# Study finds rude cycling advocates on social media may stall UK cycle lane progress



A recently published study has revealed that social media's profound impact on cycling advocacy may inadvertently hinder the very objectives its campaigners aim to achieve. This research, titled "Does social media influence local elected leaders? A study of online engagement methods through the lens of cycling policymaking in the United Kingdom," surveyed council policymakers and local officials to assess the influence of online interactions on cycling infrastructure initiatives, particularly the establishment of new cycle lanes and active travel facilities.

While the study indicates that opposition to cycling schemes is often confrontational and even hostile, it raises concerns about the rhetoric employed by cycling advocates themselves. Pro-cycling discourse on platforms such as Twitter and Facebook is characterised by “distilled and intensified viewpoints” that leave little room for nuance. The findings suggest that policymakers can feel overwhelmed by a perception that nothing they do will satisfy cyclists, with one official commenting, “Cycling campaigners are mostly counterproductive due to their rudeness.” This sentiment reflects a broader frustration among council members, who feel disheartened by the feedback they receive from vocal segments of the cycling community.

Interestingly, while cycling advocates may come across as harsh critics, the study highlights that the discourse around cycling on social media is largely dominated by opposing viewpoints that can be abusive and toxic. These negative interactions often come from anonymous accounts, which complicates the dynamic further. One respondent was explicit in stating that misinformation propagated by “the libertarian fringe” contributes significantly to the adverse online environment.

The findings suggest a counterproductive cycle, where the negativity associated with cycling discourse influences the willingness of local councils to pursue further cycling infrastructure projects. Respondents noted that the perceived rudeness of some advocates makes it more challenging to argue for increased cycling provisions, not due to a lack of public support, but because of the impression that satisfaction is perpetually elusive.

Yet the study also acknowledges the potential of social media to engage the community in meaningful ways. Grassroots initiatives like the #nudges4cycling campaign have successfully harnessed social media to solicit small but impactful suggestions for improving cycling infrastructure across the UK. Initiatives such as these showcase the power of online platforms to mobilise community-driven policy change, although they may not gain the same recognition as traditional, face-to-face forms of advocacy.

Research suggests that while social media can serve as a relevant tool in activist campaigns, it does not replace the deeper connections formed through direct engagement. When asked to rank engagement methods, respondents consistently placed emails and in-person meetings above social media interactions, indicating a strong preference for traditional approaches to influence decision-making.

Despite the challenges presented by the current online discourse, there remains a palpable enthusiasm for cycling in the UK. Similar trends have been observed in wider cycling culture, where fan engagement through social media has enhanced visibility for events and individual cyclists alike. However, the complexities of online interactions also underscore the necessity for a more constructive approach to advocacy, one that champions collaboration over confrontation.

Ultimately, the study raises critical questions about the effectiveness of current social media strategies within the cycling community. As the conversation evolves, the need for more nuanced and constructive approaches becomes increasingly vital in fostering a productive relationship between cyclists and policymakers.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://road.cc/content/news/are-rude-cyclists-putting-people-cycle-lanes-314237), [[4]](https://road.cc/content/news/85189-nudges4cycling%E2%80%A6-social-media-campaign-aims-aggregate-marginal-gains-could)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://road.cc/content/news/are-rude-cyclists-putting-people-cycle-lanes-314237), [[2]](https://www.cyclingweekly.com/racing/inside-the-world-of-social-media-and-pro-cycling-the-good-the-bad-and-the-viral), [[5]](https://www.london.gov.uk/who-we-are/what-london-assembly-does/questions-mayor/find-an-answer/promoting-walking-and-cycling-social-media)
* Paragraph 3 – [[3]](https://www.marketingweek.com/british-cycling-uses-social-to-tap-into-rise-of-uk-cycling/), [[6]](https://www.thirdsector.co.uk/case-study-social-media-helps-spread-word/communications/article/1287672)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://road.cc/content/news/are-rude-cyclists-putting-people-cycle-lanes-314237), [[7]](https://dma.org.uk/winner/2020-bronze-best-use-of-social-media)
* Paragraph 5 – [[3]](https://www.marketingweek.com/british-cycling-uses-social-to-tap-into-rise-of-uk-cycling/), [[4]](https://road.cc/content/news/85189-nudges4cycling%E2%80%A6-social-media-campaign-aims-aggregate-marginal-gains-could)
* Paragraph 6 – [[2]](https://www.cyclingweekly.com/racing/inside-the-world-of-social-media-and-pro-cycling-the-good-the-bad-and-the-viral), [[6]](https://www.thirdsector.co.uk/case-study-social-media-helps-spread-word/communications/article/1287672)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://road.cc/content/news/are-rude-cyclists-putting-people-cycle-lanes-314237> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.cyclingweekly.com/racing/inside-the-world-of-social-media-and-pro-cycling-the-good-the-bad-and-the-viral> - This article examines the dual impact of social media on professional cycling. It highlights how platforms like Instagram and X (formerly Twitter) have enhanced fan engagement and provided cyclists with direct communication channels. However, it also addresses challenges such as trolling, misinformation, and public disputes, exemplified by the conflict between Jonathan Vaughters and Thibaut Pinot. The piece underscores the complexities of online interactions in the cycling community and the evolving role of social media in shaping perceptions and relationships within the sport.
3. <https://www.marketingweek.com/british-cycling-uses-social-to-tap-into-rise-of-uk-cycling/> - British Cycling leveraged social media to capitalise on the sport's growing popularity in the UK. During the UCI Track Cycling World Cup, a campaign generated 128 million Twitter impressions, reaching 24 million people. The initiative aimed to boost ticket sales and engage fans beyond the venue. The success of this campaign highlights the effectiveness of social media in promoting cycling events and fostering a broader audience for the sport.
4. <https://road.cc/content/news/85189-nudges4cycling%E2%80%A6-social-media-campaign-aims-aggregate-marginal-gains-could> - The #nudges4cycling campaign encourages cyclists to suggest small, actionable changes to improve cycling conditions in the UK. Initiated by cycling author Carlton Reid, the campaign aims to gather these suggestions to present to policymakers, advocating for practical improvements that can enhance the cycling experience. This grassroots approach underscores the potential of social media to mobilise community-driven initiatives for policy change.
5. <https://www.london.gov.uk/who-we-are/what-london-assembly-does/questions-mayor/find-an-answer/promoting-walking-and-cycling-social-media> - Transport for London (TfL) employs social media to promote walking and cycling initiatives. By sharing resources like the Walking Steps map and updates on new Cycle Superhighways, TfL engages with the public and encourages active travel. The use of platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube allows TfL to disseminate information, respond to inquiries, and collaborate with organisations like the London Cycling Campaign and British Cycling to amplify their messages.
6. <https://www.thirdsector.co.uk/case-study-social-media-helps-spread-word/communications/article/1287672> - This case study explores how charities utilise social media to amplify their messages. It highlights the effectiveness of platforms like Twitter and Facebook in sharing campaign information and engaging supporters. The study also discusses the challenges of managing online interactions and the importance of tailoring content to each platform to maximise reach and impact.
7. <https://dma.org.uk/winner/2020-bronze-best-use-of-social-media> - The article details the 'Climb for #ThisIsOurTime' campaign by ŠKODA UK, which aimed to close the gender gap in professional cycling. The campaign encouraged cyclists and the public to participate in a virtual challenge, climbing 20 million metres in a week to support gender equality in the sport. The initiative successfully engaged over 24,000 cyclists globally, surpassing its original goal and highlighting the power of social media in promoting inclusivity and equality in cycling.