Media Release

Too risky to ride?

Negative news coverage could impact benefits of cycling

BY LOUISE ROWAN

New research has found that newspapers around the world portray bicycles as 'dangerous' and 'risky' and cyclists as 'vulnerable victims', raising fears that negative news coverage could limit the potential health, environmental and economic benefits of the activity.

But the study authors argue that such reporting could also put the need for increased bike safety and infrastructure on the political agenda.

Researchers from two universities in Sydney analysed newspaper articles from Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States. Using a new technique called Discursive News Values Analysis (DNVA) they studied almost 1,700 relevant articles from 12 newspapers, dating back to 2004.

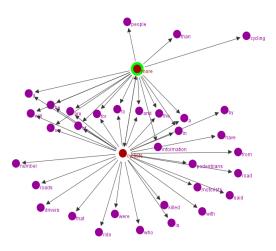
"The media have the power to shape both public opinion and policy" explained author Dr Monika Bednarek, Associate Professor in the Department of Linguistics at the University of Sydney, "So when you consider all that we know about the benefits of cycling it is important to have a better understanding of how journalists portray both cycling and cyclists."

DNVA is a new approach to media analysis developed by A/Prof Bednarek and study co-author Dr Helen Caple, Senior Lecturer in the School of the Arts and Media at the University of New South Wales.

DNVA carefully examines language and images to reveal the relationship between reality and news. Unlike established methods, DNVA does not look at why events are chosen to be news but at how journalists and authors construct 'newsworthiness' to make events appear deserving of the audience's attention; this in turn impacts upon the way audiences see the world.

The newspapers chosen for the study covered a range of bike-friendly locations - with bike share schemes and dedicated cycle lanes such as Melbourne and Oxford - as well as relatively bike-unfriendly cities including Sydney and Memphis. Using a range of specialist search software programmes, the study analysed more than half-a-million words.

A/Prof Bednarek said: "There is a valid argument that coverage portraying cyclists as 'vulnerable victims' can put the lack of adequate infrastructure on the political agenda and result in the im-



Specialist software GraphColl showing the relation between the terms cyclists and more

provement of cycling facilities".

She added: "The inspiration for the study came from personal experience. We both commute to and from work on a bicycle and having lived—and cycled—in different locations it is clear that attitudes towards cycling vary considerably from country to country, town to town.

"There's no doubt that cycling is a divisive issue: we're a 'minority' group and are often seen to clash with other road users."

The study features in the researchers' new book *The Discourse of News Values*, available from Oxford University Press and all leading book retailers.

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