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Method: Quantitative nationally significant (UK) online survey

A CASE STUDY OF A SOCIAL MARKETING BRAND: THE IMAGE OF CYCLING IN THE UK

Abstract

This paper presents findings from a quantitative nationally representative survey of cycling attitudes and behaviour. The authors use findings which indicate significant views of the image and role of cycling and use these findings as a basis for a discussion of branding in social marketing, which has been under-used but has great potential. The paper serves as a starting point for the next stages in the author's research, which will develop 'cycling brand' ideas in more depth.

Introduction

The concept of branding in social marketing is of interest to scholars and practitioners (e.g. Basu & Wang, 2009; McDivitt, 2003). Branding theory and practice within social marketing is arguably only partially developed (Evans & Hastings, 2008) leaving gaps for researchers to work within. Branding research by social marketing academics has a number of components that require special emphasis and attention. Amongst the most fundamental is a core question: what are we branding? Social marketers could seek to brand the desired behaviour (in the case discussed here, encouraging cycling), position the behaviour versus the competing behaviours (car travel), or use marketing to create a brand for a specific programme, event, or scheme (analogous to, say, the UK's Change4Life brand to encourage physical activity and eat healthily).

These are the most obvious branding targets, but to stop here may be to miss the chance to use branding more strategically by attempting to influence ideologies, visions for life, and citizens' value sets. Here, cycling could be positioned within contexts of health and wellbeing, happiness, environmental concerns, and sustainable ways of living. Commercial marketers have found success in associating their products with such 'big ideas' –sometimes with dubious authenticity. Social marketers have the force of authenticity with them: cycling *really does* improve the environment, and individual health & well-being (Gatersleben & Uzzell, 2007), (unlike the highly questionable linkages advertising agencies promote between, say, shoe brands and environmental concerns).

Research questions also arise at the *operational* level of branding. Brands are complex entities that try to address multiple objectives, and so have dimensions that are likely to include trust and authenticity (can the act of cycling keep the brand promises made?); risk reduction (what are the risks of the behaviour change to non-cyclists?); functionality and symbolism (what benefits does cycling offer the citizen; what does cycling say about someone?), and finally the 'strategic' dimension (how can cycling best position itself against the dominant transport mode – the car?).

Research undertaken
A 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. A key focus of the research was the issue of the image of cycling currently held by UK citizens, and from this the possibilities of developing a cycling ‘brand’.

As part of our research we measured agreement with a series of attitude statements on 5 point scales (agree strongly, tend to agree, neither agree nor disagree, tend to disagree, disagree strongly). We combined % scores for ‘agree strongly’ and ‘tend to agree’ to create a single ‘agree’ measure, and similarly on the opposite side for a ‘disagree’ measure. ‘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.

Findings

The short tables below illustrate some of our findings.

Table 1: Attitudes about cycling amongst UK population

		Total	GB	GB
		GB	Hot	Hot and Warm
Base		3855	328	1225
The success of British cyclists has encouraged me to think about cycling more myself	AGREE	18	43	36
	DISAGREE	45	22	27
Our Olympic gold medal cyclists inspired me to cycle/cycle more	AGREE	11	26	22
	DISAGREE	54	42	42

The environment would be much better if more people cycled	AGREE DISAGREE	74 9	92 3	89 4
Cycling would be a major help in reducing congestion in Britain	AGREE DISAGREE	70 13	90 4	85 6
Cyclists are doing their bit for the environment	AGREE DISAGREE	64 10	84 3	78 5
The dream of the 'freedom of the open road' no longer exists in this country	AGREE DISAGREE	62 13	68 13	65 14
Britain would be a better place if more people cycled	AGREE DISAGREE	58 13	85 4	80 5
Global warming has been exaggerated	AGREE DISAGREE	39 38	34 48	35 46
Cyclists often behave badly on the roads	AGREE DISAGREE	53 21	43 36	47 30
Cyclists are rather brave	AGREE DISAGREE	51 17	59 15	56 14
Global warming has been exaggerated	AGREE DISAGREE	39 38	34 48	35 46
Bike technology is much 'sexier' nowadays	AGREE DISAGREE	38 19	63 8	54 11
Global warming has been exaggerated	AGREE DISAGREE	39 38	34 48	35 46
I would not support any measure that penalises car use	AGREE DISAGREE	54 25	36 44	43 36

Our findings illustrate quite strong feelings about cycling amongst people in the UK. Most of our questions created sharp divides in attitude, with few feeling indifferent. There was considerable engagement with the 'car versus cycling' debate (can motorists accept less space to promote cycling? – only with difficulty; acceptance that the 'freedom of the open road' is now largely a myth; large agreement that 'Britain would be a better place if more people cycled', and so on). A strategic brand that positions cycling against motoring could spring from such findings.

An alternative branding strategy would be to focus on the functionality and symbolism of cycling and build on the positive signs given to cycling as helping the environment and reducing congestion.

As the final set of tables, below, illustrates, developing a 'cycling user image' would appear to have distinct possibilities, with cyclists and cycling better regarded than the authors expected.

Table 2: Findings useful in generating user-images

		Total GB	GB Hot	GB Hot and Warm
Base		3855 %	328 %	1225 %
It's quite normal to cycle to work these days	AGREE DISAGREE	65 11	87 6	81 7
Cycling has become cool nowadays	AGREE DISAGREE	42 14	62 5	54 8
Most normal people see cyclists as a bit odd	AGREE DISAGREE	17 49	20 56	20 55
Cycling is something middle-class men do	AGREE DISAGREE	10 57	12 67	11 65

Table3: Celebrities thought to definitely cycle

	Total GB	GB Hot	GB Hot and Warm
Base	3855 %	328 %	1225 %
David Cameron	59	62	63
Chris Hoy	53	57	59
Boris Johnson	48	54	54
Bradley Wiggins	28	34	35
Victoria Pendleton	27	33	34
Mark Cavendish	14	20	19
Richard Hammond	9	12	11
Shanaze Read	6	11	9
Mark Beaumont	4	6	5

Conclusion

Authenticity is always at the heart of a successful brand. Are the images and associations credible and believable? It appears that a good starting point would be a brand of cycling that rests upon an image of cycling as normal, reducing congestion, and helping the environment, and cyclists as healthy and fit. The next level of branding rests upon aspiration: can we motivate and stimulate desire? The authors were surprised to see from the research findings that there is considerable scope here. Bike technology was seen as 'sexy', while cycling is seen as 'cool' by 42% of UK adults and 62% of 'hot prospects'. Aspiration could be built around sporting success, perhaps with strong use of celebrity cyclists ranging from well known politicians to high profile cyclists (Table 3).

The research did identify some warning signs: 39% of UK people think 'global warming has been exaggerated' and 54% would 'not support any measure that penalises car use'. These results demonstrate considerable 'push-back' to any attempts to impose a 'green' agenda, as yet.

Our analysis is ongoing, and we will report on further insights at conference.

References

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Note

YouGov were responsible for the data collection but analyses and interpretation are the responsibility of The 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.