



Image of place as a byproduct of medium: Understanding media and place through case study of Foursquare

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ABSTRACT

The representational mediums of locative media contribute to the construction of identity of a place that is detached from, yet in connection with the physical realm, which is referred to in this paper as Image of place within a medium. Image of place as a concept here is developed within the framework of Lefebvre's ideas of representation of space and spaces of representation and Husserl's inter-subjectivity. By emphasizing the representational aspects of the medium and materializing the concept of Image of place, the paper discusses through the case study of Foursquare, how relocating local knowledge in the virtual – or what Gordon refers to as netlocality – changes the attitude and methods that people initially use to get information about places, which impact on the decisions about visiting those places. The paper argues that by developing an expectation towards places, this image becomes a driving force in the communication between local knowledge emplaced in virtual and physical places. The paper throws light on the increasing significance of representational mediums in connecting with real physical space.

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Introduction

The connection between image and place has been investigated by several scholars from diverse disciplines such as urban and cultural studies, media studies and human geography. Communication geographers [Falkheimer and Jansson \(2006\)](#) while discussing the diversity of mediums involved in the construction of destination-image, addressed the neglect in studying the potentials of new media practices ([Falkheimer & Jansson, 2006](#)). In this context, this paper brings to focus the effects of locative media as the site for construction and formation of Image of place. The paper, discusses the possibility of locative media and specifically, the power of the image constructed within newly introduced mediums, for becoming a cause of action in the physical place, and the possibility of media to encourage users, to potentially make decisions, move in the physical world, enables people to appropriate

social interactions and facilitates the process of making sense of urban environment by increasing the functionality and legibility of places.

The paper is divided into four parts. The first part, discusses the background of the notion of Image of place, from related disciplinary perspectives highlighting the growing relation of Image of place and representational mediums. The second part, explains the theoretical framework, developed through the discussions of spaces of representation and intersubjective place experiences. The theoretical framework, built up on the works of, Husserl and Lefebvre, *inter-subjectivity* and *spaces of representation* and *representational spaces* ([Lefebvre, 1991](#)), respectively plays a vital role in developing and defining the notion of Image of place. The third part, presents the case study of Foursquare, a Locative media application, as a model in which the two notions of place and representation are intertwined and connected. And the final part, discusses the analysis based on the described theoretical framework. The findings of this study supports the notion that representational medium plays a unique role in the formation of specific image of each place.

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Background

Before the widespread emergence of new media technologies, the notion of image in the context of cities has already been extensively discussed by urban scholars and ethnographers. Image of place has been defined by Boulding (cited in [Relph, 1976](#)), as a mental picture that is a “product of attitude, experience, memories and immediate sensation” (p. 56). [Lynch \(1960\)](#) notably discussed the Image of place as “the product of immediate sensation and past memory, used to interpret information and to guide actions” (p. 5). He also discussed the readability of city as a discourse that examines the relation between cities elements and a user’s mental image for navigation and way-finding, which is a settled discourse, further examined, by urban planners, such as [Gould and White \(1986\)](#) and [Pocock and Hudson \(1978\)](#). After the digital development [Fattahi and Kobayashi \(2009\)](#), re-examined Lynch’s concepts in terms of the possibility and the effects of new digital actors (e.g. linkmarks replacing the role of landmarks) on city imaging.

Human geographer, Relph, was arguably the first scholar relating Image of place to representation, mass media and communication. He pointed out that most of the time the Image of place corresponds to communally constructed identity of place, where identity varies with the individual, group, or community ([Relph, 1976](#)). In this way, Relph asserted the inter-relatedness of identity of place and communal expression, beliefs and values. Similar ideas have echoed within the works of communication geographers, [Falkheimer and Jansson \(2006\)](#), discussing that within the symbolic and imaginative production of space, transmission, ritual, material and symbolic aspects of communication are all intertwined. As communication theorist [Carey \(2008\)](#) explained, “reality is not given, [...] reality is brought into existence, is produced, by communication, in short, the construction, apprehension, and utilization of symbolic forms” (p. xiv).

In the era of mass media, when television dominated as the most influential medium, geographer [Adams \(2009\)](#), discussed place-image as something we carry as a result of direct experience (such as tourist visits), or mediated experience (like TV programmes) that could translate generic images into particular, particular into generic, and generic images into actions. Adam argued that, “the distinction between place and place representation is blurry at best” similarly, “the mountain in a film or television programme can become a part of your mountain experience, and hence part of your life worlds” ([Adams, 2009, p. 152](#)). He further states that “we might in keeping with the mediated, heterogeneous understanding of individual experience, at least be convinced that image is powerful, efficacious, and possessing “a force capable of alter-

ing the modalities of one’s experience, and thus one’s reality. [...] Place images are caught up in an endless cycles of representation” ([Adams, 2009, p. 152](#)) and action, internalized and externalized, generalized and particularized. Adams also pointed out that geographers engagement with place-image has evolved from focusing on the relation of image and meaning towards looking into text [hyper text consisted of different forms of visual materials] as more general, distributed, and potent agents in actions ([Adams, 2009](#)) which looks into text but also outwards to the context where images become part of daily practices and performances.

Even before locative media, scholars discussed the effects of exposure to media on making places known. Tourist culture studies is an example of the predominant domains of “Mediated gaze”, (a term used by [Urry, 2002, p. 151](#)), that celebrates places made known by media world and through media culture ([Larsen, 2006, p. 249](#)). “Representational mediums develop appetites for seeing places at their unique place of residence [...]” ([Larsen, 2006, p. 248](#)). [Larsen \(2006\)](#) described that, “people travel to see and photograph what they have already consumed in image form; thus: mobile reproduction is far more important than the sight itself [...]” (p. 251). Writing about the connection between image and place, and the power of media in giving characteristic to place and being a motive that possibly moves agents in space, [Larsen, citing Couldry \(2005\) and Riley, Baker, and Van Doren \(1998\)](#), discussed that people increasingly travel to actual places to experience virtual places. “Major films and soap operas often cause incredible tourist flows where few roamed before the location was made visible on the ‘silver screen’ ” ([Larsen, 2006, p. 249](#)). [Couldry](#) used media pilgrims for describing the journey which is “Both a real journey across space, and an acting-out in space of the constructed distance between the ordinary world and media world”. In tourist culture studies, destination image is used as “the expression of all knowledge, impressions, prejudice, emotion, and imaginations that an individual or group might have of a particular place” ([Falkheimer & Jansson, 2006, p. 134](#)) which is a dynamic process socially constructed and has been affected by media practices.

Embracing the role of media as the main source of image formation, [Croy and Wheeler](#) described the whole process of formation of an image of place, as:

Forming an image of place generally goes through a process of awareness, familiarity and complexity. People become aware of places through first-time or initial exposure, perhaps through seeing a place on television, reading about a place in a book or a friend talking about it. Through additional exposure to this place, predominately through the general media, their familiarity with the place and

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