



**Selected Papers of #AoIR2020:  
The 21<sup>st</sup> Annual Conference of the  
Association of Internet Researchers**  
Virtual Event / 27-31 October 2020

## **PANEL ABSTRACT / SOCIALIZING THE NETWORKED INDIVIDUAL: CONSIDERING MOBILE SOCIALITIES**

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Recognition of the central role of mobilities as a factor in social relations (see Sheller & Urry, 2006; Urry, 2007) has grown alongside daily use of networked mobile media, and led to a spatial or mobility turn in media and internet studies (e.g. Falkheimer & Jansson, 2006; Moores, 2012). However, although early contributions in this area considered the changing social situation—looking, for example, at how varying levels of the social were affected as the mobile phone was adopted into everyday life—connections between mobilities and mobile communication field were not theorized or adequately recognized (some such as Fortunati & Taipale, 2017; Keightley & Reading, 2014; and Morley, 2017 have begun to do so). This panel adds the question of emerging and changing socialities to that broader nexus of mobilities and mobile communication, using the emerging concept of “mobile socialities” (Hartmann et al, 2018; Hill et al. forthcoming, 2021).

“Mobile socialities” demarcates a new constellation of media scholarship that seeks to encapsulate human subjectivities of media as they are embedded in human processes, structures and experiences of mobility and sociality. The concept speaks to and critically builds upon notions of ‘networked individualism’ (Rainie & Wellman, 2012), ‘network sociality’ (Wittel 2001) and ‘mediated mobilism’ (Hartmann 2013) to conceptualize productive ways of studying the social lives inherent in digitally mediated structures, subjectivities and practices of mobility. If sociality (see Long & Moore, 2012) has always

Suggested Citation (APA): Hartmann, M. Jiménez, C., Coates, J., Norum, R. (2020, October). *Socializing the Networked Individual: Considering Mobile Socialities*. Panel presented at AoIR 2020: The 21<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference of the Association of Internet Researchers. Virtual Event: AoIR. Retrieved from <http://spir.aoir.org>.

been as much about self as it has about others (e.g. communities), in becoming mobilized and digitalized, both individual and community find new roles and new relationships forged between them. A mobile sociality also facilitates conceptualizing a new sociality of objects, new materialist forms that are embedded in networks and in relations where the objects' own mobility or immobility is fundamental to how humans engage with them.

The four ethnographic papers on this panel develop this emerging concept by critically addressing important topics including migration, experience, temporality, and precarity. In addressing the phenomena of people on the move and the role (or not) of mobile media in everyday instances of mobility, these papers begin to fill empirical gaps in studies of mobility and mobile communication, as well as the power dynamics of emerging forms of the social in mobile times. The first paper, "Mobile Figures Unplugged," considers the three-year (plus one day) 'wandering years' undertaken by journeymen in Europe to develop their crafts and get to know the world. The author shows how this low-tech journey is nonetheless socially networked, and argues that the wandering craftsman's "highly mobile, but also highly disconnected... form of mobility serves the basis for reconsidering and further developing understanding of the mobilities / mobile media and communication / socialities triangle." The second paper, "Picture a Day Laborer's Memobilia," presents an ethnographic study in Denver, Colorado of another mobile figure, the day laborer, who in the context of this study is most likely to be a Latino immigrant. The laborers use their smartphones to establish 'digital archives' that are deployed differently depending on the need to connect to home, work, and the social. Next, "Imagining Informal Economies in Sino-Japanese Contexts," studies how young Chinese expats in Japan use social media to trade goods through Chinese networks around the world. Considering the tensions generated by Chinese peoples' increasing mobility and financial strength, the author explores how sociality and power relations change across different scales of geography, mobility, and media. Finally, "Re-presentation: Temporality and Mobile Sociality," uses digital ethnography to investigate the role played by temporality in the socialities of travelers. The author demonstrates how real-time social media updates by travelers alter sociality through a constant need to re-present the self at individual moments.

The papers in this panel use a variety of ethnographic studies, undertaken in diverse geographic and mediated contexts, to contribute to a broader understanding of networked media and sociality by differing types of 'mobile figures.'

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## **MOBILE FIGURES 'UNPLUGGED': THE TRAVELING CRAFTSPERSON**

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### **Introduction**

This paper considers a little-studied area of mobile lives: the "wandering years" (called 'the Walz' or 'Tippelei' in German), an 800-year-old tradition. Originally practiced all over Europe, it is now mostly upheld in the German-speaking countries, as well as Denmark and France. The countries travelled, however, have become global. The basic idea is that craftsmen and -women, known as the *Gesellen*, or journeymen, leave their hometowns after finishing a three-year apprenticeship to begin travels that last for three years and one day. During this journey, they are expected to work and thereby learn new aspects of their craft, new skills—and get to know themselves and the world. They offer their services in exchange for food, shelter and a negotiable wage. Several rules and traditions guide this journey, many of which are related to questions of sociality, mobility, and questions of media. As based both in tradition and contemporary times, as

highly mobile, but also highly disconnected, the wandering craftsman's form of mobility serves the basis for reconsidering and further developing understanding of the mobilities / mobile media and communication / socialities triangle.

## **Mobile figures**

Mobility has been analysed through different figures over the years, as Rosenberg and Shannon (2018) point out, citing the nomad, pilgrim, tourist and flaneur. These figures reflect and represent understandings of and embodiments of certain kinds of freedom (and restrictions), certain kinds of social rules and norms (and their upheaval). Hence, the ideal of mobility-as-freedom is a one-sided view. Rosenberg and Shannon refer to Kesselring (2006) to contrast autonomy and heteronomy as well as production and adaptation as different aspects of the same processes. The flaneur, for example, is much more independent financially than the nomad, but at the same time, the flaneur is bound to the city and specific environments (such as the passage), while the nomad can travel anywhere anytime. The pilgrim—who is spiritual and often adheres to certain pre-given rituals—has a different justification (at least in past times) than the tourist, who primarily consumes. My claim with regard to mobile figures is twofold: a) additional notions are necessary to access the mobile figure (kind and speed of movement; social structures; mediation and media use, etc.) and b) other figures might be needed. Here we concentrate on the journeyman as a rather unknown mobile figure.

## **The journeyman: Networked but unplugged**

The combination of work and travel, of travelling and experience is by far not new – indeed, it has always been part of certain work traditions. However, when settlement became more widespread and work more differentiated, it became less common. Some kinds of work, however, remained mobile throughout: the shepherd is one example, the wandering priest another (Winter, 2006). The travelling journeymen and -women have existed for a long time, dating back to the 15<sup>th</sup> (some state the 13<sup>th</sup>) century, when the population began to grow and competition amongst craftspeople became fiercer. The solution was simple: send the young people on a longer journey where they could learn additional skills, could get to know the world and at the same time offer fairly cheap labour along the way. By and by, the journey began to be shaped by rituals that later turned into traditions; these include a particular outfit, piercing the ear with a nail, the specific length of the journey (three years and one day), the use of a travel diary, and the method of return.

The whole idea of travelling craftspeople is based on sociality. While one tends to travel alone, there are many meeting points, rituals and other aspects that are built on the idea of a close-knit community which takes one on board, teaches one the trade, helps wherever and whenever necessary and generally guides the process. Journeyman sociality is characterised by traditions, forms and customs that everyone has to learn and later pass on to the next. This social network is one that cannot simply be entered, but instead entry needs to 'earned' (finish the apprenticeship, express an interest, meet people and have your interest checked, utter interest more precisely, find supporters that will introduce you officially, make it known and begin the rituals that officially let you become part of this community). Even after entry, it is important to stay in touch with

your community, to regularly attend the meetings (and again perform certain rituals that you are taught) and to generally adhere to what is expected. At the same time, the daily doings and the travels themselves are characterised by great freedom (an aspect that most journeypeople emphasize). It is a sociality expressed in practice – enacted every day. It is also, crucially, a community based in oral communication. Although media representations tend to romanticize the journeymen-culture, an increasingly important aspect of the romanticization focuses on their lack of digital media during the Walz.

This is one of the rules around the Walz journey: no phones (mobile phones, smartphones or similar devices) are allowed. It is clearly fascinating for media reports since this rule seems – on first sight – anachronistic. Yet it has clear implications, which will be discussed in detail in this paper: the organisation of the social network and of work, etc. needs to take place through other means – hence the oral communication focus. Family and friends who were left behind in the home-town (or elsewhere), cannot easily be contacted. One wandering woman reported gathering a bit of loose change every couple of weeks to be in touch with her mother from a phone booth. The journeyman may gather a bit of loose change to use a phone booth, or visit one of the remaining internet cafés or a public library to send email or look up information, but while connectivity of this kind is possible, it's difficult.

But it is not only public perception that makes the non-use of mobile phones a central aspect of the journey. A carpenter, asked what he fears most about beginning the Walz, states that he will probably miss his phone and 'Dr. Google' most. A journeywoman (a seamstress/dressmaker), when asked about the most unusual aspects of going on the Walz, immediately answers that leaving behind the smartphone is the most unusual aspect of her journey. With experiences such as these, however, where liberation from the current connectivity norm is hailed, it might not be the brotherhoods as much as the passage of knowledge and experience from senior to junior journeymen/-women that allows this rule to continue. In fact, disconnection could become one of the defining characteristics of the modern Walz where both sociality and mobility are possible without the extent of mediation now common. In a world where digital detox is either bought as a temporary escape from quotidian perils or ordered from above in larger companies, the idea of a three-year-long freedom might become a trademark.

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# ON A DAY LABORER'S DIGITAL MOBILE MEMORIES

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Day laborers stand on street corners, at hardware stores, or other hidden areas in cities across the world and they are the basis of what scholars call the “gig-economy” (Friedman, 2014). The gig-economy, however, is closely tied to vast digital networks and platforms, which facilitate work agreements so that people don't have to meet face to face. Digital technologies have given order and prestige to variations on day labor, which has taken over such work as taxi driving, food delivery, dog walking, and much more. While the mobile provides a unique and somewhat stable form of income, there are also personal and innovative uses that go overlooked.

The day laborers in the study were overwhelmingly Latino immigrants seeking manual laborer (construction work; farm work; movers) who must be ready to go to work on a moment's notice, and be physically present and available. Such day labor differs from gig-economy labor and entails a different type of life world and work ethic that does not rely on an online profile or resume, but instead on being visible and ready to rush an employer's car early in the morning. If day laborers are not using their mobile phones to seek out work on digital platforms, then how are they using them? I argue that a day laborer's “digital archive,” functions as a source of self-empowerment as it includes personal memories and connections, supports identity formation, highlights their work skills, and enables self-improvement or self-reparation (Turkle 1995).

Anna Reading's concept of “memobilia” specifically seeks to understand the contours of digital memory on mobile phones. Reading's concept specifically captures the wide range of mobile phone memories that include communications and multimedia data that are “deeply personal and yet instantly collected through being linked to a global memoryscape of the World Wide Web” (2009, p. 81). While Reading highlights the ease with which digital memories can be archived and distributed, I look at a population whose memories largely stay on the device. A pioneering study by Baron et al. on mobile phones and day laborers in Seattle, Washington found that ICT's “help[ed] immigrant day laborers maintain links with their past and their roots, offer tools to navigate their present needs, and help them build future plans and aspirations” (2014, p. 107). Baron argued that the mobile phone served as a source of connection to friends, family, and the world, but also to employers and a steady income.

Building upon this research, I've carried out 15-months of ethnographic field work at Centro Humanitario (September 2017-January 2019), a day labor center in Denver. In this study, we observed day laborers use their mobile phone cameras to produce a set of images and videos that documented the work they did as well as their everyday lives. This media ultimately coalesced into a digital archive of day laborers' experiences and memories. Recently, the research has collected data on four areas of a day laborers' phones. Over four separate structured interviews, each lasting 60 minutes, we go over every photo taken, text messages, call log, and apps used.

Many day laborers use their mobile phones to document their work. They capture their daily work by photographing or video recording the material progress they make on projects and the outcome of their physical labor. Since most day laborers subsist on one-day-at-a-time verbal contracts, their work would be lost without such recordings. Given this, the day laborer's mobile phone camera becomes a valuable resource that can be used to document the labor they perform or spaces they inhabit. For some, taking a photo involves a desire to remember, but for day laborers it involves creating credibility, having a visual track record of one's labor, and using that record to get consistent work.

In terms of the personal and affective, day laborers use mobile phone cameras to take pictures of things that they want to remember, or that they find beautiful, or impressive. For some day laborers. The overwhelming presence of Mexican-style seafood in their photo archive reveals the importance of food and leisure in their lives. For others, the mobile phone highlights the importance of health with photos memorizing the foot powder, trail mix, or vitamins they don't want to forget. They also use them to establish visual connections to distant places and people, whether their hometowns in Mexico, a YouTube video from Indonesia, or new friends in the Mexico. When I asked day laborers whether they knew these individuals prior to their online friendship, they said no, which is similar to Burrell and Anderson's work where Ghanaians sought out strangers or weak connections (2008). For the day laborers in Denver, however, they were long distance and one-way conversation, as these images illustrate, but the conversations offer the day laborers a necessary connection.

The digital archive of a day laborer is filled with images of things they have touched, fixed, worked on, or that they want to remember, and of distant worlds and contacts. The result is a day laborer digital archive that has a several purposes. First, it is practical; day laborers need to find work and showcase their valuable skills and experiences via their digital portfolio to current or future employers. Second, the archive is symbolic: what is stored on their phones helps day laborers to continuously rethink and reimagine their identities and lives. These images may range widely and include photos of other people's houses, of other people's broken (but now fixed things), of voluptuous "untouchable" women, and of long distance one-way connections to people and places. If dominant society views day labor as an unskilled general workforce that has a very limited socio-economic mobility, their digital archives create a counternarrative. The digital archive filters and stores the day laborer's greatest hits (their flexibility and experiences at work), but also provides a personalized space of digital accumulation and connection.

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## **IMAGINING INFORMAL ECONOMIES IN THE SINO-JAPANESE CONTEXT: A MOBILE SOCIALITIES APPROACH**

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The circulation of economic ‘things’, such as gifts (Mauss, 1954), money (Simmel, 1950) or commodities (Marx, 1976), is a cornerstone of how early theorists came to think about movement and social relationships alongside their imaginative consequences. They were in many senses an early theorisation of media as much as economics. Historically these forms of circulation have been portrayed as distinct from each other and operating at different scales. The gift was classically personal or a defining feature of small scale socialities, whereas money and the commodity typified the grand scales of the ‘modern’ era. As Anna Tsing has argued however (Tsing, 2013), the distinction between these scales and systems often requires considerable imaginative leaps and practices of sorting, suggesting that approaches which trace the effort that goes into ‘scaling’ transactions and circulation will help us understand the workings of human imagination. Within this paper, I draw on ethnographic observations of informal digital economies between China and Japan to conceptualize how a mobile socialities approach contributes to our understanding of imagination in transnational contexts. In particular, I ask how we might reconcile the emphasis on ‘flat’ interpersonal socialities typical of ethnographic mobile media research, with the way these socialities are often imagined as representing national, inter-national and global political-economic relations.

From a mobilities perspective, it is the movement of various phenomena that constitutes place (Ingold, 2007) affording different modes of (im)mobility as imagination (N. Salazar, 2011; N. B. Salazar & Schiller 2016). The Sino-Japanese context exemplifies a mobilities approach as it is entangled with everyday circulations of people, things and practices. There are over 750,000 Chinese nationals living in Japan, and a significant number of naturalized Japanese citizens from China. Coupled with nearly 10 million

visitors in 2019, major trading relations and media flows, these various mobilities, from overseas study to overseas trade, have created a context where on an everyday level, Japan and China increasingly resemble a transnational social field.

I explore the practice of *daigou* (代购) among young Chinese people in Japan, which is a term for a range of informal social media-based trading practices among Chinese networks around the world. While there is a growing body of literature showcasing what *daigou* is and how it is creating new possibilities for mobile young people (Martin, 2017), I focus on the imaginative consequences of this system of digitally mediated transnational trade. I contrast the imaginaries and relationships afforded by the practice of *daigou* with the wider media representation of informal economies in the Sino-Japanese context. From Japanese washlet toilet seats to cosmetics and luxury brands, flows of goods from Japan to China have become a common way for students, tourists and migrants to turn a small profit while overseas. In particular, during the recent coronavirus outbreak the buying and posting of Japanese facemasks to China became a heated political issue on Japanese Twitter, broadcast media, and among Chinese migrants' WeChat discussions in Japan. The politicization of these digital informal economies reflects the everyday frictions generated by Chinese peoples' increasing mobility and economic heft in Northeast Asia. Informal digital economies and their media representation operate at different scales, both the scale of interpersonal network socialities (Wittel 2016), and the scale of a national 'imagined community' (Anderson 1991).

A mobile socialities approach allows us to trace the clash between differing (im)mobilities and scales (Eriksen 2016), which can be found at the interstices of social media and broadcast media. The practice of *daigou*, as a form of mediated mobile sociality, is portrayed as errant and dangerous in Japanese broadcast media, taking vital commodities out of the Japanese market through informal means. In this framing, it is portrayed as clashing with the immobile imaginary of Japan as a bounded nation-state and market, whose integrity must be protected from seemingly immoral economic practices. Chinese people in Japan are both producers of, and caught within, this clash of scales, resulting in negative media portrayals and stigmatisation. Their own responses, however, also reflect an effort to contest how differing practices and scales are represented. From informal trade as a 'gift' to the Japanese economy, to accessible commodities as a 'right', Chinese migrants make strident arguments for the morality of their informal economic practices. Their mobile practices and their resultant socialities are thus also imaginative and moralizing acts.

Transnational socialities and media have long been associated with imagination as a practice that shapes regional and global relationships (Appadurai 1996). Yet, depending on the field and discipline, different scales of imagination have been emphasised over others. A mobile socialities framework allows for a more granular approach to understanding different practices of imagination because of its emphasis on tracing materially grounded relations that transgress multiple scales. Mediated through the movement of people, technologies, and content, a mobile socialities approach in some senses harks back to classic economic anthropology. Yet, its relevance is by no means out of date. Considering imagination from a mobile and materially grounded perspective is all the more pertinent in the digital era, where technologies make sociality scalable in

new ways (Miller et al. 2016). The distance and speed of content spread means the shared symbols we use today circulate in new ways, algorithmic clustering of groups and interests ensure that those we see as having something in common with cluster in new ways, and the line between formal and informal economic relations has blurred and transformed. I show how a mobile socialities approach allows us to trace the way people imagine informal economies in multiple ways and at multiple scales.

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# RE-PRESENTATION: TEMPORALITY AND MOBILE SOCIALITY IN THE NEW ECONOMY

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The forms, tempos and rhythms of time are ever-present in representations and experiences of contemporary socio-cultural life. Consider modern experiences characterised by these terms: Slow food. Fast company. Real time. Live-streaming. Stop action. Slofie. The necessarily mediated temporalities of contemporary experience are ubiquitous. Time is now an entity that is played with, contested, amplified and reconfigured through a range of human and techno-social processes. What do these new perceptions, imaginations, experiences and practices of time do to our selves in the moment? This paper seeks to explore, through ethnographic example, the roles played by time in the process of producing and presenting a given experience to others through the affordances of social media.

This talk investigates the role played by temporality in the socialities of mobile experience through ethnographic research on the social media practices of mobile individuals. In so doing, it aims to explain how time alters sociality through its mediation by digital platforms that co-opt representations and subjectivities of individual moments in new ways. After speaking broadly about theoretically aligning contemporary work on temporality, mobility and the digital presentation of self, I will illustrate a series of ethnographic examples: Twitter posts with real-time commentaries from followers; a blog post from a travel writer; and live-streamed travel experiences on Tiktok. Discussing social media use by these travelers perpetually in motion, I will demonstrate how sociality and the digital are mediated by the specific temporalities linked to the particular affordances of various platforms. The core question I am to answer in this talk is: How does temporality alter the socialities of mobile experience and what are the socio-cultural effects on the self of the socialites produced from these novel engagements with time?

I will argue that digital mobile practices in the experience economy do not merely alter how time and space (or temporal and spatial experience) are encountered and felt; they are now in many ways the new bar for what constitutes human experience itself. I frame temporality through the emerging concept of 'mobile socialities' (Hill et al. forthcoming) as a means of bridging the temporal structuring processes and everyday lives of transient individuals and communities with shifts in the relevance and importance of place and place-making concomitant with mobile practice. In rewriting the rules for how the present is understood, lived and represented, digital practices reconfigure how humans experience the limitations of time and space – entities whose understandings are already in part ruptured by the hypermobility rampant throughout contemporary mobile practice. Mediated hypermobility – which spans the planet and can inform everyone on it that you are there and there and there – becomes the consummate mode of living out a worldview emblematic of the phrase *carpe diem, quam minimum credula postero* ("seize the day, put very little trust in tomorrow"). In other words: there is only present.

However, to be ushered into being, this present must be *presented*, which is to say, that in contemporary social life, lived experiences are only turned into present moments through their *re*-presentation. The concept of mobile socialities works here as a frame for considering the new temporalities of reproduction, distribution and dissemination of text and the real-time, discursive engagement around such texts that connect disparate individuals separated by distance but brought together by the time/space-bending connectivities of digital technologies. Being social has always been as much about self as it has about others (e.g. communities), but in becoming mobilized and digitalised, both individual and community have new roles and new relationships forged between them.

With the rise of so-called experiential travel, changes in the production, consumption and mediation of such experience have shifted the focus from travel as place/destination to travel as self-fashioning/self-dissemination. Many travellers no longer hit the road solely to have a memorable bucket list adventure in a given destination, or as James Clifford (1986) has suggested, travel is not (or perhaps no longer) merely about going places; it is a conceptual and geographic displacement intended to catalyse consciously enriching experiences. One also now travels in order to share the experiences one anticipates having there, documenting, narrativising and broadcasting memories in specific mediated forms to be consumed, digested and commented upon by others. Travellers today are often compelled to regularly emote their lives in situ through different media platforms. These online 'selves' can (and ought to) be regularly maintained and supplemented with additional media, and people apologise if they have not updated their blogs or made current their Facebook timelines.

While these self-presentations are qualitatively different than how people have thought and written about their lives ten or twenty years ago, the specific temporalities of such experience have also become key to how they are both produced and consumed. As the separation between consumer consumption and production becomes cloudy, the traveller evolves into a 'prosumer' (Charitsis 2016): a 'prosuming self' who creates value through a life broadcast via travel, and a 'prosumed self', an active and entrepreneurial subject governed to produce data and content that bring value for large media corporations through engagement with various platforms. This 'communicative capitalism' (Dean 2010) relies on the appropriation and exploitation of the active participation of users who create content, interact with each other, develop and cultivate relationships, and provide suggestions, recommendations and solutions.

As such, changes in the production, consumption and mediation of mobile experience have 'de-placed' the doing of travel – shifting it from a phenomenon bound up with place and destination to one focused on the self and its dissemination (there's probably a pun somewhere on the horizon to this end that plays with "the present" and "re/presentation"). Within this I critically address Simanowski's (2017) arguments about how the subjective experience of the present itself is constructed to be withering away on account of our seemingly new penchant for structuring, capturing and fixating "moments" of experience. At the same time, as moments of experience are able to be captured and fixed, thereby losing their immediacy, fluidity and fragility, the subjective experience of the present itself begins to erode (Simanowski 2017).

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