



Cycling to Work: Analysis of a Sustainable Lifestyle Phenomenon

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1) Introduction:

A “sustainable lifestyle” also referred to as “responsible lifestyle” is a cluster of habits and patterns of behavior embedded in a society and facilitated by institutions, norms and infrastructures that frame individual choice, in order to minimize the use of natural resources and generation of wastes, while supporting fairness and prosperity for all. (Akejni, UNEP, 2016, Gierszewska and Seretny, 2019; Agnew et al., 2020). Sustainable lifestyle pertains to continued, altruistic and frugal behaviours of an individual (Corral-Verdugo et al., 2010), who maintains harmony with the society, economy and environment, which is reflected by a number of environmental (Ponikowska, 2016; CDC, 2018) and health-related practices (Marjanen et al., 2016; Swiatowy ´ and Szalonka, 2018; Machnik and Lubowiecki-Vikuk, 2020), in order to be “living well within earth’s limits” (O’Neill et al., 2018; Vita et al., 2019).

Overuse of automobiles has led to increased pollution, congestion, environmental damage, and serious health problems associated with lack of exercise (Dora, 1999; Dora et al., 2000; Gärling & Schuitema, 2007; Jain & Guiver, 2001; Jones & Hervik, 1992; Wootton, 1999). Cycling to work (C2W) could mitigate pollution and environmental damage by replacing motor vehicles and at the same time improve health of professionals. Despite these advantages C2W is simply not prevalent among professionals in most of the emerging cities. Academic research on utility cycling in the western context has studied the determinants of cycling (Fraser and Lock 2010), environmental and psychological influences on cycling (Panter and Jones 2010), influence of built environment on travel behaviour in general (Handy et al. 2002) and on cycling in particular (Heinen et al. 2009; Reynold, Harris et al. 2009), and the effect of inventions on cycling (Pucher et al. 2010). In their effort to summarise Willis et al. (2015) found 24 research papers from western Europe and the USA on social and psychological factors influencing the choice to cycle for transportation. However, in the context of Indian metros there are no studies on C2W.

2) Purpose of research:

In this research paper we explore Cycling to Work (C2W) phenomenon and analyse it in the light of relevant theory. In the process we 1) discover the factors that govern C2W, 2) describe C2W practice including its components, and 3) define the ‘committed consumption’ construct. Based on the relationships observed in the above constructs we further develop and state a few propositions to be tested. We intent to contribute to the understanding of sustainable lifestyle phenomenon from an emerging market context.

Besides exploring the phenomenon in relation to the private as well as professional life, interests, values and beliefs of people (Vyncke, 2002) this paper also enquires into values, motives, personality traits, behaviours, habits, and identification of socio-cultural relations to determine various lifestyle dimensions (Furman et al., 2020). Sustainable lifestyles in this research imply more than material consumption alone and importance is given to the social impacts of lifestyles beyond the usually considered environmental impact .(Akejni, UNEP, 2016).

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3) Methodology:

We adopted a qualitative approach for getting a broader picture of sustainable lifestyle especially from an emerging economy country context. Adopting an exploratory design we collected data from Two sources. First, we sourced data from an online-blog where professionals who cycled to work posted their comments on C2W. Then we conducted depth interviews with 8 professionals who cycled to work in Bengaluru city. To be included in the study the interviewee had to be a C2W-cyclist with an alternate means of personal transport (a car in this case). All the respondents were male, working (or had worked) in software industry and were in their 30s. The most experienced C2W-cyclist had begun C2W 13 years back and the least experienced cyclist had started C2W 3 years back. 2 respondents had stopped C2W fully after about 16 months of starting C2W.

4) Analysis:

We conducted initial coding of the online blog data as well a depth interview transcript using a commonly used qualitative analysis software NVivo (version 11). We conducted thematic analyses of the data following Braun and Clarke (2006) and the axial and selective coding procedure of Strauss and Corbin (2008). The depth interview data were coded on 21 themes. After a round of interpretation of all the interview transcripts by both the researchers, the first researcher presented a set of thematic descriptions that were identified to which the second researcher gave comments. Based on the comments the researchers refined the thematic descriptions. We looked for underlying ideas and that resulted in the identification of the following conceptual themes and subthemes as presented in Table-2. These themes are; 1) the components of a practice (context, meanings and skills), 2) the drivers and 3) benefits of the practice. Further analysis and reflection resulted in identification of 6 underlying themes and 16 subthemes. Further review of these themes and subthemes resulted in 3 major themes including 1) Factors that govern C2W, 2) C2W practice and its components and 3) Committed consumption.

We present the initial themes in Table 1 and the Four interrelated conceptual themes arrived from axial coding in Table 2. We also developed a thematic map based on these identified themes which is given in Figure 1.

Table-1: Themes identified from initial coding of data.

Emotional Benefits	Frequency& distance	Excitement
Functional Benefits	Friends and family	Ready to help
Self-actualization	Safety	Special events
Social benefit	Interest and passion	Starting cycling
Catalyst for social change	Learnings	Struggles
Dress and belongings	Nostalgia	Sustainability concern
Reasons for cycling	Parking space	Traffic management

Table-2 Conceptual Themes and Subthemes:

Broad Conceptual Themes	Themes	Subthemes
Drivers of the C2W practice	a) Benefit-driven C2W	Functional, Economic, Social, Altruistic Benefits
	b) Passion-driven C2W	Nostalgia, Passion
	c) Conviction-driven C2W	Commitment, Values
Components of C2W Practice (Practice theory perspective)	a) Meaning of C2W (perceived as bundle of benefits)	Emotional Benefits Functional Benefits; Social Benefits Altruistic benefits (for society and ecology)
	b) Materials/Physical Environment	Built environment (road condition, public and private parking facilities, roadside repair shops)

		Good cycles, Cycle outlets, Traffic Conditions.
		Motorists and others on the road
	c) Social Environment	Office context (Colleagues, Superiors, HR policies) People at Home, Friends and Neighbors
	d) Cycling Skills	Childhood habit; Induction and Learnings; Physically demanding activity; Social influence: Struggles and Safety (safe parking, additional dress, safety)
Committed Consumption	a) Commitment to the society b) Commitment to the environment	

Figure 1: Thematic Map of Committed Consumption Phenomenon



5) Discussions and propositions:

The relationships existing between the identified themes are further explored here. In the process the concept of “committed consumption” is defined and its characteristics are described. Based on the relationships we suggest the following propositions that may be tested in future studies. In the interest of space only a list of the propositions is included here. The linkages of these propositions to extant literature would be included in the full paper, if considered for publication.

Proposition 1: *The more passionate one felt about a sustainable lifestyle during childhood, the more inclined one would be to re-engage in it later as an adult.*

Proposition 2: Conviction-driven consumers would be higher on self-transcendence values whereas benefits and/or passion-driven ones would be higher on self-enhancement values.

Proposition 3: Conviction and/or passion-driven consumers would stay more loyal to the sustainable lifestyle compared to purely benefit-driven consumers.

Proposition 4: Material and social environment affect participation in sustainable lifestyle.

Proposition 5: The harder the material and social environment, the greater the role of peer groups in eliciting a sustainable consumption behavior.

Proposition 6: The more social support an individual gets to adopt a sustainable consumption practice, the more likely one is to start and stay in it.

These propositions as well as themes would provide scope for further research in sustainable lifestyle.

6) Conclusion:

We explored the sustainable consumption phenomenon of cycling-to-work from a practice perspective and identified the motivations that govern the consumers in that practice. While appreciating the role of the physical and social context in sustaining a consumption practice we present an anomaly that there are committed consumers who initiate and participate in a sustainable consumption practice despite unfavorable physical and social context. While these committed consumers are different from other mainstream customers regarding their motives and conviction, they could play the critical role of pioneers and influencers in taking a peripheral sustainable consumption practice to a mainstream practice. As ours is an early attempt to define and describe the committed consumption phenomenon we suggest that further research into the phenomenon could be of both theoretical as well as practical relevance.

Sample List of References:

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