precipitation, coinciding with an increase in car trips and a decrease in the
33 number of bike trips.

34 35 36 **Post-challenge survey**

37
38 Post-challenge survey was sent out through the SMART app for all participant immediately after
39 the campaign. In total, 43 out of 139 participants took part in the post-challenge survey of which
40 23 participants completed the challenge, and 20 did not. The results are shown in Figure 3. For FG,
41 half of the users (12 users) found the challenge too easy, and 7 of those 12 did not even need to
42 cycle more to complete the challenge. Furthermore, 5 out of 23 users claimed they had to use the
43 Boswinkel route quite often anyway and therefore they completed the challenge without changing
44 their behavior. The remaining 6 participants indicated that they were motivated by the challenge
45 and the reward, and 5 of them cycled more often along the Boswinkel route during the challenge.

46
47 Summarizing, 10 out of 18 users (55.6%) indicated they have changed their behavior, and all of
48 them said they would keep on cycling more often (50% also claimed to cycle more on other routes).

1 Furthermore, half of them gave the challenge & reward as the sole reason for their behavioral
 2 change, whereas the other half claimed that both the newly paved route and the challenge & reward
 3 were the reason for behavioral change. In other words, all participants indicated that the challenge
 4 and reward played a role for them to cycle more. However, all 10 users changed their behavior to
 5 choose the Boswinkel route more often, but not related to mode change.
 6



7

8 **FIGURE 3 Reasons for completing (left) or not completing (right) the challenge.**

9

10 For the participants that did not complete the challenge, half of them (10 participants) did not need
 11 to use Boswinkel the route at all, and therefore could not complete the challenge. Others claimed
 12 external factors such as illness and weather (4 persons), the limited challenge period (4 persons)
 13 and malfunctioning of the tracking tool of the app (2 persons) as reasons for non-completion. It is
 14 worth noting that in the latter case, the participants complained about the GPS trajectory accuracy.
 15 However, it turned out that they only cycled through a small part of the Boswinkel route which
 16 was excluded by the algorithm, but which was not reflected in the textual explanation of the
 17 challenge. This is of course an issue when considering the trustworthy and credibility of the app.
 18 For the participants that did not complete the challenge, still 6 out of 20 persons indicated they had
 19 changed their behavior, and were planning to cycle more. In other words, if we would customize
 20 the challenges to the personal situation of the participant such that the challenge is perceived as
 21 not too easy or too difficult, high rates of behavioral change are likely based on these results.
 22

22

23

24 4. CONCLUSION AND FUTURE WORK

25

26 In this study, we examined the potential impact of interventions to promote cycling by using the
 27 SMART app in a living lab environment. The intervention in this case study is the Boswinkel
 28 challenge in which participants were challenged to cycle along a newly paved cycling road
 29 (Boswinkel route) with rewards.
 30

30

31 From our analysis, we can draw three main conclusions. First, the new paved Boswinkel route
 32 alone did not have a significant effectiveness to promote cycling. In other words, the challenge

1 and reward played a role for travelers to cycle more, which is supported from the survey that no
2 users claimed the new route resulted in their behavior change, but resulted from the combination
3 of the new paved route with challenge and rewards. Second, extra bike trips were made on the
4 Boswinkel route during the campaign, as participants who completed the challenge made more
5 cycling trips than participants who didn't complete the challenge, and the users who finished the
6 challenge and joined the survey claimed they made more bike trips on the Boswinkel route.
7 Additionally, the extra bike trips on the Boswinkel route were mostly created by change in route
8 choice, since users who completed the challenge mostly live nearby the Boswinkel route and
9 already cycled often. The effectiveness of the interventions for modal shift is not significant,
10 however, some users who did not finish the challenge claimed they had modal shift from car to
11 bike. The modal shift analysis needs a bigger sample size. Third, participants who completed the
12 challenge kept cycling along the Boswinkel route after the campaign. These results were confirmed
13 by the post-challenge survey, in which 56% of users indicated they have changed their behavior
14 and planned to continue cycling more often after the campaign.

15
16 Moreover, from the survey we found that 20% of participants who didn't complete the challenge,
17 still indicated they had changed their behavior and / or were planning to cycle more in the future.
18 In fact, most people that indicated they had not changed their behavior either found the challenge
19 too easy (or did not need to adapt their behavior) when they completed the challenge or found the
20 challenge too difficult or not appropriate (because they did not need to use the Boswinkel route)
21 when they had not completed the challenge. This clearly shows that personalized challenges,
22 customized to the individual's need, i.e., based on the travel context of the individual (which can
23 be derived from historic trip patterns), could significantly increase the amount of behavioral
24 change. Moreover, respondents who either claim the challenge is too easy or too difficult / not
25 appropriate to them, may be discouraged to participate in future challenges.

26
27 Due to natural variation in weekly trip patterns (partly due to small sample sizes), it is quite hard
28 to disentangle the effect of positive incentives from external effects (such as weather). These
29 external effects may have influenced modal split, i.e. the percentages of cycle and car trips (for
30 example more car trips at the expense of bike trips during bad weather), or total demand (for
31 example more traffic during events, or less during holidays). Although the data shows a slight
32 decrease and increase respectively of the average numbers of car and bike trips, these findings are
33 not statistically significant. In addition, as we used a living lab setting, it is hard to do (controlled)
34 experiments with before and after measurements. To overcome these drawbacks, we are planning
35 to monitor the participants over longer periods of time, in which they get multiple challenges, so
36 that we have multiple outcomes. This will enable us to look for behavioral change over a longer
37 period, distinguishing between challenges, in which we control for external effects such as weather
38 or seasonality by for example using traffic counts (both for car and bicycles).

39 40 41 **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

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