Information Age travel:

Social media, social networks and transport networks

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1. **Introduction**

The paper addresses emerging trends in mobility through the interaction of social media and social networks. It will identify some of the key characteristics of information age travel that takes into account the relationship between online and offline life in the 21st Century. The interaction between networked communication and travel is shaped in the way mobility is part of the late modern condition. The rise of transport systems and mass access to travel and tourism means that for many mobility is part of everyday life. Since the development and high use of the Internet, especially mobile Internet enabled phones, means that mobility also involves communication whilst travelling. This has two main dynamics: one that people communicate while they are travelling and; two that the Internet provides information about the current state of travel. These two aspects of communication during travel have developed into a tighter relationship through the use of social media by both individuals and transport companies.

1. **History of the Internet**

Wessels (2010) writes that the development of the World Wide Web (WWW) is of primary importance in the broader social take-up and use of the Internet. Berners-Lee, an English programmer working at CERN (Coseil Europeen pour La Research Nucleaire) produced the WWW. He wrote ‘Enquire’ (a web-based program) in his spare time to help him remember the connections between people, computers, and projects in the lab (Berners-Lee, 1991, p.4). This led Berners-Lee to ask: ‘what if all information stored on computers everywhere were linked: suppose I program my computer to create a space in which anything could be linked to anything?’ (ibid., p.4). He then took this further, suggesting that, by being ‘able to reference anything with equal ease, a computer could represent associations between things that might seem unrelated but somehow did, in fact, share a relationship’ (ibid., p.5), forming a web of information. He states that computers could not solve social problems but they could assist the human mind ‘in that computers could follow and analyze the tentative connected relationships that define much of society’s workings, unveiling entirely new ways to see the world’ (ibid., p.5).

Berners-Lee brought together hypertext and the Internet to build the WWW, and the first browser was released by CERN over the Internet in August 1991. Berners-Lee argues that, throughout the Web’s history, there are parallels between technical design and social principles (ibid., p.225). For instance, Berners-Lee designed the Web on universalistic (with lower case u) principles to build an environment that enabled people to think and discuss diverse issues from a range of perspectives in an open and accepting way (ibid., p.226). He argues that both philosophies allow the development of decentralized systems, whether of they are systems of computers, knowledge, or people. Berners-Lee understands freedom in the Internet in two ways. First, freedom is experienced in terms of sending any content anywhere in the network in packets. Second, it provides a freedom of association based on mutual respect with an ethos of collective endeavour that goes beyond singular individual effort to build for the common good in ways that are unconstrained by bureaucratic regimes (ibid., p.227). The Internet when seen from this perspective of the Web is a textual, audio-visual, and social network that challenges a hierarchical bureaucratic model of communication.

From the discussion so far, it can be seen that the overarching ‘architecture of openness’ is a key aspect in the development of the Internet. This openness allows the Internet to be shaped by users who, through their use, become its producers too. For instance, nodes are easy and cheap to establish and, through open co-operation, a variety of spontaneous applications resulted in e-mail, bulletin boards, chat rooms, the modem, and hypertext. As Castells (2001) suggests, users are often the key producers of technology and, with the Internet, new uses and modifications are fed back in real time by users, enabling the Internet to develop rapidly. A related dimension to this is that this instantaneous response generates an environment where doing and learning are dynamically interlinked, a dynamic that keeps the Internet growing at a fast pace (ibid.). The character of this mode of participation in the Internet as a form of communication, and in its innovation process, continues in its development.

Taking the above characteristic of participation in Internet communication, virtual communitarians shaped the nature of that participation further in social and cultural forms. Virtual communitarians who as early users of the Internet sought to use it in ways to generate egalitarian and alternative communities. Their culture generated a context in which the Internet moved beyond its specialist employment to more general social use. These early users of networked computing outside of university or hacker environments created virtual communities, using the term popularised by Rheingold (1993). The values of these communities shaped the ethos, practices and organization of forms of online communities, such as messaging, mailing lists, chat rooms, multi-user games, MUDS, conferences and conference systems (ibid.). Some of the early participants like SF-Lovers (Science Fiction Lovers – an early online community) were technologically sophisticated, but from the 1980s onwards, users were not necessarily skilled programmers in developing virtual communities.

This trend of widening participation was especially supported with the advent and roll-out of the WWW in the 1990s because the WWW enabled everyday users with only limited technical knowledge to use the Internet in innovative ways. Examples include community networks such as the one created in Seattle by Schuler called the Seattle Community Network or Digital City Amsterdam, sought to renew or enhance citizen participation. Another historically specific use of Internet-based networks was the way in which Russian academics used the Internet to organize activities for democracy and freedom during the perestroika period of dismantling the Soviet Union (Castells, 2001). These online communities had a similar ethos and sensibility to that of 1960s and post-1960s countercultural movements. This was seen especially in the US – in the San Francisco Bay area, for example, there were a variety of online groups, such as Homebrew Computer Club and the Community Memory projects, Jenning’s anarchist agenda in FidoNet and Amsterdam’s Digital City’s roots in the squatters’ movement in the 1970s. These types of online developments tended to spring from a sense of thwarted communal aspirations that were located in the failure of counter-cultural community-based endeavours (Castells, 2001).

Although there is diversity amongst virtual communities, Castells (2001) points out that online communities share two features. First is a horizontal free communication that advocates global free speech in an environment dominated by media conglomerates and government bureaucracies which censor communication. Second is the practice of ‘self-directed networking’ in which individuals find, or produce, their own network in which to self-publish and self-organize. The communitarian culture’s appropriation of the Internet embraces diversity and reinforces the role of the Internet as a tool for horizontal communication and a medium for free speech. Thus, culture and technology combine to facilitate networking that is self-directed and can organize communities of interest in the generation of meaning.

The community-based take up and use of the Internet did raise concerns about the quality of the Internet’s future. Fears from within the Internet community about the ad hoc and anarchic development of the Internet prompted the organisation of the Internet Society (ISOC) in 1992. The ethos of self regulation within the Internet community shapes the way in which regulation of the Internet has developed. For instance, the creation of ICANN (Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers) emerged from other Internet community organizations that sought to develop policies to ensure that the Internet’s development would maintain its foundational ethos. Building on the work of Postel in Internet Assigned Numbers Authority (IANA) and his small team of dedicated staff, ICANN’s mandate is to support one global interoperable Internet in the model of stakeholder representation. This type of self-organized regulation is a check to threats to Internet operations from powerful commercial interests as well as ensuring privacy and security for all Internet users.

The commercialization of the Internet was achieved through entrepreneurial activity. Entrepreneurs working within this entrepreneurial culture pushed the Internet out into broader society and set an agenda for commercializing the process of technical innovation in computing, without sharing its founding values. As Castells (2001) argues, business drove the expansion and diffusion of the Internet through commercialization, which happened very quickly during the 1990s (ibid., p.55). The specific characteristics of entrepreneurs and the environment in which they operate enabled them to develop the potential of the Internet for mass use. The environment in which much of this early entrepreneurial activity took place was in and around Silicon Valley in the US. In Silicon Valley there was a concentration of technical actors, knowledge, and entrepreneurs that provided the expertise and resource for exploiting the Internet in commercial terms. Castells (ibid.) argues that the defining feature of Silicon Valley’s entrepreneurial culture is how ideas and creative imagination, something he terms as ‘mind-power’ is transformed into, and used for ‘money-making’. The skill of the Internet entrepreneurs was, and is, their almost charismatic ability to envision and sell cyber futures to investors based on their firm conviction that they can form such futures. By this envisaging, they draw in venture capitalists to invest in their ideas to produce tangible goods and services, as well as intangible aspirational lifestyle frameworks for different consumer sensibilities. The combination of actors, both individuals and organizations, from the spheres of invention and innovation, technological development, and venture capital produce ‘the Internet entrepreneur’ (Castells, 2001, p.58). The ‘Internet entrepreneur’ is therefore not a person but a social phenomenon (ibid.), although this phenomenon is often popularly perceived as a person with keen vision, such as Bill Gates (see The Road Ahead, 1995). Their role and their capacity to commercialize the Internet is a significant aspect of its history. This entrepreneurial culture interacted with the meritocratic culture of academic and computing research, hacker culture and virtual communitarian culture in the multi-layered cultural dynamics of the innovation of the Internet.

Change, however, is an intrinsic part of the history of the Internet, extending beyond its process of innovation. Since its introduction to general society in 1995, its shape and use are continually being adapted, seen for instance in emergent trends of 4G mobile phones, peering technologies, mapping and remediation in alternative media such as podcasting8, blogs9 and vlogs10 as well as Web 2.011. The openness of the Internet allows it to be shaped by users who, through their use, become its producers too. The concept of Web 2.0, sometimes referred to as the ‘Social Web’ or ‘social computing’ serves to highlight the idea of a second-generation of web-based communities that aim to facilitate (co-) creativity, collaboration and sharing amongst users. The relatively low cost and ease of use means that Web 2.0 services are opening up new ways for mainstream internet users to share, adapt and create content.

The defining feature of most web 2.0 services is a cluster of dynamic social networks, which the OECD calls the ‘participative web’ to stress the active roles of users (Frissen, 2008). Web 2.0 encompasses a wide range of applications, such as blogs, wikis, social networking sites, podcasts, social bookmarking sites, auction sites, online games, and peer-to-peer services. These services allow users to publish, distribute, and share pieces of content, examples include blogs, Flickr, YouTube. They also allow people to work or play together seen in for example Second Life, Habbo Hotel. They can also create a collective body of knowledge such as the case of Wikipedia. Furthermore they facilitate users to attach their own interpretations to bits of information in the form of ‘social bookmarks’ or ‘tags’, for example de.li.cious and to produce and share reviews and preferences such as Amazon, Last.fm, TripAdvisor. Particularly successful are social networking sites such as Facebook and MySpace that offer an attractive and accessible platform for users to interact and to share social capital (Frissen, 2008).

Although the Web is opening up for popular use there is a tension in its development. This tension is based in the contradiction between the utopian ideal of free and open communication shaped by its users and the way the Internet has been commercialized for business, public sector, and popular markets. In the use of social media in travel and tourism one sees the combination of free and open communication combining with commercial and public sector markets to create a communication service created out of users and providers of travel. It is part of a prosumer logic because it is bringing travel users and travel providers into a tighter communication relationship.

The next section summarises the social media and travel landscape based on research by the European Travel Commission’s Digital Portal. Because this is a draft paper, it takes direct quotes and text which can be accessed via the following link: <http://etc-digital.org/digital-trends/social-networking-and-ugc/travellers-and-social-media/>

1. **Social media**

Over the last few years, social networks have taken over how a great proportion of Internet users worldwide spend their time, and with the online world constantly accessible with the prominence of mobile devices, they are becoming an integral part of their users’ lives. Across the globe, social media sites are used to share information among online communities, and are increasingly becoming a key point of reference in people’s lives <http://etc-digital.org/digital-trends/social-networking-and-ugc/travellers-and-social-media/>.

**Social media network users**

In countries such as the UK, the USA, Russia, the Czech Republic and Spain, about half of all adults now use social networking websites. Although the growth of social network users world has been slowing down due to market saturation, it shows no sign of stopping. While the worldwide number of social network users grew in 2012 by 17.6%, it is estimated to increase in 2014 only by 12.6%. The most significant growth in 2014 can be observed in the emerging markets of the Middle East & Africa (18.7%) and Asia-Pacific (16.6%), where the base of social network users remains small. In Africa, large parts of the growth can be attributed to South Africa, which remains the most technologically advanced country in the region Latin America (13.9%), Central & Eastern Europe (9.2%), Western Europe (6..3%) and North America (3.2%) also continue to grow in terms of their social network usage, although below the worldwide rate. This growing usage of these sites in regions with many lower-income nations can be attributed to the fact that once people have access to the internet in these areas, they tend to use it for social networking <http://etc-digital.org/digital-trends/social-networking-and-ugc/travellers-and-social-media/>.

**Demographics**

Social media usage has become an engrained activity across different demographic groups world wide. Nevertheless significant differences between the regions of the world remain, when it comes to the penetration of social media. The highest penetration among adult population can be observed in the USA (56%), followed by Western Europe (44%), South America (44%), Oceania (44%) and East Asia (43%).On the contrary South Asia (7%), Africa (7%) and Central Asia (5%) remain at the lower end of the scale, as the percentage of adults using social media is below 10%.

The use of social networking sites varies by age. While in the mature markets the age gap is decreasing consistently, the difference in age between young user (18-29) and older age cohorts (50+) is particularly high in in emerging nations . This gap is particularly noticeable in Russia, Lebanon, Argentina and Malaysia, where at least 60% separate those in the younger group from those in the older group.

Similarly, use of social networking sites varies by education level, with double-digit differences between those with a college degree and those without a college degree in 15 of 18 countries (this finding excludes Mexico, Brazil and Pakistan, where fewer than 100 of the respondents had a college degree). The widest gap is found in Egypt, where 81% of those with a college degree use social networking sites, compared with just 18% of those with less education <http://etc-digital.org/digital-trends/social-networking-and-ugc/travellers-and-social-media/>.

**Devices used**

Following the GlobalWebindex mobile devices have become a most popular device for accessing social media services, with a total of 66% of users indicating that they used a mobile handset to engage with social networking services. Looking at the breakdown of social network users, across regions, desktop computers remain the most popular access device; with 91% of Middle East & Africa users, 93% Asia-Pacific and 96% for both European and Latin American users adopting these devices. The next most popular were mobile devices. In terms of smartphone usage for social networking, one third of both European and Latin American users, 48% Middle Eastern & African and 59% Asia-Pacific users made use of the device. Tablet usage was considerably less, with under 10% of Middle East & Africa, Latin America and Europe-based users engaging in social network sites using them, whilst 28% of Asia-Pacific users did so. The remaining devices had under 10% representation across regions: internet-enabled TVs, games consoles and handheld music players.

In terms of the markets accessing social media sites via smartphones, it was found that in 12 of 21 countries surveyed at least 60% of smartphone users regularly accessed social networks with their phones. This was most notable in Egypt, Mexico and Greece, where the rate was 79%, 74% and 72% of smartphone users respectively. The Japanese (45%) and Chinese (31%), on the other hand, were the least likely to use their phones to connect with social networks <http://etc-digital.org/digital-trends/social-networking-and-ugc/travellers-and-social-media/>.

**Social Media engagement**

The time spent on social media networks world wide increased between 2010 and 2013 by 143%. On average visitors worldwide spend 5.2 hours on social networking sites in one month. A list compiled of the top ten global markets in terms of social media engagement, considering time spend online, identified Argentina, Brazil and Russia as the most engaged social networking countries, with 9.8, 9.7 and 9.6 hours spend on the sites, respectively. Latin America as a region was identified as being significantly more engaged on social network sites than the global average, with 8.1 hours spent on average within a month <http://etc-digital.org/digital-trends/social-networking-and-ugc/travellers-and-social-media/>.

**Popular Channels**

In terms of both account ownership as well as active usage, Facebook remains the number one social network in the world, followed by Youtube, Google+, Twitter and LinkedIn. When looking at the regional breakdown, differences in activity and usage can be noted. Facebook as the most popular channel in the world, is most actively used in North America (55% of internet users), but enjoys less popularity in Europe (43%). Surprisingly, Google+ is most actively used in Middle East & Africa (31%) followed by Asia Pacific (26%). The same holds for Twitter, which is used by more tha n 1 in 4 internet users in Middle East & Africa as well as in Asia-Pacifc. However, the fastest growing network is Instagram, with a total growth rate of 23% between the 2nd and the 4th quarter of 2013. In addition, asian networks are prominent among the global top 10 of fastest growing social services, in particular Tencent Weibo (9%), Sina Weibo (6%) and Badoo (5%).

With users across demographics and from around the world actively engaging in social networking, and the popularity of these social media sites continuing to grow at phenomenal rates, it is essential to take account of the usage patterns they are following. Users are spending a considerable amount of their time online, and understanding what they are searching and sharing with their networks and how they interact and are influenced by their online communities is critical for organisations to be aware of in order to tap into the power of these networks <http://etc-digital.org/digital-trends/social-networking-and-ugc/travellers-and-social-media/>.

**Social sharing**

When it comes to commercially relevant content, sharing of visual information is the prime activity of many consumers. In fact, one in two consumers share pictures of items that they are interested in, and more than one in three share pictures of items that they have recently purchased. With the growing use of Internet-enabled mobile devices, information is shared anytime and anywhere; over half of respondents from India, Indonesia and China take advantage of this, with 59%, 68% and 70% respectively of adult users from these countries sharing information online about an event whilst still there. The rate of this sharing behaviour in the other respondents was between 25-35%. However, the proportions increased in each case when looking at teenagers’ sharing activity. Of the places shared from, the most popular event respondents shared was vacations.

Regarding the subjects discussed on social networks, on an international scale the most popular topic to share views upon was music and movies (67%). Significant numbers also post their views on community issues (46%), sports (43%) and politics (34%), while far less post about religion (14%). Interestingly, the survey found that expressing opinions about community issues, politics and religion via social networks is particularly common in the Middle Eastern region; over 60% of Egyptian and Tunisian social networkers discussing politics online, as opposed to the worldwide average of 34% observed. Likewise, over 70% of users in Egypt, Tunisia, Lebanon and Jordan posted views on community issues as compared to a cross-national mean of 46% <http://etc-digital.org/digital-trends/social-networking-and-ugc/travellers-and-social-media/>.

**Location tagging**

A key social networking behaviour to consider is location-tagging; a form of sharing, whereby users disclose their locations and places of interest to one another online. In total, 62% of on-the-go users tag their locations in their social sharing posts and pictures. Interestingly, the findings showed that the location-tagging activity was directly related to age; 75% of those under 24 tagging their posts with their locations, as opposed to 44% of over 55 year olds. Users with children also location-tagged their social posts more than users without children, although the difference was less significant; 64% compared to 58%. Whilst almost a quarter of respondents (24%) didn’t have any particular reason for location tagging, 49% did so to notify their family and friends. This was the main reason identified, with 31% tagging their posts with their locations simply because the social sites made it easy to do, and 26% doing it to connect with others <http://etc-digital.org/digital-trends/social-networking-and-ugc/travellers-and-social-media/>.

1. **Travellers and social media**

The impact of social media platforms in the travel and tourism space is becoming more pervasive, given the popularity of sharing travel aspirations and experiences amongst their users. Social networks can be very influential when it comes to purchase decisions, and this trend is particularly notable within the travel industry. Therefore, it is important to consider travellers use social media and how they interact with the various platforms at the different stages of the travel cycle <http://etc-digital.org/digital-trends/social-networking-and-ugc/travellers-and-social-media/>.

**Inspiring travel**

Approximately one-fifth of leisure travellers worldwide turn to social media platforms for inspiration within different categories of their travel planning, the highest reference being taken for selecting destinations (27% of respondents), while hotels, vacation activities, attractions and restaurants are similarly highly searched (23%, 22%, 21%, 17% respectively). (eMarketer, 2013) Broken down regionally, users in the Asia-Pacific market are particularly influenced by their online peers, with 44% of travellers within the region seeking travel planning advice and inspiration regarding destination selection on social media platforms, almost double the percentage within the USA and EMEA (18% and 14% respectively). Whilst leisure travellers in these two regions refer to social media a similar amount when considering other holiday components such as hotels, vacation activities, attractions and restaurants to visit, the Asia-Pacific traveller has a clear focus on destinations when it comes to social network researching. However, they are still more active in searching for hotels (36%), activities (35%), attractions (34%) and restaurants (24%) via these channels that their USA and EMEA counterparts. (eMarketer, 2013)

In terms of the demographics drawing inspiration from social media, as reported in [Text100’s Travel & Tourism Digital Index](http://info.text100.com/travel-tourism-digital-index-2012/info.text100.com/travel-tourism-digital-index-2012.html) (2012), more frequent travellers make the most use of the networks and those within the 25-34 years age bracket are most likely to use social networks to get ideas and inspiration for their travel plans.

#### Channels

Results published by [eMarketer, 2013](http://www.emarketer.com/Article/Asia-Pacific-Social-Media-Inspires-Travelers/1009605" \t "_blank) found that leisure travellers worldwide tended to turn to online reviews when seeking travel-planning inspiration, with online travel forums and then Facebook the next-most used channels. These findings were consistent across traveller responses from the Asia-Pacific, USA and EMEA markets, although the proportions using each channel within Asia-Pacific were considerably higher. Chinese travellers in particular were noted as highly influenced by online peer reviews (71%), leisure travellers from the country are far more likely to search for Internet reviews than the average Asia-Pacific traveller when selecting their travel destinations.

These observations are further illustrated by the case of TripAdvisor. As reported by Tnooz (2014), a recent global PhocusWright survey indicated that over 80% of travellers read numerous reviews before making a decision in which hotel to stay, and 53% indicated that they would not be willing to book a hotel that had no reviews. Over 50% checked reviews before choosing a restaurant and 44% for an attraction. As reported by Travel Daily News (2012), the vast majority agreed that TripAdvisor reviews helped them feel more confident in their booking decisions (87%), and that they considered reviews on the site to be accurate (98%) <http://etc-digital.org/digital-trends/social-networking-and-ugc/travellers-and-social-media/>.

With regard to the components of TripAdvisor reviews that influenced users, reviewers’ track records tended to be taken into account when looking at hotel reviews; 71% of users noted the reviewer’s basic information, such as the number of reviews written and 59% ignored extreme opinions. Only 5% of users said that they focused on negative reviews when browsing hotels on the site. In addition to the written reviews, 67% stated that they looked at traveller-submitted photos, where available, to help them make their decisions. In terms of businesses’ responses to reviews about them, actively responsive businesses were viewed favourably by users, regardless of whether they were dealing with positive or negative feedback, as they appeared to care about their customers’ experiences. Seeing hotel management responding to reviews in general made 53% of users more likely to book with the given hotel. The manner of response made these feelings stronger; appropriate responses to bad reviews improved 84% users’ impressions of the hotel, whilst aggressive or defensive responses to such reviews saw 64% users less likely to book with the hotel. In general, 78% of users agreed that seeing hotel management responding to reviews gave the impression to them that the hotel cared about its guests. Hence, while TripAdvisor provides an open and unrestricted forum for travellers to provide their reviews, good or bad, businesses within the travel sector can still be highly effective on these platforms by simply maintaining an active presence on them. (Travel Daily News, 2012) in <http://etc-digital.org/digital-trends/social-networking-and-ugc/travellers-and-social-media/>.

As identified by Text100 (2012), users’ judge of independence when it comes to reviews is based primarily on the review’s balance of comments (43%), and where it was found (30%). 25% importance is placed on the ensuing comments and 18% on whether the reviewer was paid to write it. Interestingly, the lowest proportion of importance in determining whether a review can be considered independent is given to whether it is written by a person involved in tourism; an authority on the subject (15%) or, not surprisingly, a spokesperson for the organisation (11%).

**Social media whilst travelling on holiday**

With the constant use of the Internet and social media in people’s everyday lives these days, many travellers take their holiday time as an escape from the digital world as well. Text100 (2012) found that a quarter of their respondents reflected this need for a break from social media, claiming that they would not use the sites at all during their vacations. A key factor in many respondents’ likelihood of using social media was Internet connectivity capabilities; almost half would be persuaded to be more involved on the platforms if they had free WiFi. 21% of the respondents said they would use social networks while on vacation to share their experiences with their friends and family <http://etc-digital.org/digital-trends/social-networking-and-ugc/travellers-and-social-media/>.

Text100 (2012) identified five top topics on which travellers are most likely to comment online regarding vacations: shopping, local cuisine, fine food, historical sites and outdoor activities. They further noted clear variations in online sharing patterns between travellers from different regions; Asia-Pacific travellers enjoy commenting on shopping far more than the others, while EMEA travellers comment about historical sites and relaxing by the pool or beach more than travellers from other regions. Similarly, travellers from the USA’s comments centred around museum and galleries as well as amusement parks <http://etc-digital.org/digital-trends/social-networking-and-ugc/travellers-and-social-media/>.

With regard to sharing via social media, Text100 (2012) illustrated travellers’ activity patterns during and after their vacations. The most popular activity is sharing self-made videos and photos, with almost half of all respondents doing so both during and after their vacations. Next is sharing blog posts or news stories, done by around a quarter of respondents, followed a similar proportion ‘liking’ the location on social networks. Interestingly, each activity appears to be carried out virtually the same amount whether respondents are mid or post-vacation <http://etc-digital.org/digital-trends/social-networking-and-ugc/travellers-and-social-media/>.

On TripAdvisor, whilst the common misconception is that people only provide reviews when they have had bad experiences, in fact, reviewers’ main motivation is to share their positive experiences with other travellers (as claimed by 74% of those surveyed). Similarly, 78% of reviewers stated that sharing useful information with others made them feel good ([Travel Daily News, 2012](http://www.traveldailynews.com/news/article/52077/half-of-tripadvisor-users-will)). Similar results were found by Text 100 in their Digital and Travel Index 2012, not specific to TripAdvisor, with travellers worldwide more likely to post about positive vacation experiences, and Asia-Pacific travellers in particular the most likely to post such comments <http://etc-digital.org/digital-trends/social-networking-and-ugc/travellers-and-social-media/>.

[Text100](http://info.text100.com/travel-tourism-digital-index-2012/info.text100.com/travel-tourism-digital-index-2012.html)(2012) also identified the main reasons behind why travellers create online content and/or actively engage in social media usage following their vacations, finding that over a third of respondents said that they would create or share content online if they thought it would be of interest to their family and friends. 26% would be encouraged to share and create content if rewarded through loyalty or discount schemes. However the second highest rate of response was 28% respondents, who claimed that nothing would persuade them to get more involved in social media after their vacations <http://etc-digital.org/digital-trends/social-networking-and-ugc/travellers-and-social-media/>.

**Travel information and everday life: case study of Transport for London**

This section is based on a report by the cross industry collaboration addressed the way in which a major transport provider had taken up social media as part of its service provision (Institute of Practitioners in Advertising, 2014). Because this is a draft paper, it takes direct quotes and text from the report. Transport for London (TfL) is the managing authority for public transport in London: eg Tube, buses, Overground trains, river services, trams, DLR and Cycle Hire, as well as controlling London’s major roads and operating the Oyster ticketing system. A key part of its role is to provide users with real-time service updates, traffic and product information, alerts and tips, as well as responding to queries and complaints in order to optimise customer service and help people move around London. TfL started using social media for broadcast in 2009. In February 2012 it started using it for real time updates sent by trained staff (original trials of automated updates were discontinued) (Institute of Practitioners in Advertising, 2014).

In March 2012 it began using it for Oyster customer service. With increasing customer

demand, TfL rolled out customer service on social media across the board including all the

real time feeds like @centralline and @tfltrafficnews from May 2012 onwards. Due to its role at the heart of London’s public transport system, it is important that TfL maintains a strong reputation among customers and stakeholders for being easy to do business with, and offering good customer service and innovation.

TfL has five strands to its overall customer strategy:

•To let customers know an integrated service is provided and customers are at the heart of everything they do

•To provide a customer experience that is reliable, consistent, personalised, safe, secure and accessibleand easy to do business with

•To provide value for money

•To deliver progressive and innovative services, making investments in improvement

•All these underpin the requirement for customers to trust TfL

The key business and marketing objectives for its social media policy are:

•To make TfL easier to do business with

•Improve customer satisfaction

•Cut customer service costs

•Empower customers to have the information they need so they are less affected by disruptions when they happen – 79% of followers have changed the route of their journey as a result of following one of the Twitter feeds

•To use the channel to provide a human, personalised service to its customers and to show TfL listens and cares for our customers

In addition, TfL wanted to generate additional feedback and use analysis of interactions to improve customer insights (Institute of Practitioners in Advertising, 2014).

TfL has an average 3,000 customer queries a day across various channels: email, telephone, letter, Twitter and Facebook. Volumes can vary enormously, depending on factors like weather and service conditions. By speed of response, Twitter is the fastest of these with queries serviced on average in one minute. That compares with average response times of 15 minutes for email and letter; 7 minutes for telephone; and 2 minutes for Facebook. Measured by cost of response, the same ratios apply (Institute of Practitioners in Advertising, 2014).

In addition to speed and cost, social media was the obvious choice for TfL for several reasons:

•Because there was clear customer appetite for its use, especially among Oyster card holders

•Because it enabled TfL to engage with customers as and when they demanded it – especially on the move

•Because it is fast, efficient and could potentially improve customer service at a lower cost

•Because the volume of interactions would provide data and qualitative feedback

•Because it would allow TfL to present a human face

•Because it would bring together different parts of the organisation such as operations, ticketing, HR and engineering (Institute of Practitioners in Advertising, 2014).

TfL has deployed 25 Twitter feeds (covering different modes of transport, individual tube lines, as well as feeds for road traffic updates, disabled access and so on). The main corporate one here (www.twitter.com/TfLOfficial) and the Northern Line one here

(www.twitter.com/northernline). All these can be seen at www.beta.tfl.gov.uk/travel-information/social-media-and-email-updates. It also has a Facebook presence (www.facebook.com/transportforlondon). No new staff were taken on to deliver the social strategy. Existing staff were retrained and can work flexibly across all contact centre communications channels and services. The team of 10 work 24/7 in three shifts based in the main contact centre, and part of their job is customer service on social media. The Oyster feed (www.twitter.com/TfLOyster) is run from TfL’s customer contact centre. The content is a mix of standard updates, responses to individual queries, and pro-active tips. For example, onthe day of the Jay-Z concert at O2, TfL tweets alerted followers to potential traffic issues (Institute of Practitioners in Advertising, 2014).

In aggregate, TfL’s Twitter suite has over 1 million followers, with over 750,000 following real-time information. This grew from 13,000 in Jan 2012, to 300,000 in Jan 2013 to 1 million in Jan 2014. The content tweet-ed is a mix of standard updates, responses to individual queries, and pro-active tips. Interaction is encouraged. The TfL tweet about a Jay-Z concert, for instance, was re-tweeted 610 times, marked as a “favourite” 238 times and drew 150 responses. Daily volumes of service information tweets vary, depending on circumstances; they can range from 4-5 to 12-15 per feed. TfL customer contact staff also tweet to announce they have come on duty in order to humanise the service where possible.

TfL’s Facebook pages have 275,000 likes. Facebook posts include product information and tips. Visual elements are mixed with text. TfL also uses Pinterest, Instagram, Google+ and YouTube for news and marketing campaigns (Institute of Practitioners in Advertising, 2014).

Social media for tube, bus and traffic achieved a 73% satisfaction score, and the Oyster feed recorded a 71% score. There are, as yet, no comparatives, but TfL regards this as satisfactory given that the feeds often pass on ‘bad news’ - for instance, updates about delays and disruption. It believes the effect of its use of social media as a communication and response channel on its reputation has been largely positive. Two thirds of social media followers have said that following TfL on Twitter has had a positive impact on their impression of TfL. However, TfL has yet to measure the impact of this on its overall satisfaction score. TfL’s reputation figures have been increasing since the organisation started measuring it in July 2012. The main contributor to this is whether TfL is considered to care about its customers. This score has improved by over 10 percentage points between July 2012 and January 2014. A soft benefit of the use of social media has been greater integration across the organisation and more consistent messaging. It has also provided a channel for customers to commend staff members and give positive feedback about service and/or investments TfL has made i.e. new trains. On one occasion Twitter was even used to rescue someone locked in a toilet at one of TfL’s stations (Institute of Practitioners in Advertising, 2014)

**Conclusion**

The paper shows that social media is a feature in the negotiation of mobility that is configured by the citizensʼ own knowledge and wider information provided by services and it is an actor in an on the ground shaping of transport networks. Citizens whether as tourists or as commuters are negotiating transport systems through the use of social media within social networks that are configured from personal contacts and transport services. The development of data driven services is an emerging feature and it is one that draws both on personal social media data and on formal service data. Thus travel information is being co-produced by citizens and transport services, which raises questions about the way in which transport networks are being shaped, which raises questions about the governance of transport networks.

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