Assessing the relationships between young adults’ travel and use of the internet over time

# Details

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## Sample

792 young adults aged 18-24 studied from adolescence using two longitudinal studies - British Household Panel Survey (BHPS) and the Understanding Society survey

# Abstract

Although young people’s mobility behaviors and their association with information and communications technologies (ICT) usage have been extensively researched, few studies have considered the relationship between changes in the use of ICT over time and young people’s travel
patterns. This paper explores how use of the Internet during adolescence/late childhood and the
degree of change while transitioning from late childhood to adulthood is related to sustainable
travel patterns in young adults. We are particularly interested in the mediating role that attitudes
towards the environment have on the relationship between early age Internet use and sustainable
travel in young adults. The use of rich, longitudinal datasets, the 2004 British Household Panel
Survey (BHPS) and the Understanding Society Survey (Wave 4, 2012/14), allow an investigation
of these attitudes and relationships for the same people from childhood to adulthood. We use
structural equation modeling (SEM) to examine the complex interrelationships between young
adults’ Internet use over time, their travel modes and attitudes towards the environment, and
other related behaviors. Our key finding is that consistently high levels of Internet use between
adolescence and young adulthood is associated with the formation of environmental attitudes.
While other factors not considered in this study might also have an effect, we find that these
attitudes are indirectly but significantly associated with young adults’ sustainable travel patterns
and behaviors.

# Outcome

"study differentiates between the travel outcomes of young adults who are heavy users of the Internet (defined as
those who used the Internet on a daily basis) from those who do not use the Internet heavily. We find that the frequency with which
the Internet was used by young adults is positively related to their sustainable travel behavior. Young people who used the Internet
heavily over time in a sustained manner resulted in having a long-term and intensive exposure to the Internet, which may have
played an important role in the formation of their environmental attitudes and awareness. Such attitude significantly influences their
travel patterns, which makes their travel behavior distinct from that of other young adults, who did not consistently use the Internet
heavily over time.
We also considered those who recently started using the Internet daily. We call this group as new heavy users. Although new
heavy users are inclined to use bus, train, and car-sharing modes frequently, such Internet-travel interactions tend to be immediate
and direct as they are not additionally mediated by the travelers’ positive attitude towards the environment. For experienced heavy
users, however, their long-term exposure to the Internet results in an even stronger interaction between ICT and travel, which is
greatly mediated and supported by their pro-environmental attitude. As a result, they have more sustainable travel patterns with even
lower levels of car use and more cycling" (Wu et al. 2019: 18).