

# **Mundane citizenship on the move: A counter-public response to inbound shopping tourism via mobile social media app use**

## **Introduction**

Mobile (micro)blogging (moblogging), in its contemporary form, is a personalized act of posting brief texts and captioned visuals that express one’s feelings and moods on social networking sites (SNSs) while on the move (Quan-Haase & Martin, 2013). This mobile media practice has become a common way to sense and explore a city in real time (Evans-Cowley, 2010). However, mobile social media users, equipped with smartphones and relevant applications (apps), are not complacent as they navigate their (re)presentations of mundane urban life. Rather, as I suggest in this article, moblogging can be a proto-political practice of “mundane citizenship” that is “firmly rooted in private experiences, needs, and concerns, but [...] sheds this shell through collective identification and movement from private to interpersonal, group, and public discourse” (Bakardjieva, 2012: 1358). Using digital ethnography to examine the daily moblogging practices of local residents as they confronted a wave of inbound shopping tourists in pre-pandemic Hong Kong, I demonstrate how the latest mode of mundane citizenship emerges from the communicative mobility of digitally savvy urban dwellers.

As China develops into the world’s fastest growing tourism market, Hong Kong, a Special Administrative Region located in southeastern China, has become one of the main travel destinations for tourists from mainland China (Calderwood & Soshkin, 2019). Moreover, compared with tourists from other countries, tourists from mainland China are more likely to consider shopping as their main motivation for traveling (Mangin, 2015) and to show a

preference for specific consumer goods in their cross-border consumption (Ryall, 2015).

Although an increase in shopping tourists may create market niches in the host society, the massive influx of tourist shoppers posed challenges to the everyday lives of local residents, for example, by causing shortages in some commodities and social order disturbances (Qin & May, 2018). Concerns about changing urban landscapes and lifestyles led to the emergence of a “networked counter-public” (boyd, 2010; Dahlberg, 2007; cf. Fraser, 1992) across community-based pages on Facebook, the most popular SNS in Hong Kong. Residents traveling through local neighborhoods used moblogs as “artifacts of engagement” (Clark, 2016) as they managed the problems arising from inbound shopping tourism.

Recent research on the role of mobile devices and social media apps in citizen participation has focused on their strategic use and informational functions in the mobilization of protest demonstrations or the coordination of elections and voting. This strand of research has focused on the more visible forms of civic-political events and ignored the effects of mobile communication performed during banal travel and quotidian activities. This article offers an alternative reading of the relevance of mobile social media in contemporary public lives by examining how they open up new temporalities and spatialities for (counter-)public engagement in the neglected contexts of mundane urban mobility. Using the case of Hong Kong, it illustrates how moblogging practices, clustered around ordinary, small-scale spatialities of city life and circadian temporal rhythms of urban transit, may serve as nuanced “acts of citizenship [...] that transform a subject into a citizen” (Isin & Nielsen, 2008: 18); these practices both “address and call into being a counter-public” (Roslyng & Blaagaard, 2018: 129). Moblogging practices can thus be characterized as a mobile form of mundane citizenship.

This article extends mobile media studies on communicative publicness to consider the ways that daily moblogging practices become improvisational and moving forms of mundane citizenship. Focusing on mobile socialities enabled by smartphones and networking apps, it shows how contemporary moblogging can, on the one hand, extend people's capacity to engage in citizen talk and connective action, while on the other hand, allow them to flexibly connect and contribute personal photobiographies and narratives to counter-public communities. The case study analyzes various moblogging practices that entail modalities of counter-public engagement that traverse the personal, proto-political, and communal. Specifically, the findings demonstrate how local residents used these modalities to articulate alternative public agendas, connect acts of consumer activism, and perform communal belonging vis-à-vis inbound shopping tourism amid their daily routines and modest journeys. By unpacking the novel pathways to citizen participation, this article identifies new ways in which everyday mobile communication can be transformed into public involvement, albeit often in agonistic and emotional forms, and the role of mobile social media in this process.

### **Research context: Inbound shopping tourism and the use of smartphones and Facebook apps in Hong Kong**

Hong Kong has 7.4 million residents and attracted approximately 50 million tourists from mainland China each year in the pre-pandemic period (Siu, 2019). On average, each tourist spent more than HK\$7,000 (approximately US\$900) during an overnight visit and HK\$2,300 (approximately US\$300) during a same-day visit (HKSAR Census and Statistics Department, 2018). However, as the regular shopping outlets of local residents became tourists' shopping destinations, locals had to compete with inbound buyers to obtain resources for their daily use.

Meanwhile, gentrification occurred in the northern and western districts of Hong Kong, i.e., the border areas adjacent to mainland China, as commercial properties changed the urban landscape to meet the needs of tourists rather than those of local residents (Wassener & Hui, 2013).

Marketplaces in these areas were transformed into stores selling the goods demanded by tourist shoppers (e.g., pharmacies selling Western medicine and groceries), and shopping malls accommodated large chain stores or high-end boutiques. The shopping sprees of inbound tourists therefore resulted in “neoliberal consumptionscapes of tourism” (Chen & Ting, 2019), which are disconnected from the local lifestyle and serve the needs of tourists rather than locals.

In this context, local residents, whose access to urban resources, including commodities, infrastructure, and space, was limited by the widespread tourist consumptionscape, began to increasingly use camera-equipped smartphones and social media apps to instantly report and exhibit on prominent Facebook pages the changing urban landscape and livelihoods of affected districts (Ting & Chen, 2021). These mobile and ad hoc Facebook communities constitute a “networked counter-public,” where local residents converged to discuss the negative externalities of inbound shopping tourism and attempted to use moblogging to address local issues “in the dynamic interaction between cyber-space and urban space” (Castells, 2012: 60). The term “networked counter-public” (boyd, 2010; cf. Dahlberg, 2007; Fraser, 1992) refers to subordinated social group members engaging with each other as “invisible” authors and/or audiences, i.e., an aggregation of networked individuals interacting and associating with group members whom they may not know or have exact information on. In the case of Hong Kong, whilst the development of shopping tourism created market niches for corporates and developers, it did not translate into the well-being of urban dwellers. As income and interest only benefited the “official public” of specific retail giants or monopolies with limited connections with local

communities, affected residents, who suffer first-hand from the undesirable costs of shopping tourism, constituted a “counter-public” that their concerns and interests were not represented in the mainstream public policy and discourses (Dahlberg, 2007). Empowered by the ubiquity of mobile social media, they came to display and disseminate daily experiences of and personal encounters with tourist shoppers “to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs” (Fraser, 1992: 123).

Over the years, the use of mobile media and communication technologies has grown substantially in Hong Kong. The growth rate, availability of advanced apps, and the penetration of wireless Internet connection is remarkable. Hong Kong had 13.55 million mobile subscriptions as of 2019, a 20.6% increase in the use of mobile devices between 2011 and 2019, and each citizen owned 1.8 mobile phones (We Are Social, 2011; We Are Social & Hootsuite, 2020). Moreover, because daily social media use is heavily reliant on smartphones, which offer portable connectivity, mobile devices are important factors in the use of SNSs, such as Facebook and Instagram, while on the move (Wei, 2014; Choi, 2016). Moreover, mobile multimedia content uploaded through social media apps is often ephemeral and decentered, as posts are sorted in reverse chronological order (i.e., with the newest posts at the top). They have a greater chance of being seen by more viewers than posts on an individual’s blog page or website and generally reach a greater audience, including individuals unknown to the user. Recently, Hong Kong has witnessed a major increase in the number of active social media users, from 3.8 million in 2011 to 5.8 million in 2019 (We Are Social & Hootsuite, 2020). Of all the SNSs available, Facebook has been the most popular and most frequently used by Hong Kong Internet users for over a decade (Statcounter, 2021). Nearly all Facebook users in Hong Kong (98.5%) use it through their mobile phones (We Are Social & Hootsuite, 2020).

## **Rethinking the relationships between the political and the everyday in the digital age**

The relationships between civic-political participation and everyday life are of interest for much literature in relation to the use of digital media and mobile technologies. In particular, the ways in which the realm of the mundane may function as a politically significant domain of protest demonstrations have attracted considerable attention, especially for scholars of new social movement studies (NSMSs) (Habermas, 1981; Offe, 1985; Melucci, 1996). More recently, with the notion of “the politics of mundanity”, Liu proposes to examine the political dynamics of in digitally mediated, routine daily life, which serve as “precursors of open, confrontational forms of contentious activities” (Liu, 2017: 418) and “the less publicly conspicuous tactics of protest” (Liu, 2017: 422). Following Melucci’s (1996) conceptualization of the interactions between “latent” and “visible” movement activities, he argues that digital platforms are means through which people’s mundane activities structure social networks and prefigure collective goals that become available for collective action mobilization. Other scholars speak about the relevance of everyday processes of networking, learning and meaning construction as mundane online tools for the organization of political participation. For example, researchers have examined how camera phones enable people to record or livestream unexpected incidents that can result in popular protests (Liu, 2013) and how snapshots of private acts can have a political effect (e.g., in the case of online feminist activism) (Vanden Abeele et al., 2018). This literature thus focuses on how everyday processes set the conditions for protest demonstrations to occur as they help maintain “submerged networks” (Melucci, 1996) and oppositional identities (Staggenborg, 1998; Taylor, 1989) through affective bonds, (sub-)cultural activities and/or “free” spaces (Cherry, 2006; Futrell & Simi, 2004).

The increasing use of smartphones and social media apps has stimulated discussions of how individuals' acts and discourses can be connected to those of activist communities and political struggles. For example, individuals in campaign movements can use shared personal photos and narratives on mobile social media apps to construct collective identities that resonate with the group (Khazraee & Novak, 2018). Moreover, on-site protestors can share political updates and connect with previously unknown audiences by (re-)posting real-time photos and videos of protests on Twitter, Facebook, and other mobile social media platforms while on the move (Penney and Dadas, 2014). Other functions of mobile social media, such as location-based hashtags and check-ins, have emerged as tools for protestors to exchange information during demonstrations or other political events (Idle & Nunns, 2011). For example, in the Egyptian revolution of 2011, protestors used the "check-ins" service on Twitter and Facebook to recommend safe routes in real time (Meier, 2011).

While researchers have commonly observed that mobile social media can enable and connect new repertoires of citizen action, these streams of research have limited their investigation to public involvement merely in formal and contentious politics. Particularly in the case of Hong Kong, research has focused on how activist digital media usages were reproduced in people's daily routines, work patterns, and habitual activists during the Umbrella Movement (Ting, 2017; 2019) and Anti-Extradition Bill Movement (AEBM) (Ting, 2020). Albeit from a different perspective, researchers have also investigated how abeyant civil society networks connected the two social movements through everyday digital media uses (Cheng et al., 2021). Others have focused on the impact of proliferating social media on movement continuity after AEBM (Lee et al., 2020). As Mattoni (2017: 500) observes, "such literature mostly considers the moments in which political action is already under way, hence focusing on individuals that are already

engaging with some form of political action and, at times, considering how [... to] deal with the presence of individual newcomers in mobilization”. Their emphasis is on the appropriation of political communication by protest participants, and have focused on events that are “extraordinary” and relatively short-lived. While extant literature has explored collective identity, prefigurative politics and other forms of everyday politics, these processes are framed as important only in explaining how everyday digital media uses provide a primary context for visible forms of contentious politics. Research has not sufficiently examined “how latent processes might themselves become a focus of overt political attention” (Yates, 2015: 240) and that there may be other forms of mobile social media uses for public mobilization outside of protest demonstrations.

As shown in this study, today’s public involvement increasingly revolves around digitally savvy urban dwellers, whose mobile and networked participation cannot be captured by the conventional contentious political paradigm (Theocharis, 2015). As far, less is known about how everyday uses of mobile social media are simultaneously politicized and politicizing beyond mobilizing and organizing visible forms of protest movements. Research is particularly lacking in the exploration of the enduring and recurrent public involvement derived from communicative interactions in the contexts of mundane urban mobility (Binnie et al., 2007; Wei, 2014). To address these gaps, this study expands the concept of mundane citizenship to examine the ways in which lay citizens come to engage in public contestation in mobile and networked urban environments. Specifically, it extends mobile media studies on communicative publicness to explicate how daily moblogging practices can facilitate everyday forms of citizen participation by forging new sites of active citizenship during banal travel and quotidian activities in the city.



## **Mundane citizenship, mobile sociality, and smartphone apps**

The concept of mundane citizenship was developed by Bakardjieva (2011; 2012) to capture the role of new communication media in recent waves of citizen action and identity work in the everyday lives of individuals and groups. It seeks to characterize the growth of civic-political engagement that in digital environments has been “intertwined with the routine activities and concerns of everyday living” (Bakardjieva, 2012: 1357). Converging media technologies are improving people’s ability in “prosuming” digital content (Jenkins et al., 2013), that is, individuals are not only viewing, but also increasingly producing and disseminating “content for the media or talk and action engaging with the worldly affairs” (Bakardjieva, 2011: 67). In connection with theories of (mediated) public connection (Couldry et al., 2007) and everyday politics in social media (Highfield 2016), the concept of mundane citizenship is important to the study of networked forms of citizen participation and public deliberation. This article extends this framework to capture the latest trends in public engagement and articulation in mobile social media uses, centering on urban dwellers’ mobile media-enabled activities and experiences and on their civic-political resonances.

Extending research on communicative publicness (Sheller, 2004; Sheller & Urry, 2003), in this study, I emphasize the importance of the porous nature of mobile communication as it helps reconfigure “new hybrids of public-in-private and private-in-public that disrupt commonly held spatial models of these as two separate ‘spheres’” (Sheller, 2004: 39). Conceptually, I foreground mobile socialities enabled by smartphones and social media apps, whereby urban dwellers can flexibly “slip in and out of different contexts, identities, and relationships [...] for the momentary ‘gelling’ of public identities and actions” (Sheller, 2004: 41). In this sense, this study presents a case for exploring the proto-political potentiality of moblogging, i.e., its capacity for turning

private moments into (counter-)public engagement that enable the “coming together of private citizens as a public” (Habermas, 1989; cited in Sheller, 2004: 39) during daily routines and banal travel.

As converging practices of mobility and communication, contemporary moblogging allows users to create and publish brief multimedia content (e.g., text, hyperlinks, images, audios, and videos) while on the move (Graham, 2012). Afforded by the latest uses of smartphones and mobile technologies, it varies from the traditional forms of moblogging in the use of phone cameras and social networking platforms. First, owing to growing communicative mobility and strong Wi-Fi connectivity in the city, contemporary moblogging allows users to upload multimedia content in the form of original posts or follow-up comments in real time while using urban transportation or engaging in quotidian activities (Owigar & Chepken, 2008). Second, visual narrativity has taken on a more significant role in reporting an ad hoc situation and presenting a spontaneous experience to a community on SNSs (Ting, 2021). Recent studies have helped illustrate how the pervasive adoption of mobile devices and social media afford otherwise dispersed individuals to converge quickly and develop social ties across temporal and spatial boundaries. It is suggested that the Facebook app facilitates the articulation of “mobile social media publics,” as it allows for an “always-on” mode of engagement and “on-the-go” access in public spaces (Willems, 2020). Scholars have also noted that mobile social media offers a means to create networked sociality and cyber connectivity, as users “connect and reconnect to each other through the Internet, mobile phones, tablets or phablets” (Liu, 2015, 336). These discussions of connective forms of (counter-)public thus offer insights into how moblogging may facilitate “momentary stabilizations of collective identities and social-communicative actions as publics” (Sheller, 2004: 50).

Beyond their uses for self-expression and urban leisure through the personalization of public space, this article contends that daily moblogging practices are vital to the emergence of mundane citizenship because they open up new temporalities and spatialities for citizen talk and connective action in places where social relations and connections for (counter-)public engagement were previously lacking, such as riding on urban transit systems and engaging in quotidian activities. Citizen talk refers to discourses and informal discussions that citizens initiate to make political decisions and contest social realities (Klofstad, 2010; Schmitt-Beck & Grill, 2020). Mobile media and communication technologies have advanced these processes by allowing users to more seamlessly switch between the production and consumption of multimedia content, transforming them from mere spectators to active participants in a moment. Connective action refers to new forms of collective engagement, whereby mobile social media users adopt personalized communication, such as individualized contents and action frames, to mobilize or directly engage in political and citizen action (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013).

Equally important are the “networked audience activities” (Quan-Haase & Martin, 2013: 521) built on moblogging, through which mobile social media users in the audience can simultaneously contribute and co-create content by experimenting with various visual and textual elements remotely. By allowing people to add personal photobiographies and narratives when re-posting and responding to existing or unfolding moblogs, SNSs encourage users to collaborate in prosumption activities and engage in public discussions. The updating and “sharing of these artifacts of engagement [...] functioned as personalized expressions of a collective counterpublic that propelled people toward connective action” (Clark, 2016: 244); people are responsive to the formation of “ad hoc communities without the need to establish mutual follower/followee relationships with any members of those communities” (Bruns & Burgess, 2012: 3). Therefore,

contemporary moblogging and its associated audience activities offer new opportunities for (counter-)public engagement among mobile urban populations by enabling them to connect and contribute to the communities of networked (counter-)public while traveling in the city.

## **Methodology**

This study conducted a digital ethnography of three Facebook community pages in Hong Kong, namely, “North District Parallel Imports Concern Group” (@NDPICG), “D18 – Sha Tin Locals” (@ShaTinLocals), and “Tung Chung Future” (@TungChungFuture). The three pages were selected because they were the most popular pages among local residents in the respective districts, which are affected by inbound shopping tourism. As suggested by their page or group names, they represent the border towns in the northern and western parts of the city, which are adjacent to mainland China. The three Facebook community pages were established in 2012, 2013, and 2015, respectively, and they are managed by local residents. A few years after their creation, the membership of these pages greatly increased and they now form large virtual communities. Mostly, these pages have been used as ad hoc channels of everyday communication, i.e., spaces where the residents could share and discuss their everyday urban lives and through which they could express feelings and thoughts and seek personal advice and support from each other.

This study observed content posted on the three Facebook pages including posts, comments, and responses regarding inbound shopping tourism and/or mainland Chinese tourist shoppers for two years, from January 1, 2016 to January 1, 2018. During the period of study, a new wave of inbound shopping tourism developed in Hong Kong after impact of the 2014 Umbrella Movement faded out (PartnerNet, 2019). As an interpretive and inductive research methodology,

digital ethnography involves the unobtrusive, observational analysis of visual and textual content on digital platforms (Langer & Beckman, 2005). It is considered an effective method for understanding networked practices and examining the points of view of participants in digital spaces (Kozinets, 2012); it is suitable for the study of networked counter-publics and their community culture.

Following Kozinets (2012), the observations conducted on the Facebook pages were considered ethnographic field observations. These observations were used to evaluate the daily moblogging practices and their potential for promoting public involvement. During the observations, I traced and took screenshots of all relevant posts along with their comments, replies, and engagement data (numbers of likes, shares, and comments) and made field notes for further analysis. I note that although the dataset did not include all of the material posted on mobile social media, the analysis of moblogs in some of the districts most affected by shopping tourism offers insights into the mobile social media uses that are the foundation of counter-public engagement and articulation.

The analysis aimed at reconstructing the mobile communicative practices performed by local residents on the community pages and what they revealed about the participants' modes of thought, patterns of mobilization, and webs of practices (Gherardi, 2012). It began with a basic coding of the empirical materials to identify the various topics and features of moblogging and the ways that these shaped and contributed to the formation of a counter-public in and across local neighborhoods. Through the process of dialogical data generation (Carspecken, 1996), I gradually refined and narrowed down the key themes. Subsequently, I interpreted these themes to construct meaningful scholarly discourses to reveal how mundane citizenship occurs in the moblog sphere. In the discussion of the study findings, I group these observations into different

modalities of moblogging that reflect the major themes observed across the three Facebook pages during the study period.

## **Analysis**

### *Moblogging as bottom-up agenda setting during daily commutes*

Contemporary moblogging makes visible a space that is “between” the private space of home and the public space of work or school, a previous “non-place” of mobility and travel (Lee, 2009). Today, owing to the pervasive use of camera phones, the photo-taking and livestreaming practices of individuals have been extended to capture their encounters with tourist shoppers in these “between times” and “non-places.” Whilst moblogging practices varied across urban dwellers, one of the most noticeable features was the negative feelings they exhibited toward tourist shoppers. The local residents, especially those who had to commute daily, reported and (re)presented mainland Chinese tourist shoppers in mobile social media as primarily a group of cultural disturbers. By (re)telling their personal stories, commuting residents illuminated the micro-realities of their living world and unveiled the marginalized or less-highlighted occurrences that were previously invisible or simply disregarded in the mainstream media and ignored by policy-makers.

Analysis of moblogs posted by local residents on the Facebook pages revealed that in districts affected by the influx of tourist shoppers, local residents intensively used mobile social media and smartphones to visually illustrate and explore their personal experiences with inbound shopping tourism. For example, they commonly remarked on the time they spent commuting from their homes to their places of work and vice versa. Especially during rush hours, moblogs posted by commuting residents captured the “dislocating rhythms” (Binnie et al., 2007) caused

by tourist shoppers. For example, they uploaded captioned images and videos to the community pages that complained about how large groups (e.g., dozens or even hundreds) of tourist shoppers inconvenienced their trips by occupying train stations, blocking the subway with large suitcases, and obstructing main roads while gathering and packing goods on streets. Others livestreamed on the community pages to inform people about traffic jams caused by the numerous tourist shuttle buses parking on main roads, to denounce the significant amount of solid waste (e.g., cardboard and plastic boxes) left behind by shoppers in the busy mornings, and to offer advice on detours to avoid the crowds or rubbish. By presenting themselves as eyewitnesses to the disturbances to everyday life in their neighborhoods, they contributed an array of first-hand experiences or “ephemeral evidence” (Clark, 2016: 244) of the disruptions brought by tourist shoppers on their way to work or home.

Figure 1. Screenshot of a moblog complaining about tourist shoppers obstructing main roads



For most of the commuting residents, moblogging was not just complaining about personal inconveniences caused by tourist shoppers, but a way to express their opinions to the public on Facebook. A large number of moblogs featured discourses on systemic failures in the city's social and political system. Apart from portraying tourist shoppers as "uncivilized" intruders, they attributed the problems caused by tourist shoppers to poor urban governance. These problems included selective enforcement of the law, absence of control, and lack of regard for local residents' concerns. For example, a significant number of moblogs expressed discontent with the local authorities. They claimed that neither the police force nor the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department accepted responsibility for resolving the problems caused by tourist shoppers; instead, the authorities indulged the shoppers' intrusive behaviors. Moreover, they commonly felt that the authorities enforced the law inequitably; the authorities often accused local licensed hawkers, who attended to the local residents' needs, of obstructing the roads, yet they ignored the obstruction and pollution caused by tourist shoppers.

The bottom-up agendas articulated and disseminated in the moblog sphere encouraged an array of synchronized "networked audience activities" (Quan-Haase & Martin, 2013). Commuting residents across different districts, who found themselves in similar situations, instantly engaged with each other and added more nuance to the unfolding "reality" of inbound shopping tourism during commutes. They simultaneously posted captioned visuals in response to relevant moblogs to express their aversion to people who carried huge suitcases in train stations and roughly bumped into other commuters. They expressed strong feelings and emotions in their real-time follow-up posts and comments, such as "In front of me, there is a bunch of smugglers who interfere with our normal daily lives" and "I hate the fact that I'm standing near them right now." These networked audience activities associated with moblogging connected urban



travelers and encouraged robust citizen discussion, whereby commuting residents engaged in casual and personalized forms of proto-political conversation through content co-creation and peer-sharing while on the move.

Therefore, daily moblogging practices not only enabled local residents to share their personal experiences during daily commutes, but also helped them to raise public awareness of relevant local issues and structural problems they encountered in the “between” times and spaces; they sought to expose the hidden structures that caused the negative externalities of shopping tourists, especially regarding rapidly changing local urban landscape and lifestyles. As the personal (re)presentations of “biased” law enforcement and “failing” legislations emerged as a popular focus of moblogging, commuting residents were able to self-identify issues of local importance and openly challenge the institutional settings that they perceived as indulging shopping tourism. As such, these moblogs served as “bottom-up public agendas” (Farrell & Drezner, 2008) that occupied a key position in the formation of a networked counter-public; they created points of attention and issue salience, through which ad hoc members in the moblogging communities could (re)interpret and contemplate the roots and routes of inbound shopping tourism through alternative lenses.

#### *Moblogging as self-mobilization of consumer activism during shopping and dining trips*

While moblogging was used by commuting residents to channel (re)presentations of “uncivilized” shopping tourists and to prompt bottom-up public agendas while on the move, such converging practices of mobility and communication also developed into active venues for promoting and connecting acts of consumer activism during other seemingly trivial activities and quotidian journeys. In several districts that were most popular among shopping tourists,

excessive purchases of necessities, such as vaccines and other health products and commodities, led to a shortage of supplies (Qin & May, 2018). Moreover, as the regular shopping outlets of local residents became tourist shopping destinations, locals had to compete with inbound buyers to secure enough resources for their daily use, while small traditional shops serving local consumers, such as local diners, clinics, and grocery stores, were pushed to peripheral locations or forced to close due to declining profits (Chen & Ting, 2019). Against this backdrop, moblogging through the Facebook app during one's shopping or dining trip served as a handy tool for the locals to challenge the proliferating tourist consumptionscape.

Observations of the Facebook pages showed that local residents frequently uploaded captioned visuals on the Facebook pages of local communities to self-exhibit their immediate shopping activities when they patronized locally oriented businesses in real time, especially those that were affected by soaring rents and the segregated marketplace. Often, these shopping residents highlighted distinctive features of these shops that they enjoyed, such as “great human touch” and “being consumer friendly.” Moreover, they published moblogs that served as brief consumer reviews to identify, locate, verify, and/or certify locally oriented businesses on behalf of the Facebook communities.

Figure 2. Screenshot of a moblog showing support for a locally oriented hawker booth



Analysis of the moblogs of conscious-consumption also showed that local residents did not just recommend the stores to the audience. Rather, many of them reflected on the “unpleasant” shopping experiences at tourist-oriented stores. Sharing personal encounters with these businesses during or immediately after the event was an important way of achieving peer-to-peer persuasion in consumer activism (Kuehn, 2015). While shopping and dining, local residents uploaded real-time images, videos, and shop details that denounced tourist-oriented stores and expressed anger and frustration over the prioritization of tourist shoppers. Indeed, such events were common occurrences given the widespread tourist consumptionscape in the affected districts. When this happened, the improvisational customer critiques and complaints highlighted their personal experiences of being neglected or offended by shopkeepers who focused only on shopping tourists because of greater profits expectations, a common practice of these stores.

While the moblogs published by shopping residents aimed at mobilizing boycotts of tourist-oriented businesses, they also offered opportunities for further counter-public engagement by inviting the networked audience to continuously contribute follow-up posts. Rather than starting new posts, many mobile social media users uploaded captioned pictures and posted ad hoc comments, such as “I’m now having a meal there” and “I’m there now and I’ll keep supporting it like you do” in the comment sections of existing moblogs to show support for the locally oriented businesses. They did this within a few days of following the original moblogs, as they shopped or passed by stores of interest and/or businesses of concern. Others commented on the same products and/or services that they were enjoying in the moment and passionately replied to “the shopping guides” posted by others, adding positive/negative reviews of the shops and updating information on their menus or items. A common reaction was to display one’s buy- or boycott activity to others in the networked counter-public when shopping and dining out in respective neighborhoods. This unfinished and open-ended characteristic of contemporary moblogging created a “living archive” (Hall, 2001), which helped consolidate consumer citizenship by connecting otherwise dispersed efforts that challenged inbound shopping tourism.

Whilst displaying one’s consumption behaviors articulates a possible pathway to “consumer citizenship” (Kallhoff, 2013), local residents took on the role of “prosumers” (Ritzer & Jurgenson, 2010) to display their participation in conscious consumption through the production and dissemination of moblogs. In these cases, moblogging functioned as a connective infrastructure of “self-mobilization” (Lee, 2015), through which loosely connected individuals initiated and promoted conscious consumption through everyday uses of mobile social media in a largely diffuse, horizontal manner. By creating these mobile and ephemeral “shopping guides,”

they attempted to mobilize other people in the networked audience to patronize the stores that prioritized the needs of locals.

*Moblogging as performance of communal belonging while strolling in and across neighborhoods*

Over the years, the shopping sprees of inbound tourists have shaped an “enclave” consumptionscape (Chen & Ting, 2019). In many of the affected districts, the proliferation of the tourist consumptionscape separated urban dwellers from their local environment and culture. This led to conflict and confrontation between the urban dwellers and shopping tourists not just over the socio-spatial arrangements of local communities, but also their social and cultural meanings. Apart from attempts to denounce and reverse the disrupted temporal and spatial orders of the locals’ everyday world, daily practices of moblogging entailed uploading mobile and ephemeral content that exhibited both a reactionary attempt to perform communal belonging and construct cultural membership vis-à-vis inbound shopping tourism.

Observations of the Facebook pages showed that local residents frequently used moblogging to express anger at the loss of meaningful places, which they perceived as a major consequence of inbound shopping tourism. Especially during weekends and public holidays, personal photobiographies and narratives were frequently posted and shared on Facebook to report iconic spots in the local neighborhoods that had been demolished by developers or express disappointment about shops that had been forced to close. For example, local residents traveling around the city for leisure or work constantly posted captioned images or videos to reflect on the closure of the restaurants that they had visited and been fond of. Sometimes, in their captions or

voice-overs, they expressed a sense of resentment over the replacement of their enjoyable memories with the dull tourist-oriented stores as they traveled in and across the neighborhoods.

Another tendency of moblogging was to condemn “touristy” behaviors in shopping malls that local residents frequently visited during their leisure time. In recent years, many businesses had started to sell golden jewelry and watches, cosmetics, herbal medicines, toddler products, and luxury brand products to cater to mainland Chinese tourist shoppers at malls. Local residents often uploaded captioned images and videos to denounce these shopping behaviors in real time. Some of them would even follow the tourist shoppers from a distance to livestream and micro-broadcast their shopping trips. They documented the excessive consumption of mainland Chinese tourists during their travels and mocked the tourists for being “tuhao,” i.e., someone who comes from a poor peasant background and has become rich quickly but does not have the manners or sophistication to match their wealth. Filming shopping tourism while on the move provided another reference point for networked audience activities in and across the Facebook communities. Networked audience, especially those who were in the same neighborhoods, traced the real-time events and instantly participated in them on Facebook. Some of them even called the shopping tourists “locusts” to denote their excessive shopping behaviors and denounced their “filthy rich” attitudes, which they contended were “unimaginable” and “impossible” to find in locals.

Using mobile social media to (re)tell personal stories and share real-life images in and across Facebook communities helped promote in-group solidarity within the counter-public. However, unlike the “civil” model of a public sphere primarily built on rational discourses (cf. Habermas, 1989), some moblogging practices appealed to aggressive narrations and emotional expressions as they mobilized stereotypes as conceptual resources to enable others to understand the issues at

hand and to formulate responses. Through the circulation of “disturbing” scenes and distant witnessing, they built oppositional categories of cultural membership between “insiders/locals” and “outsiders/inbound shopping tourists,” which in turn served as a basis for the (re)production and performance of communal belonging in the moblog sphere.

Figure 3. Screenshot of a moblog stating, “Locusts are back @ Tuen Mun Town Plaza”



## Conclusion

Extant literature has acknowledged the importance of the ubiquitous presence of digital technologies and considered how ordinary people organize for formal and contentious politics in their everyday lives. However, these strands of research have tended to reduce the potential of social media and mobile communication to opportunities or constraints for protest demonstrations. Alternatively, this article seeks to explore contemporary public lives, with an account of how public engagement and contestation can be associated with and performed

through uses of smartphone and Facebook app in the context of mundane urban mobility. Specifically, it has been shown that mobile communication between networked individuals in sharing daily experiences via contemporary moblogging allows public agendas to be articulated and tested in and across Facebook communities. These citizen talks were then acted upon by the loosely connected members of the counter-public as part of their everyday urban routines and banal activities, which in turn provided new “artifacts of engagement” for further engagement. Notably, such daily practices of mobile social media display an alternative mode of public involvement, not as “precursors” of visible forms of contentious collective action, but as changing temporal and spatial characteristics of participation that take place in the course of urban everyday life.

This study, therefore, recommends a shift away from the conventional frameworks of political communication in the landscape of resources mobilization or political opportunities to an improvisational and moving form of mundane citizenship. An analysis of moblogging as constituting diverse aspects of mundane citizenship deepens how we conceptualize mobile device and social media app use and how we understand their impact on public involvement. It has been revealed that various moblogging practices and networked audience activities generate novel pathways to counter-public engagement, as they extend individuals’ capacity to flexibly connect and contribute to the communities of networked counter-public amid modest urban journeys. Although many of these practices and activities were not contentious collective action, their proto-political textures were clearly visible. Through moblogging, the visibility and voices of local residents, who have been underrepresented in public policies and mainstream discourses for many years, are raised. While such connective forms of counter-public engagement might appear to be ephemeral and is often composed of agonistic and emotional contents, mobile



media-enabled residents brought a counter-public into being as they articulated alternative public agendas from below, connected acts of consumer activism, and reproduced communal belonging.

However, while this study has illuminated the porous nature of mobile device and social media app use during banal travel and quotidian activities, it pertains to contemporary moblogging surrounding a particular public issue in Hong Kong. There is still considerable work to be done in exploring the use of mobile media and communication in the articulation of various (counter-)public agendas in the city and beyond. Future avenues of research may examine citizen involvement, potentially using the concept of mundane citizenship on the move to explore how (counter-)public engagement is experienced and shaped by the use of mobile social media. Moreover, recognizing the limitations of mobile forms of networked activism might be particularly important in the context of Hong Kong. As opportunities for street politics faded in the region, activist citizens have come to contribute to social media content and update information on smartphone apps while partaking in politically driven consumption activities for AEBM, known as the “yellow economy”. While the cases examined in this study were for the most part independent of the prodemocracy movement, consumer activists of the yellow economy might have been required to engage in risk-taking activities, especially when facing urban policing in enforcing social distancing measures and the new national security law. The effectiveness of using mobile communication and social media for such activism may be undermined in the region.

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