



5 December 2017

HSBC UK AND BRITISH CYCLING FIND SMALL AND SIMPLE ‘NUDGES’ CAN HELP GET PEOPLE BACK ON THEIR BIKES

The Bike Shed studies – the first series from the partnership – are based on real-world testing to find new and tangible ways to help people build sustainable cycling habits

Simple and small ‘nudges’ can have a lasting impact on the UK’s cycling habits, a series of behavioural studies released today by HSBC UK and British Cycling has found.

Most people learned to ride a bike as a child when it was a fun activity to take part in with friends or family. Yet as we grew older, many of us have forgotten or lost the freedom that came with getting on a bike. In fact, over fifty per cent of UK adults have been identified as ‘lapsed riders’ – those who know how to ride a bike but have stopped.

To help get more people on a bike, HSBC UK and British Cycling developed a series of studies to identify new and tangible ways to inspire action. Devised with behavioural science experts at Columbia University in New York, the **Bike Shed studies** are based on real-world testing to look at how best to encourage, motivate and dispel the fears associated with getting on a bike.

The launch of the Bike Shed studies mark the end of the first year of HSBC UK and British Cycling’s eight-year partnership, aimed at embedding cycling within communities up and down the country. The partnership’s ambition is to inspire two million cyclists by 2020.

The studies found that small behavioural nudges can motivate people to cycle again. The research reveals that:

- **Support from friends or family can have a big impact on keeping to cycling goals:** People who were prompted to make a plan and set cycling goals with the support from friends or family went on to **do 20 per cent more cycling during the following four weeks**, compared to people who were not prompted to make a plan.
- **Breaking down mental barriers by helping people to visualise themselves as a cyclist can make a lasting change to people’s behaviours:** In the study providing people with a virtual reality headset showing them realistic vistas of being out and about on a bike **were 39 per cent more likely to get on a bike again afterwards**, compared to those who viewed a control video.
- **When you remind people of the fun they can have cycling, people get back on their bikes:** In registration emails sent out to HSBC UK City Ride attendees, messages appealing to a sense of fun or the nostalgia of rediscovering your cyclist were most effective in motivating people to sign up. The average improvement rate was found to be **around 15 per cent compared with alternative reasons to attend**.

The results from the Bike Shed studies pave the way to help understand cycling behaviours and get as many people as possible on their bikes. More people cycling will result in a variety of benefits, including improvements to health and to the environment.

Luke Harper, Head of British Cycling Partnership at HSBC UK said: “The goal we have set with British Cycling to get two million people back on their bike is deliberately ambitious. We know that changing people’s behaviours is tough – especially when it comes to changing long standing habits. The Bike Shed studies launched today are the first of our partnership and they have shown that even the smallest of changes can make a lasting difference to people’s behaviour.

“There’s a cyclist in all of us, it just needs teasing out – primarily through fun, friends and family. This the first step we’re making with British Cycling to inspire people to get back on their bikes to create a greener, fitter and healthier country, and will shape our thinking on how we encourage people to get back on their bikes.”

Julie Harrington, CEO at British Cycling said: “We are all creatures of habit, and this is no different when it comes to riding a bike. Most of us are aware of the many health or environmental benefits that riding a bike brings, but still do not cycle regularly, perhaps because we have concerns about safety or lack confidence when riding on the road. Our partnership with HSBC UK is all about understanding those barriers, breaking them down and getting people back on a bike.”

Hale Forster, Behavioural Scientist, Center for Decision Sciences at Columbia University, New York said: “The Bike Shed studies applied behavioural science insights to real life scenarios to generate evidence on what motivates people to cycle. The results from the first year have been promising so far and the findings contribute to a growing body of evidence that small nudges can help us to achieve our own goals. Because they are simple, these behavioural nudges can be applied at a wide scale fairly easily and quickly.”

The findings from the studies within the Bike Shed studies will continue to be confirmed and verified through repeated testing over the course of the partnership.

As well as the Bike Shed studies, the partnership also saw over 100,000 riders enjoy a day of traffic-free city centre cycling at HSBC UK City Rides across 14 locations in the country, support for cycling groups and programme such as the HSBC UK Ride Social, the UK’s largest social cycling community, HSBC UK Guided Rides and HSBC UK Breeze rides, aimed at inspiring women to cycle for fun and fitness.

For more information and to read the full Bike Shed studies visit www.britishcycling.org.uk.

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Notes to editors:

The lapsed cyclist market is those people who have not cycled in the past year but have cycled in their life. This equates to 53% of the adult population (27.6m people) as of May 2017. The Annual Cycling Survey is conducted by British Cycling by GfK NOP. The data from GfK uses a sample of 10,000 adults (16+).

About the Bike Shed studies:

Methodology

We ran the Bike Shed studies as randomised controlled trials, the most robust form of testing.

The key to demonstrating if an intervention is responsible for an outcome is to identify what would have happened if the intervention had not been implemented – and compare. The most robust way to do this is to randomly assign participants to different interventions. This randomisation approach eliminates most problems of comparison that normally complicate an evaluation. This is the basis of all our studies.

Bike Shed study one, motivational messages to get people back on their bikes, was conducted with British Cycling. We tested the content of the emails sent to hundreds of thousands of people to invite them to register for the HSBC UK City Rides in Sheffield, Manchester, Bristol, Leeds and Liverpool. We randomly allocated people to groups to receive different variants of the email invitation. We then compared the registration rates between those groups to measure which were most effective.

Bike Shed study two, brief cycling experiences to motivate lapsed cyclists, was conducted with HSBC UK staff at workplaces in Hamilton and Leeds. We arranged for a virtual reality (VR) cycling experience to be available for staff throughout the day. Staff volunteered to participate in the study. We then randomly allocated them to either the VR cycling experience or to a non-VR experience as a comparison group. We measured cycling rates before the experience and again two weeks after. This was self-reported via a questionnaire. We then compared the cycling rates between the groups.

Bike Shed study three, creating new cycling habits, was conducted with British Cycling. This study was with 2,415 volunteer members of the public attending the HSBC UK City Rides in Cardiff, Bristol, Leeds, Edinburgh and Liverpool. Volunteers were randomly assigned to receive one of three leaflets and to have a brief conversation with an interviewer. One group made a cycling plan, set goals, and were prompted to take the plan home. A second group had a similar plan, but with the addition of support from friends or family. A third group received a leaflet with information about cycling; this was the comparison group. We measured cycling rates before the event and again two and four weeks after. This was self-reported via a questionnaire. We then compared the cycling rates between the groups.

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About British Cycling

British Cycling is the national governing body for cycling as recognised by the UCI – the international federation for the sport. Based in Manchester at the National Cycling Centre, British Cycling works across all levels and six disciplines of the sport (BMX, Mountain Bike, Cyclo-cross, Road, Track and Cycle Speedway), from providing the support and encouragement people need to get riding their bikes for the first time, to being home to the hugely successful Great Britain Cycling Team. Continued success at the highest level is inspiring a boom in participation across the nation. There have never been more opportunities to ride a bike, be it for fun or sport, and British Cycling is at the heart of this growth. British Cycling also works hard to represent cyclists' interests at all levels, including campaigning on important issues including road safety. As a membership organisation, British Cycling provides a suite of benefits and support to its members who currently number over 135,000. All membership revenue is invested back into cycling. For more information, visit www.britishcycling.org.uk

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