Introduction

Transport is the fastest growing source of UK greenhouse gas emissions, threatening to undermine efforts to curb CO₂ output. This project focused on the psychology of travel-mode choice. What motivates people to reduce their car use? What barriers are perceived to using non-car modes? How do psychological motivations interact with context to influence travel behaviour?

Approach and Aims

This research identified influences on commuter travel-mode choice, examining drivers’ decisions to reduce or maintain their car use. Two psychological theories were applied; Schwartz’s norm-activation theory (focusing on altruistic or morally-motivated actions) and Ajzen’s theory of planned behaviour (focusing on self-interest). Two complementary methods were used. In phase 1 (n = 1,014) quantitative data were gathered by questionnaire and analysed using statistics. In phase 2 (n = 24) semi-structured interviews were used to gather qualitative data which revealed more about individual idiosyncrasies. Combining these methods provided breadth and depth.

The research shows that many people see travel as moral behaviour (due to its environmental impact) and say they would like to drive less. But such motives often fail to influence behaviour because people apparently see car use as necessary. This has theoretical implications, in that elements of both Schwartz’s and Ajzen’s theories are needed to explain travel-mode choice. Commuting behaviour is often habitual; removed from conscious thought processes. Moreover, where conscious motivations do play a part, they include affective (ie emotional) motives which are not captured by the theories used here.

Conclusions

From a policy perspective, the research indicates that car-use reduction measures should: point out benefits of reducing car use, including the worth of the individual’s contribution; demonstrate that switching modes is possible, or better still, easy; foster internal motivations (eg responsibility and obligation) rather than simply asserting anti-driving social norms; and target bounded groups (eg members of one organisation) so that people might trust others to reduce their car use.

The dual-theory, dual-method approach made this a novel piece of transport psychology work. The field has often lacked a sound theoretical base, making it hard to compare findings from different studies. This project explicitly addressed this deficiency.

References and acknowledgements


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http://www.iesd.dmu.ac.uk/staff/rob_wall.htm