

Case Study

Nudge People onto the Bus

Key Points

- Mindlab has developed a range of implicit measures for evaluating the effectiveness of behaviour change campaigns and nudges.
- We used this methodology to find the most effective way of increasing bus usage.
- These insights helped the client to develop a national strategy for encouraging passengers back on to the bus in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In 2020 Mindlab worked with key stakeholders in the the transport sector to encourage passengers to get back on the buses.

Bus usage in the UK declined significantly during the COVID-19 pandemic. In a bid to reverse this decline, four campaigns were designed to encourage people to return to the buses. Each campaign was based on a different nudge. A nudge is a behavioural change intervention – a concept that guides a range of creative content.

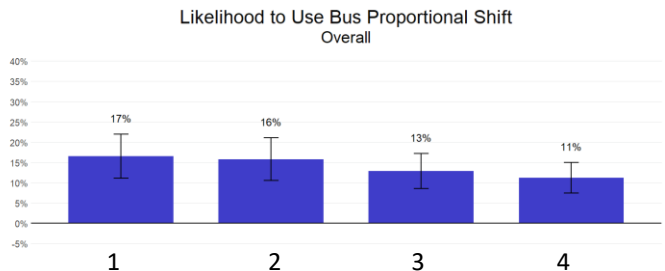
Mindlab was tasked with selecting the most effective campaign. Using our bespoke online testing platform, we created a range of implicit tests to measure the effectiveness of each campaign at changing behaviour.



Measuring nudges by implicit tests

Before showing the campaigns to the participants, we asked them how likely they were to use the bus during the following weeks. We then divided the participants into four groups, and showed a different campaign to each group. The participants then completed a range of tasks before, at the very end of the session, answering the same question about how likely people were to use the bus in the next few weeks. People are unlikely to remember the answer they gave to the question the first time, and so can't consciously choose to give a more favourable answer the second time. This eliminates social desirability bias, and means that any change in likelihood is a good indication of behaviour change.

The chart below shows the change in likelihood. Our tests indicated that all four campaigns would make people significantly more likely to use the bus. The most effective campaign would likely increase bus usage by 17%.



Insights for the client

Mindlab was able help the client select the most effective campaign for encouraging passengers back on the bus in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

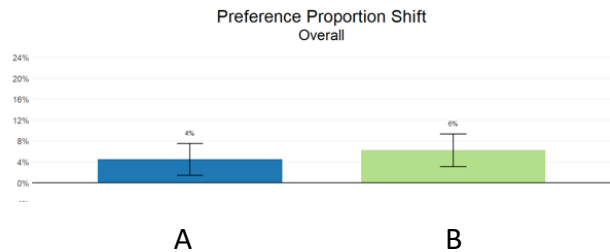
In addition, Mindlab helped the client quantify the likely increase in bus usage that would be brought about if the different activations were used combination with the campaigns.

Because these findings were based on implicit measures rather than simply asking people explicit questions, the client could be confident that these results were strong indicators of likely behaviour change, rather than than just due to social desirability bias.

These insights helped the client to build a strong case for government support and engage other national stakeholders in their behaviour change campaign.

Preference testing for behaviour activations

In addition to evaluating the four campaigns, we also looked at two different “activations” designed to boost the effectiveness of the campaigns. These two activations were based around the same financial incentive (a free bus journey), but framed this in different ways. To see which activation would be more effective, we first ran a preference test in which we presented participants with pairs of travel options (such as bus / train) and asked them to indicate which they would prefer to use. After showing participants the activations, we ran the preference test again.



As the graph shows, both activations increased preference for buses, with activation B being slightly more effective. Because the preference test requires participants to select their answers very quickly, there is little opportunity for them to consciously alter their responses. This limits the scope for social desirability bias and means that the results are a good indicator of behaviour change.

Combining campaigns and activations

Finally, we looked at how the activations fared when paired with each of the campaigns. Here we found a much bigger difference between the activations. Although Activation B was slightly more effective than Activation A when considered in isolation, Activation A did quite well in the most powerful campaigns (shown as 1 in the graph below). This shows the importance of considering the whole communication package together when designing behaviour change interventions.

