Bike-sharing: friend or enemy during the COVID-19 pandemic?

A Twitter qualitative data analysis

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“Bike sharing helps people travel safely without public transit” versus “Bike sharing = germ sharing”. During COVID-19 pandemic, bike-sharing systems (BSS) served as a substitute for public transport but also, they were accused to support the spreading of the virus. After this dilemma of BSS being “friend or enemy” during the pandemic, the goal of this study is to identify topics, their connections and narrative related to this dilemma. What do the general public, journalists, activists, news, etc. think, report, complain, or thank BSS during the pandemic? Therefore, I collected 1,708 “original” tweets including bike-sharing-related terms from April to May 2020 in English (69%), Spanish (23%), and German (8%). Qualitative data analysis was carried out using the software MAXQDA 2020. Three-quarters of tweets were coded into 12 main topics. The most concurrent topics were related to the COVID-19 pandemic (38%) and recommended improvements and incentives for BSS (19%). Tweets supporting BSS (26%) stated that BSS help for social distancing, and supports the lack of public transport. After some safety strategies (e.g. usage of gloves), BSS are recommended to use during the pandemic. Because of these benefits and after systems reopening, an increasing demand was reported or perceived. In contrast, tweets stating that BSS are bad during the pandemic (12%) included statements that rules are not being respected, riders touch the handlebars and BSS is bad for social distancing. Because of these disadvantages, tweets reported BSS closing, which has led to a reported decrease in demand. Moreover, tweets stated BSS losing money, firing employees, and some closing definitely. In conclusion, BSS served as a relatively safe public transport system during the pandemic. Authorities should have controlled and promoted BSS as safe, attend improvements and incentives suggestions, comply and enforce safety rules to prevent complaints and demand decrease.

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