6th Sense Travel App Trial Report: Martock

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1.0 Introduction

The 6th Sense Travel App is an outcome of the 6th Sense Transport research project funded by the UK Research Councils and run by a consortium of UK Universities (Bournemouth, Edinburgh, Lancaster, Salford and Southampton). The research project investigates the opportunities for collaboration provided by improved visibility of various transport options using mobile communication media (smartphones).

The purpose of this trial was to test the functionality and usability of a purpose built mobile phone application, the '6stTravel' app, which aims to facilitate travel collaboration between users. The app enables participants to see the collective movements of other people in their social network over time and interact with one another by sharing travel information and posting various requests, such as shopping, general help and lift requests. The app was originally designed for use by a campsite community but was adapted slightly to meet the needs of a village community. The app is currently only designed for the iPhone platform.

2.0 Trial Aim and Objectives

The aim of this trial was to enable collaborative travel between app users. The trial had the following objectives:

1. To provide participants with a means to visualise the community travel patterns
2. To provide a platform in which users could communicate and share travel related information
3. To examine the ways in which participants communicate with each other
4. To explore the potential for collaboration amongst a community of users

3.0 Method and participants

Participants were recruited by Matt Jollands at Yarlington Housing Group. This was achieved by:

- Placing posters in various locations (e.g. parish notice board)
- The Housing Group's Facebook page
- Leaflet drop
- Identifying and contacting individuals who might be 'lead users'

Following contact, participants were invited to attend meetings where they were given further information about the project and a demonstration of the mobile phone app. An additional two participants were provided with the same information in a home visit. A total of eight participants were recruited which was significantly less than anticipated (Table 1). Participants were either loaned iPhones (n=5) for the duration of the trial or had the app installed on their own phone (n=3). One participant was visited during the trial to address some technical issues. The trial took place during December 2013 and January 2014. Due to the low number of participants the trial was ended mid-January as it became apparent that further participants would not be recruited. Three participants were interviewed at the end of the trial.

Earlier trials took place in Maiden Newton, Dorset during July 2013 and at Tom's Field Campsite, Langton Matravers, Dorset for 5 weeks during July and August 2013. Occasional reference is made to these trials for comparative purposes.

Table 1: Participant profile

	Pseudonym	Age	Engaged with app	Interview	iPhone owner	Days with app
1	Michael	20s	Y	Y	N	47
2	Simon	Late teens	Y	Y	N	47
3	Darren	20s	N	N	N	47
4	Daniel	50s	Y	Y	N	47
5	Nigel	50s	N	N	N	47
6	Lucy	30s	N	N	Y	47
7	Elaine	40s	Y	Y	Y	42
8	Derek	60s	N	N	Y	42

4.0 Findings

4.1 Users

Users were recruited across a range of age profiles (see Table 1). In contrast to the earlier trials, not all participants were car users; however, all had access to various transport options e.g. public transport or lifts from family or friends. The most active user, Daniel, exhibited the least competence regarding the use of technology. His perseverance with the

app is thought to be driven by his strong desire to help others, something evident in his existing day-to-day life.

Of significance to subsequent findings, users volunteered for the trial as they supported the concept of travel collaboration and were keen to offer help to others.

4.2 Collaboration

Not all Martock users engaged with the app, which is consistent with the earlier trials. The app was not used to its full potential. App users in the Martock trial were less active in comparison to the summer campsite trial. However, encouragingly at Martock, the app did facilitate two collaborative exchanges.

4.2.1 Lift share

While trial participants offered lifts, there were no requests for lifts. Some participants were not able to drive or did not have access to a car; however, this did not prompt them to seek assistance. This is because they felt that they had adequate systems in place, e.g. public transport or existing lift shares were working well. One user who did not have a car felt that she was not a good candidate for the app trial because she didn't have anything to offer:

> "It's not like I could repay the favour"

Previous interviews have shown that a reason for not asking for or accepting a lift was due to time issues and a loss of flexibility, however, in this trial it appeared to be more to do with a perceived lack of 'need'. In the Maiden Newton trial this was said about other participants:

> "If we'd had somebody in the village without transport who needed things got, that would have worked better" (Julie)

Simon, who does not drive explained that he is in a routine of taking the bus and that asking for a lift would take more organising; he would have had to remind himself to post message the night before to give people a chance to respond. Additional evidence from the Tourism trial indicates a reluctance to ask for help as people feel the need to build 'credit' in the exchange system first.

The Martock trial included users who did have more of a need for assistance than previous trials but this did not result in the anticipated lift requests.

4.2.2 Collaborative shopping

The app was used for two instances of collaborative shopping. Elaine was caring for her ill child and unable to leave the house to go shopping and she required some washing powder. She did not hesitate to use the app. She acknowledged that if the request had not worked she would have fallen back on her existing network of 'help' or would have simply gone without.

Michael was another user to ask for an item of shopping. This task was carried out by Simon who has this to say about the exchange:

> "It works well, he said what he wanted, we were in the shops, we picked it up for him and dropped outside his house, he gave us the money … and it all worked really well"

4.2.3 Travel information sharing

Users did not frequently share travel information during the Martock trial, this was consistent with the results from the Maiden Newton trial. Within the campsite trial more information was shared such as car park capacity, congestion and bus information. In addition, tourists shared information about visitor attractions that might inform travel decisions. Tourists indicated they had more time on their hands to engage with information sharing. Elaine felt that information sharing would have been a major benefit to participation in the app. She would have liked the app to be used for posting local information, e.g. events:

> "It would be nice if people posted events on it, so that you knew what was going on and you were being kept in the loop"

4.3 Engagement with the app

4.3.1 Barriers to engagement

Users gave several reasons why they were unable to use the app to its full potential. Reasons included:

- They did not feel they had a need to ask for help
- Absence of other users
- Poor understanding of the technology
- Remembering to carry two phones (personal and project phones)
- Potential for poor signal – although not actually experienced

In comparison to other trials the app worked very well due to recent modifications. There was only one minor issue with regards to functionality identified. Therefore, the usability of the app was not seen as a barrier to participation.

4.3.2 Engagement opportunities

All three of the Martock users interviewed stated that they would have liked some 'other voices' on the app and that more users were needed to make the trial successful. They confirmed that they would have put more effort in themselves had they seen more people taking part. They also noted the fact that it seemed to be the same people taking part.

Daniel acknowledges that the lack of interaction on the app did prevent him from becoming more involved:

> "If there were more people needing my help it would have perked me
> up, I'd have thought oh great I'm doing something positive"

One user remarked that if he was more familiar with using an iPhone he would have used the app more:

> "If it was on my own phone, I would have been more using it, if that
> makes sense … I tried to use it the best I could" (Simon)

4.4 Reciprocity

4.4.1 Helping

Daniel frequently posted messages offering lifts but acknowledged that with hindsight he could have given more prior warning and perhaps it was unrealistic to expect the offers to be taken up. His use of the app did diminish and he acknowledges:

> "I got a bit disheartened a few weeks ago because nobody seemed to
> want any help"

There were also offers for shopping to be collected but these were also unanswered.

4.4.2 Asking for help

Even those who did not have access to their own personal means of transport did not feel that they had a real need to ask for help. They remained concerned with how they could offer help to others. However, as mentioned earlier, Elaine acknowledged that she did not feel that she had much to offer others. Daniel states his position:

> "I didn't need any help really, I always try to help myself"

4.5 Trust/security

App users did not appear to have any trust or security issues when using the app. Elaine explained:

> "I felt it was a trusting app and people were using it for the right
> reasons"

She felt this way because messages posted on the app were friendly rather than "clinical" or to the point and it was: "more like talking to a friend than a stranger". In addition, she had seen individuals posting messages on the app before so they could be identified as a regular user, implying an increased level of trust. When considering her shopping request and the necessity to give out her address she explained that she wasn't worried by this because:

> "I don't feel they would have initially outlaid that money if they weren't
> genuine"

Simon on the other hand would appreciate more contact with someone before undertaking any collaborative activities:

> "If you could make yourself familiar with the person on the phone, messaging and talking like, that would help you, make you feel a bit more confident."

Simon was part of a collaborative shopping task but had met Michael before undertaking the task.

In line with other trials, security issues, such as identity theft, were not a major concern. Participants felt in control of the amount of information that they shared about themselves. Simon summarises:

> "If you're on there [the app] for the same purpose there shouldn't be a problem"

4.6 Motivation

The main reasons for taking part in the trial were identified as:

- Creating a sense of community
- Altruism, as it was something they were able to do

Elaine explains why she took part in the trial:

> "It's new, it's exciting, I like to feel I'm part of a community … I would have liked to see it work"

As evident from the messages he posted, Daniel took part because:

> "I want to help the community"

It is important to acknowledge that all participants volunteered to take part and are likely to be of a disposition to offer assistance, hence the number of lift offers and low number of requests.

4.7 Time/Planning

Users did not feel that the app had any impact on their travel time organisation or planning. This is because they continued to rely on existing methods of transportation i.e. their own car, existing lift sharing or public transportation. Elaine explained that she felt she could rely on the regular bus service but did acknowledge that, should the need occur, she would not hesitate to use the app to ask for a lift.

4.8 Critical mass

The trials to date have been small scale, with this trial consisting of the fewest participants. It is not known whether a larger group of participants would have generated more activity; however it is thought this is likely. The 'critical mass' of users that might enable travel collaboration in a given context remains unknown. This is likely to vary according to the type of users, the strength of their social ties and the geographical context.

4.9 Community

Participants were asked whether they felt part of a community. All three interviewees felt they had small network of people around them but that an overall feeling of community was missing:

> "it [community] should mean more to me, we haven't got much of a community ..." (Daniel)

They all defined community in similar ways, highlighting the importance of communication and the ability to rely on others for help:

> "Feeling that you can help people, not just people helping you" (Elaine)

In addition, users suggested the app had the potential to build a community.

5.0 Concluding comments and recommendations

This trial did not see any evidence of car sharing collaborative activities facilitated by the 6th Sense Travel App. However, there were two instances of collaborative shopping. This shows the potential for the app to be successful and also indicates willingness for individuals to participate in these kinds of activities.

Other key issues to note are:

- The trial context was limited in terms of number of participants.
- This trial showed promise with regard to users undertaking collaborative travel. However, information sharing was more limited than in previous trials.
- Users taking part in the trial all volunteered to do so; they are prone to offering help which is reflected in the results.

All three interviewees felt the app had potential for both collaborative travel activities and also for building a stronger sense of community. Elaine described participating in the trial as:

> "Like being part of a social network it felt like you were part of something that nobody else was, it was great"

Further trials would require a larger number of users. This is thought to be essential for the success of any additional trials. Furthermore, the recruitment of a number of lead users prepared to drive app use would also facilitate a more robust trial.