



Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Transportation Research Part D

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/trd

Role model advocacy for sustainable transport

Paul Hanna^{a,*}, Joe Kantanbacher^a, Scott Cohen^a, Stefan Gössling^{b,c}^a School of Hospitality and Tourism Management, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, University of Surrey, Guildford, Surrey GU2 7XH, United Kingdom^b School of Business and Economics, Linnaeus University, 391 82 Kalmar, Sweden^c Western Norway Research Institute, PO Box 163, 6851 Sogndal, Norway

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Celebrity endorsement
 Social marketing
 Sustainable transport
 Behavior change
 Identity
 Neoliberalism

ABSTRACT

Individual aspirations of associating with role models are routinely harnessed by marketers, who for instance, use celebrity endorsement in selling brands and products. It appears there has been no research to date, however, on the potential for celebrity activism, or role model advocacy beyond celebrities, such as from politicians, to form effective interventions for encouraging sustainable transport behavior. This is despite studies suggesting that celebrity endorsement is a potential gateway for transforming public opinion on carbon intensive transport modes. The present paper consequently offers a critical review of the literature on role model advocacy and celebrity activism, and how these concepts have been harnessed to address environmental issues, in order to conceptually assess the potential for extending these intervention techniques to the context of sustainable transport. The scope of the paper includes the potential that high profile politicians/celebrities might play as role models in exercising referent power to influence social norms surrounding sustainable transport, given that the success of social marketing interventions are closely tied to the need for changes in the policy landscape. Key dimensions of role model endorsement in transport are identified and applied to a series of examples of how celebrity and political role models have influenced transport cultures. In addition to offering an original application of a theoretical framework to a new context, in order to help address the increasingly important societal issue of transport's growing contribution to climate change, the paper discusses the challenges associated with the neoliberal framing of this approach.

1. Introduction

Wishing to identify or fit in with desirable individuals or reference groups is a primary motive for many consumption activities, especially those that are consumed publicly and may be considered a luxury. Aspirational reference groups, often consisting of idealized figures such as celebrities, athletes, successful politicians or business people, are particularly important in shaping the attitudes and behavior of others who desire to associate with them (Solomon et al., 2006). Individual aspirations of associating with such role models are routinely harnessed by marketers, who for instance, use celebrity endorsement in selling brands and products. Referent power, that is, the power of reference groups to influence purchase decisions, is used to encourage consumers to copy the behavior of a person they may admire (Solomon et al., 2006).

Role model and celebrity endorsement have also been leveraged within the field of social marketing, which applies commercial marketing techniques to the solution of social problems, and focuses on consumers as active participants in processes of social change (Ampt and Gleave, 2004; Andreasen, 1994; Hall, 2014). The aim of social marketing is consequently voluntary behavior change,

* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: p.hanna@surrey.ac.uk (P. Hanna).<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.trd.2017.07.028>

Received 21 December 2016; Received in revised form 15 July 2017; Accepted 27 July 2017

1361-9209/© 2017 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

targeted to a specific audience via market segmentation (Barr et al., 2011b). Although social marketing interventions, such as those within the health field that have, for instance, encouraged the public to exercise more, are criticized for only engendering small-scale behavioral change, which is often not sustained (Higham et al., 2016; Peattie and Peattie, 2009), considerable effort has been invested in social marketing interventions that use aspirational role models, such as celebrities, to influence public opinion on social issues. One such arena has been environmental issues (Goodman and Littler, 2013), where celebrity activism has focused on advancing an environmentalist agenda (McCurdy, 2013).

It appears that there has been no research to date, however, on the potential for celebrity activism, or role model advocacy beyond celebrities, such as through politicians, to form effective interventions for encouraging sustainable transport behavior, particularly in terms of the conspicuous consumption of leisure travel. This is despite Higham et al.'s (2013) observation that celebrity endorsement is a potential gateway for transforming public opinion on carbon intensive transport modes, and Cohen et al.'s (2016) further emphasis that trends are fashion driven, with role model advocacy potentially playing a role in driving social norms that may help to constitute a desirable transport future.

The present paper consequently offers a critical review of the literature on role model advocacy and celebrity activism, and how these concepts have been harnessed to address environmental issues, in order to conceptually assess the potential for extending these intervention techniques to the context of sustainable transport. The scope of the paper includes the potential part that high profile politicians/celebrities might play as positive role models in exercising referent power to influence social norms surrounding sustainable transport, given that the success of social marketing interventions are closely tied to the need for changes in the policy landscape (Wymer, 2010). A range of examples of how celebrity and political role models have influenced transport cultures – for better or for worse – are discussed. In addition to offering an original application of a theoretical framework to a new context, in order to help address the increasingly important societal issue of transport's growing contribution to climate change, the article discusses the challenges associated with the neoliberalist framing of this approach.

In order to achieve this critical review, the paper opens with an overview of the need for sustainable transport behavior in contemporary societies. It then turns to literature that explores understandings of self and identity through modes of consumption. This provides a foundation that allows the paper to next move on to the ways in which celebrities feature within the self/identity/consumption nexus, particularly in relation to their social status and their ability in theory to endorse/not endorse the consumption of discrete products. Here a critical reading of the 'celebrity' is offered before the paper moves on to explore the potential role of celebrity endorsement and role model advocacy in sustainable transport consumption patterns/behavior. This theoretical framing is finally applied to sustainable transport behavior, which allows for identification of key dimensions of role model endorsement in transport, and their application in a series of short illustrative examples. The paper concludes with a discussion of the implications of the review and the potential future research directions it opens up.

2. The need for sustainable transport behavior

Transport behavior is an arena of consumption associated with a wide range of environmental issues, such as noise, air pollution, accidents, and emissions of greenhouse gases (Gilbert and Perl, 2008; Hook and Replogle, 1996; Kenworthy and Laube, 1999; Okokon et al., 2015; Stanley et al., 2011). A wide range of organizations and politicians have acknowledged that the current transport system is not sustainable, with evidence that it is even becoming less sustainable over time with regard to key aspects such as transportation's contribution to global warming (Banister, 2005). Research has repeatedly underlined that technological innovation is unlikely to resolve these issues. Specifically, climate mitigation is unfeasible on the basis of technological change alone, as constant growth in transport demand outweighs efficiency gains by a wide margin (EEA, 2015; Peeters et al., 2016). This would call for policies aligning societal goals of sustainable transportation more closely with the development of the sector, but policy makers have been found to be reluctant to initiate sustainable transportation initiatives, which are seen to interfere with existing 'order', and likely to draw massive criticism from lobby organisations (Gössling and Cohen, 2014). With regard to individual changes in behavior, there is no evidence of change that would lead to more sustainable transport systems, perhaps with the notable exception of cycling, where some progress has been observed in cities throughout the world in recent years (Pucher and Buehler, 2012). In light of this, a key question thus remains how behavior can be influenced at large scales, and over comparably short periods of time, and whether significant others such as celebrities can inspire more sustainable transport behavior on larger societal scales.

3. Consumption, self and identity

Transport often involves consumption, whether that be purchasing a high-powered sports car, a trans-continental flight in business class or a bike to cycle to work. Such consumption decisions are inextricably bound up with one's sense of self and identity, and this is no secret to marketers, who leverage consumer identity concerns to sell products (Belk, 1988; Solomon et al., 2006).

Identity has generated considerable interest in the social sciences with numerous theoretical perspectives attempting to understand how identities are constructed and what this means for the individual. In what is often referred to as 'pre-modernity', it has been argued that fixed social structures, such as the church, family and work, contributed to the construction of individuals' identities and these remained relatively fixed throughout their lives (Baumeister, 1987). This ordering of individuals in relatively stationary social structures carried through into the industrial period/'modernity', however work and production played an increasing role in the process (Featherstone, 1991). Identity constructed through such structural channels offered individuals little agency and can be seen as 'ascribed' rather than 'achieved' (Dittmar, 2008). In contemporary societies it now appears that some of these previous social structures are fragmenting and there is more fluidity, with recent attention turning to how consumption is playing an ever-increasing

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/7498792>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/7498792>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)