

Social media use amongst  
taxi and private hire drivers  
and customers

11056

November 2011



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- **Research conducted by SPA future thinking**



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- Apps
- Customers

→ Discussion / questions

# → Background and context





# Social media

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TfL and SPA are working on a number of different social media projects

→ Transport for London is increasingly exploiting social media as a research tool

- Allows us to hear the voices of those who would not always respond to traditional research methods
- Puts content in its natural context, and avoids the sense that someone is 'speaking to the researcher'
- As such you tend to find what people are 'really talking about'

→ Social media is a broad term encompassing a wide variety of (online) content

- Includes well known websites like Facebook, Twitter and YouTube
- But also other user-generated content such as on personal blogs and forums
- For the purposes of this study we are also looking at mobile Apps





# Taxi and private hire (TPH)

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- As the licensing authority TfL needs to communicate in a cost-effective way with both the taxi and private hire trade
  - At present updates and notices are issued through the TfL website, and occasionally letters
  - However means are sought to communicate with drivers with much greater immediacy and on a more personal basis
  
- Taxi drivers and PHV drivers tend to have different demographic profiles
  - Taxi drivers tend to be white men, while PHV drivers are more likely to be from black, Asian or minority ethnic (BAME) communities
  
- The private hire trade encompasses minicab, chauffeur services and some tour guide / private contact services, ranging from very small operators to large companies
  - As such it is a diverse community with varied needs
  
- It is known that there has been growth in the use of social media and smartphone technology among taxi and PHV drivers
  - This report sets out knowledge gathered through desk research into the extent and nature of TPH use of social media
  - While some taxi and PHV drivers do use social media, we will see that others do not and this must be borne in mind when considering any communications strategy



# Summary





# Summary

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- The majority of content appears to be generated by taxi drivers rather than PHV
  - There seems to be a community of up between 500 and 1,000 taxi drivers who are actively using social media
  - It may be that PH users are harder to detect
  
- Taxi drivers use social media for all kinds of things
  - Arranging bookings, sharing road traffic and demand information, experiences and advice about the trade
  - But also non-work related content, such as general conversation about football or politics
  
- For PHV drivers and operators there is less visible content
  - Twitter is mainly used to advertise services
  
- Apps market is growing and tends to be divided into taxi and private hire Apps
  - Remains to be seen what customer uptake is likely to be
  
- Amongst customers themselves there is a reasonable amount of content regarding TPH
  - Mainly taxis, or Addison Lee – as these are the major players
  - The majority of content is on Twitter and centres on individual experiences of using taxis and minicabs

# → Taxi drivers and social media

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# Taxi drivers and social media

- A small group of taxi drivers are using social media
  - Probably up to a maximum of 1,000, out of the total of c26,000 drivers overall\*
- They are using a wide variety of social media
  - Twitter is very commonly used
  - There are various active forums and blogs
  - YouTube and Flickr are both in use
  - Little evidence of widespread Facebook use
- There is some overlap between the medium and the message:

## Road conditions / demand management

- Twitter
- Blogs

## Bookings

- Apps
- Twitter

## Chit-chat

- Twitter
- Forums

## Trade discussions

- Forums

\* Estimate based on the number of users of cabup and various forums



# @TweetaLondoncab

## Twitter tool for booking of London cabs

- Society of London taxi drivers to share information and bookings
  - At present relatively small – only a few hundred drivers out of the total 25,000
  - All 'authenticated' at 'Twitter meetings' where they have to show their badge
  - Then signed up to closed twitter feeds
  - Claimed sign up with STaN campaign – website claims they are “Fully TFL-Affiliated”
  - 18,000 followers at present
- @TLC\_chair is the controller, who assigns the bookings
  - @cabup is a community scheme sharing information about road conditions and traffic
- Used to be free, now they are charging a £30 annual fee for @TLC\_Chair
  - And for @cabup they have a sponsorship deal with Ascott Cab Company but will charge new members
- Where there are customer comments, these tend to be very positive



@tweetalon  
London's Virtual



**batch\_services** Batch Ltd

Anyone in London in need of a **black cab** should try

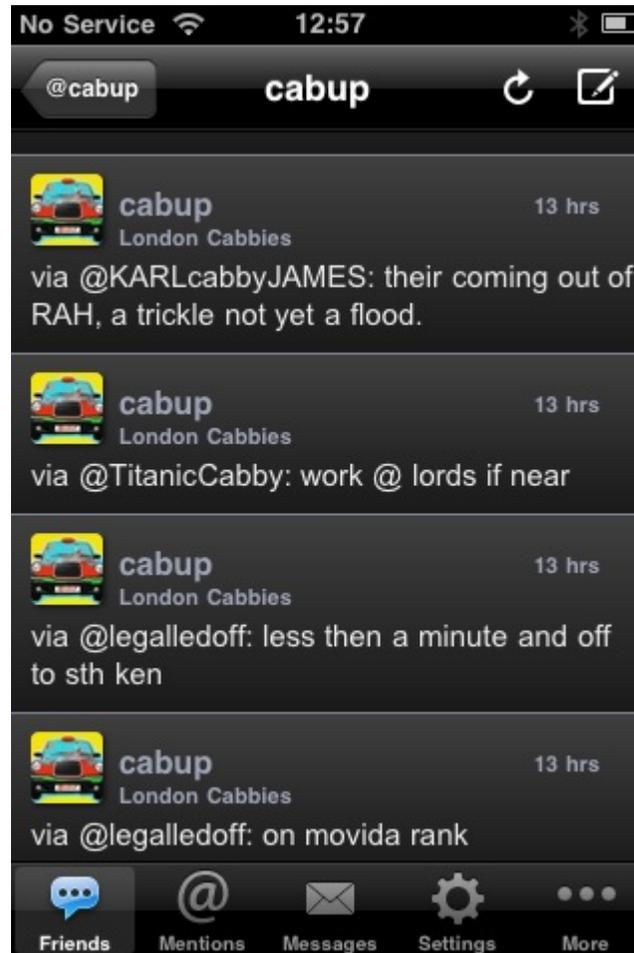
[@tweetalondoncab](#) - we have and warmly recommend it. They make you feel a little special.

28 Sep



# @cabup is used for sharing traffic and demand information

Though this is closed off and cannot be viewed by non-taxi drivers



To become a member you need to be a registered taxi driver, and to have attended a 'Twitter School' session run by TLC, normally at Kings Cross Taxi Centre at Camley Street

Messages contain slang / abbreviations (eg RAH = Royal Albert Hall)

NOTE: this example is publicly available on the [tweetalondontaxi website](https://www.tweetalondontaxi.com), not behind a password



# General chat is also prevalent amongst drivers

## Taxi drivers tweet about everything from politics to football

- Where content is publicly viewable, it's generally just chit chat
  - Some is political, commenting on the day's news, some concerns sport, some just conversation between people who spend most of the day driving around London
  - Some respond to customers who have had bad experiences with PHV firms



**3offtheT** Michael  
Tiger Woods teams up with Rolex, they must be about to release a new two faced watch.  
3 hours ago



**jockthecab** Robin rowe  
**@stevetheparrot** not had a smoke now for over a week ☐  
4 Oct



**paulie21832** paul simons  
**@lapvito @ianztg @mikeinns** that was borozsky n he the one taking to court I thought  
4 hours ago



**cabiblophile** William Grozier  
The UK & Greece both have excessive debts. We expect the Greeks to swallow the medicine and bitch like hell about our much smaller dose.  
6 hours ago

**@LondonTaxiBoss's Tweets are protected.**  
Only confirmed followers have access to @LondonTaxiBoss's Tweets and complete profile. You need to send a request before you can start following this account.



**grimmers** nick grimshaw  
Never, ever using stupid **@addisonlee** again  
22 hours ago

in reply to ↑



**@bonzocosta**  
Alfie Costa

**@grimmers @addisonlee** too right. Always use a proper London black cab. We know where we're going. Not like those mugs.



**Spencercabbie** Spencer  
**@londontaxilee** you out later mate?  
9 hours ago



**Spencercabbie** Spencer  
**@paulie21832 @SlimAlsCabs @jockthecab** good afternoon gents.  
9 hours ago

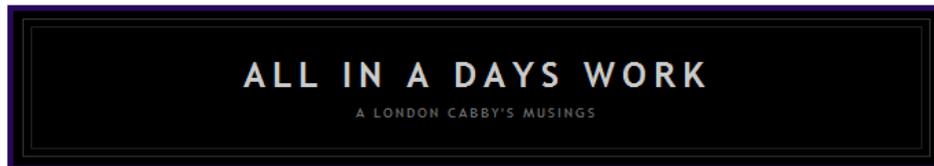
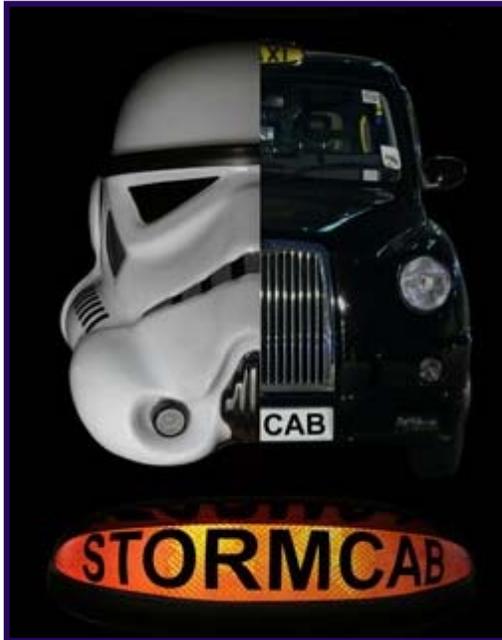


**Spencercabbie** Spencer  
Good afternoon all you wonderful people working the the streets of london town. ☐☐☐  
9 hours ago



# Blogs and forums

Blogs and forums are used for lengthier dialogue

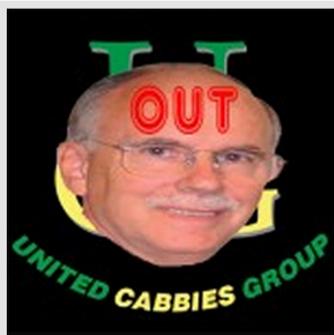




# There are numerous taxi drivers' forums

There is publicly available content, and that which requires registration

- Many contain blogs which appear to be fairly popular
  - Tend to focus on political issues such as STaN, unlicensed cabs, blacked out windows, taxi drivers' use of the Olympic routes, touting etc
  - This type of forum provides more room for considered debate and there are regular contributors of fairly extensive articles
  - Cover a wide variety of issues (traffic, fines, insurance, social media etc)
  
- The topic that generates the most content and passion is that of competition with PH drivers
  - That said, factions within the taxi driver community also come through on forums
  - The issue of Olympic fare increases recently made this clearly visible
  
- The most recent 'hot topics' are the Olympics fare increases, and the Remembrance Day celebrations (during which taxi drivers offered free transport for veterans)



## Remembrance Sunday 2011 – Proud as Punch.

Latest news

by editor 1



On Sunday 13th November the United Cabbies Group organised the second Remembrance Sunday Free Shuttle Service to take all the veterans and their friends, family and helpers to the Cenotaph in London's Whitehall. After the success of last year's event we decided to expand the operation to more of London's stations. Our marshals were in ...

[Continue reading »](#)



# Illegal touting by minicab drivers comes through as the issue that most concerns taxi drivers

There is a strong perception that this is damaging to trade, dangerous for passengers, and that TfL is not doing enough to enforce licence conditions

- The focus on PH drivers' behaviour is consistent with the concerns raised by taxi drivers in other spheres, including surveys and anecdotal feedback
- There is clearly concern that TfL is not doing enough to ensure fair competition
  - This type of theme is very common (source: <http://theandersonshelter.blogspot.com/>)
  - The Anderson Shelter is the main champion of this topic, but it has very wide support
- Discourse around touting is very often linked with comment about passenger safety
  - Particularly in relation to late night venues
- News stories about minicab drivers being convicted of offences against passengers are posted on forums, and are much commented upon
  - The subject of blackened out windows in minicabs is also raised in relation to this question
- Some taxi drivers actually make videos of alleged touting offences and post these on Youtube or their blogs
- Other examples of Youtube posts detailing minicabs 'bad behaviour'
  - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JEYBPjjVuRk&feature=related>
  - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rVuubvDSBww&feature=related>

## NO BOOKING! NO RIDE

Yet we the sheep of the cab trade are happy to go along with whatever TfL dream up (without asking us) to deflect attention from their woeful lack of enforcement against PH touting, the mystery of the forged bills, aided and abetted by some whose self preservation outweighs the long term health of the world's no.1 Taxi service.

Therefore:

We should not be prepared to even consider the matter of 'identifiers' in Taxis until PH are required to have in large lettering (at least as big as any other logo and lettering on the vehicle) the words (or similar)

**THIS VEHICLE MUST BE PRE BOOKED,IF NOT YOU AS A PASSENGER ARE UNINSURED.**

Yet again we are the bad guys and PH seen as not a problem by TfL. They consulted on the PH but not on identifiers, WHY?





# Use of red routes and Olympic routes is also contentious

Social media can be used to organise demonstrations against perceived injustices

- Many taxi drivers are upset about enforcement and rules regarding their privileged use of bus / Olympic routes
  - Indeed, a protest is planned for 6 October on this very issue as advertised on the Anderson Shelter website
- See also this article on the United Cabbies group website

Aug 23 Go Johnny Go... Latest news by editor 1

**Go Johnny Go... Forth and Multiply!**

Addison Lee Lose Legal Challenge Appeal to get in Bus Lanes!



On Thursday 18th August 2011, Minicab Monkey John Griffin, boss of London's largest second rate transport service provider Addison Lee lost his legal challenge appeal to get his minicabs into London's bus lanes.

WEDNESDAY, 5 OCTOBER 2011

## **DEMONSTRATION, THIS THURSDAY 6th 5pm**

**The United Cabby's Group, are calling on the London Taxi trade to demonstrate over the trades ban from the Olympic rout network.**

A LOCOG test event will be held at Lords Cricket Ground this Thursday 6th October.

The committee of the UCG invites all Taxi drivers, from all unions and associations, to come along and protest over the exclusion of the Licensed Taxi Trade, from Olympic lanes during the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic games. The Demonstration will take the form of a drive-a-round the statue of St George on the St Johns Wood round-a-bout.



# Some particularly helpful taxi drivers post road updates and other useful information

There are a few very active and influential content generators

- Stormcab is a well respected blogger, despite apparently believing he is “Part Stormtrooper, part Taxi Driver”
- His site which is updated regularly contains useful information including:
  - London Road and Points updates
  - London PCN hotspots
  - Useful websites
  - “London taxi lingo” (abbreviations and slang)
- Like others, Stormcab also uses his blog to share information about his personal interests



Hilton Hotel Olympia Kensington High Street W14	Unless you are a taxi, you cannot stop outside. If you are a taxi you cannot wait for too long.	Camera is on Southside Kensington High Street, between Warwick Gdns & Warwick Rd
Lavender Walk SW4	Access only	drivers are now receiving PCNs
Lea Bridge Rd/Orient Way Junction	Yellow Box/Zig Zags	
Lexington Street W1	Parked on East Side facing north, 10ft from Beak Street	Camera is about 10 ft along Beak St from Lexington on northside. So most of Beak St covered

## Places

Arsehole of the World - Deptford SE8

The Batcave - Westfield Shopping Centre (T6)/Lower Robert Street WC2/Area under Charing Cross Station (there seems to be a debate as to what EXACTLY it refers to)

Blackfriars Underpants/BFUP - Blackfriars Underpass

The Bone - Marylebone Station

Bullring - The crescent at the entrance to back of Royal Hospital Chelsea Embankment

CK's - Chelsea Kitchen (Fulham Rd)



# Taxi drivers' views on their customers

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This is a topic of much debate on taxi driver forums

- There is a whole spectrum of view points on customers' rights and responsibilities
- Some take the view that it's 'my cab, my rules', and tend to complain about customers who want to make a short journey, question the route or don't tip
- Others regard the 'customer as king' and give short shrift to the 'moaners'
- This discussion sometimes ranges into the territory of what happens when there are PCO complaints, with some viewing the customer as 'always right' and challenging those who moan about customers who complain when they are refused a taxi for a short journey, for example



# Private hire

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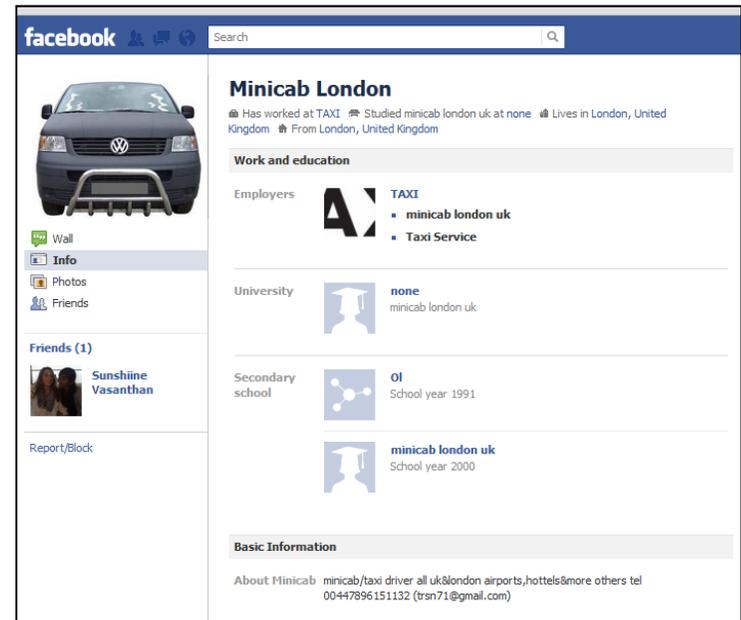
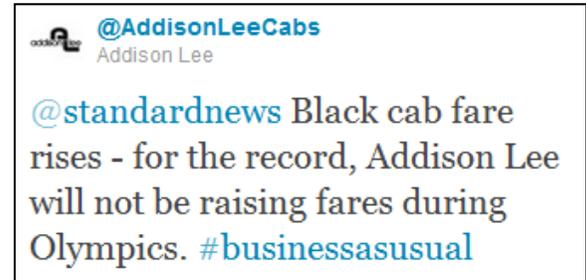




# Private hire drivers much less obviously vocal on Twitter

It could just be that they are hard to find, but it appears that Twitter use is much lower amongst PHV drivers

- Instead, some PHV companies tend to tweet adverts for their services
- Some have Facebook pages, or even adverts on Gumtree
- Addison Lee has a much bigger presence
  - They have a Twitter feed and dedicated App





# The growth of the Apps market

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## The range is growing, but this creates a problem

- There are now probably at least a dozen Apps for booking black cabs / PHV
  - Some offer a full booking service but many at the moment just provide phone numbers for local firms
- However, the lack of a single platform (Android, iPhone, BlackBerry, Ovi etc) and the fact that individual Apps are not available on all platforms means that taxi drivers (and customers) need to choose
  - Other services use a special box which is installed in vehicles
- Further down the road there may be either convergence of platforms, or 'survival of the fittest' where one comes to dominate
- At the moment the App world is pretty divided into Apps for taxi drivers, and those for PH drivers
  - Seems likely to remain this way given the animosity between the two groups – particularly in London though not perhaps elsewhere in the country
- This topic is the subject of various taxi driver blogs for example:
  - <http://cab4now.com/2011/09/27/the-taxi-app-wars/>
- For taxi drivers, some see the Apps as a way of winning back business from the minicab trade
  - But there is a worry amongst some that taxi drivers will use the system to cherry pick big jobs, and this will drive customers away



# Taxi Apps

There is widespread discussion of these Apps on taxi driver forums

- Get Taxi launched in August this year
  - It's a live taxi service using GPS to order taxis direct to your location
  - Available on iPhone, Android and BlackBerry
  - Costs drivers £5 a week plus 10% per job capped at £19 per week for account work, and £1 per ride for cash
  - Get Taxi issue a free driver's box
- cab:app is available on all platforms (iPhone, Android, BlackBerry, Ovi)
  - Both drivers and customers use the smartphone technology (rather than a box)
  - £1 per job, paid in advance as 'PAYG credit'
- Hailo has recently launched after a development phase
  - It was developed by a group of drivers and appears to be popular
  - Similar to cap:app in payment - PAYG
  - Has a credit card facility and a messaging service
  - Claims to be 'TfL approved'
- LDNTaxiApp is only available on iPhone at present





# PHV Apps

There is a wide variety out there

→ Full service bookings

- ubiCabs (iPhone/Android); PHV
- Kabbee (iPhone/Android); PHV
- Cab4Now (not yet launched); PHV
- Safer Minicabs (iPhone/Android/Windows phone); PHV
- Addison Lee (iPhone/Android/BlackBerry); PHV

→ There are also services which just give you the phone numbers of local operators, e.g.

- One Click Cab (iPhone/Android); PHV
- Charges you 5p to connect the call

→ It's hard to tell which will become the dominant player, Kabbee and Cab4Now are most prominent in the media

- There is a lot of buzz around these Apps, but how this relates to life in the 'real world' remains to be seen
- Further research would allow us to find out more about the views of operators and drivers on these new technologies, as well as understand how much support they have from customers





# Customers





# Customers also vocal on Twitter

## Mixture of positive comments and complaints

- In some ways taxi journeys lend themselves to Twitter comment
  - As such there tends to be a reasonable amount of content
- Black cabs and Addison Lee are the best known / most Tweeted about
  - Probably because of their ubiquity
- General comments tend to revolve around drivers needing directions, complaints about fares/rates, missed appointments or illegal minicabs (it seems that there is a general awareness of the difference between booked and unbooked minicabs)



**Dombelina** Dombelina

I know I've said it before, but I really do resent paying the same taxi fare to have my bones shaken by a really old fashioned **black cab**.

54 minutes ago



**@KEStorey1**  
Katie Storey

I love this Addison Lee driver. He told me to tell him if the car was too hot or cold, & also to tell him what kind of music I wanted on [#love](#)

15 hours ago via [Twitter for BlackBerry®](#)

[☆ Favorite](#) [↻ Retweet](#) [↩ Reply](#)

Retweeted by [WesBishopAddLee](#)



**brookekinsella** brooke kinsella

Thank you to the angel disguised as a **black cab** driver who saved me today - and no dad it wasn't you ;0) Some very kind people out there

3 Oct



**katymoseley** Katy Moseley

My **Addison Lee** driver is beyond clueless I have had to direct him as he has spent the whole journey on his mobile [#useless](#)

3 Oct



**widerider** Martin Brown

So lost in NW **London**. Trying to get to SE. Only one thing for it. **Minicab**.

1 Oct



**Bradwell Simpson** Bradwell Simpson

**Black cab** don't take **black man**

21 hours ago



# On other social media customers are less active

We have found mentions of taxis and PHV on various forums but they are rarely the main topic of conversation

→ The most commonly observed topic is found on forums and relates to retrieving lost property

→ There are various forums and blogs advising Londoners and those new to the Capital on the dangers of unbooked minicabs which generate some content

- And some providing information on how to use the taxi system in London aimed at visitors

→ There are some videos on Youtube showing minicab / taxi drivers doing things they shouldn't, including by cyclists with video cameras on their helmets

- <http://youtu.be/EyNJ5OqUYjQ>
- <http://youtu.be/DRQ0wCr-Nrl>
- [http://youtu.be/INPftxiT\\_ec](http://youtu.be/INPftxiT_ec)

→ Black Cabs are relatively photogenic, and appear in reasonable quantities on Flickr

- And some (mainly overseas visitors) post videos of themselves in Black Cabs
- <http://youtu.be/ePTSA6GXyjM>





# Summary – the future

## The ability to communicate with the trade through social media will only increase over time

- At present the number of taxi drivers using social media is relatively low
  - As an estimate it may be around 1,000 (out of a total of around 25,000 taxi drivers in London), with a smaller group actively generating and controlling content
  - But online presence in the market is growing ([Radio Taxi](#) for example reports steady growth in online bookings and anticipation that this will continue)
- Even though the numbers generating content are not hugely substantial, the growth of the App market and smart phone penetration mean that increasing numbers of TPH drivers are able to receive information through social media
  - As more Apps are developed to help link up customers and drivers, it will become impossible *not* to be online
  - Many of the App developers are also using social media with Twitter pages to reach taxi drivers and customers, bringing them into contact with the various media
- Although use of social media is growing amongst the TPH trade, it is not for everyone and penetration has not reached the point where this could be the sole method of communicating with them
  - As such, other communication channels will still be required, which could include printed materials, email (although we do not know take up amongst the TPH trade), trade publications, TfL website etc
- TPH drivers may follow TfL on Twitter if content is sufficiently motivating / relevant
  - For example if up to date road travel information can be provided as part of the deal
  - But taxi drivers in particular may not allow Tf Lto access to the content screened off from general view



# Sources

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## Sources included the following

- Forums
- <http://theandersonshelter.blogspot.com/>
- <http://londontaxi.proboards.com/index.cgi?action=display&board=advertisements&thread=8412&page=1#105079>
- <http://londontaxiforum.co.uk/default.aspx>
- <http://legaledoff.com/about/>
- <http://ucg-london.co.uk/>
- <http://www.stormcab.com/>
- [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com)
- <http://www.plymptontaxis.com/1177/omid-djalili-minicab-the-musical-hq-and-london-black-taxi-cabs-hilarious-accurate/>
- <http://www.addisonlee.com/press>
- <http://www.ltda.co.uk/>
- Facebook
- <http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=8371274791>
- <http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=7395253017&v=wall>
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- <http://www.taxizapp.com/about/>
- <http://www.cabapp.net/>
- <http://cab4now.com/>
- <http://www.kabee.com/>