



# Short and Tweet

How passengers want social media during disruption

June 2012





Colin Foxall CBE

# Foreword

Passenger Focus has researched rail passengers' experiences of and needs from social media such as Twitter and Facebook. The research looked at social media's role in communicating with passengers when trains are disrupted, as well as how train companies use social media in other areas.

**P**erhaps the most significant findings with immediate implications are that passengers we spoke to want train service information of direct, immediate relevance delivered in a professional, not too informal way and that they expect Twitter feeds to be active at all times trains are running. Perhaps the most significant longer-term implications are that train companies need to think about how passengers can personalise the information they get and that, if delivered right, social media could start to break down traditional perceptions that train companies don't do customer service.

Passenger Focus research shows that information during delays is passengers' fifth highest priority for improvement, behind value for money, punctuality, frequency and being able to get a seat. We were therefore pleased to work in partnership with Abellio to research social media's role in communicating with passengers. I hope you find it interesting and useful.



Colin Foxall CBE  
Chairman  
Passenger Focus

## The key points train companies and those seeking to win new franchises should note are:

- In the context of rail travel, many passengers appear to use and wish to use Twitter as an information channel about service disruption rather than as a truly 'social' medium.
  - Passengers regard Twitter, rather than Facebook, as having an important role in how train companies communicate with them about disruption – but they see social media as complementary to rather than replacing traditional channels of communication
  - It appears that Twitter offers the potential for train companies to tackle long-standing perceptions of poor customer service, particularly if it is accurate, consistent and timely enough to build trust among followers
  - There is an expectation that Twitter feeds operate throughout the hours that trains are running and on all days of the week
  - That there is a strong desire among passengers to be able to filter or personalise communications to receive only the information relevant to their journey
  - Reinforcing Passenger Focus's existing message that train companies need to more effectively market the means of being kept informed about disruption, even among a sample recruited specifically for social media usage in a rail travel context, understanding of the services actually on offer was not universal
- In terms of how Twitter should be used, while individual personal preferences will clearly vary, the broad message from passengers we spoke to is:
- The tone of Tweets should be professional and not attempt to be 'my friend', although when services are running well there is scope for greater informality
  - Twitter feeds should focus primarily on train service information of direct, immediate relevance to passengers with sparing use of non service-related Tweets
  - Non-standard abbreviations that have to be thought about and overly-technical language should be avoided in Tweets
  - Two-way communication with a train company via Twitter is expected in specific circumstances (e.g. a specific question to which the passenger needs an immediate answer to make a decision about their journey) and if the train company responds effectively it can create a 'wow factor'. However many appear content to be passive recipients of service information.





Dominic Booth

# Foreword

From



**“We** were delighted to work with Passenger Focus to co-fund this research project. Social media is changing the traditional way in which train operating companies interact with customers and is a valuable tool for passing information quickly to passengers and gathering feedback from them which we can act upon to improve our service.

We hope that the industry will benefit from the useful findings in the report to improve their use of social media as a source of information to customers in the future.

We will be using the findings in this report to improve how we manage our social media interactions and to improve the way we communicate during disruption”

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "D. Booth".

**Dominic Booth**  
Managing Director UK  
Abellio



# The Use of Social Media During Disruption

Qualitative Research

Report of Findings

**Prepared for:**



## Table of Contents

	<b>Management Summary</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>1.</b>	<b>Research Objectives</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>2.</b>	<b>Methodology &amp; Sample</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>3.</b>	<b>Main Findings</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>3.1</b>	<b>Social Media Context</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>3.2</b>	<b>Twitter in a Rail Context</b>	<b>8</b>
3.2.1	Experiences and Expectations	8
3.2.2	Passive Tweets From Train Companies	9
3.2.3	Language and Tone	10
3.2.4	Passive Tweeting	11
3.2.5	Interactive Tweeting	12
3.2.6	Non-Service Related Tweeting	13
3.2.7	Trust of Sources	15
<b>3.3</b>	<b>Other Social Media in a Rail Context</b>	<b>16</b>
3.3.1	Experiences and Expectations	16
3.3.2	Train Companies Use of Facebook	16
3.3.3	Rail Forums	17
3.3.4	Personalised Phone App	18
3.3.5	Unofficial Train Company Sites	19
<b>3.4</b>	<b>The Future of Social Media in a Rail Context</b>	<b>19</b>
3.4.1	The London Olympics	19
3.4.2	Channel Integration	20
<b>4.</b>	<b>Conclusions</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>5.</b>	<b>Appendix</b>	
<b>5.1</b>	<b>Discussion Guide</b>	



# Management Summary

Previous research on passenger information requirements during unplanned disruption highlighted specific needs relating to delays, as well as a general requirement for greater transparency of information from train companies.

The preference for live, real-time information feeds into a perception across the industry that social media will have an increasingly important role (for disruption related events or other reasons).

Passenger Focus therefore commissioned research to provide an understanding of passenger experiences and expectations of the role that social media are expected to play in the future.

**6 discussion groups and one mini group** (90 minutes each) were conducted among different user groups (commuters, business users and leisure users) and across a number of train companies. The research was conducted in March 2012.

The key findings that Passenger Focus should note are:

1. A clear opportunity exists for improvements to be made in how social media are currently used within the industry, especially against a backdrop of low passenger expectations of traditional communication channels
2. In a rail context, Twitter tends to be regarded not as a 'social' medium but instead has a more specific role as an information channel, especially in the context of delays and disruption
3. Train companies are expected to have a Facebook presence, although many consider that the actual role of this as a true 'social' medium is difficult to define. It is not expected to be useful in the event of delays and disruption
4. Trust in information provided is a critical issue for passengers and the research has indicated that there is a clear need for train companies to improve in this area
5. The challenge for the industry is to find a way to filter information provided via Twitter to be more directly relevant to journeys being made, ideally through journey personalisation
6. This future need for increased relevance and improved integration of information provision across the industry was epitomised by what passengers anticipated would be required during the Olympics

# 1. Research Objectives

The objectives of this research were as follows:

1. **Overall, to understand passenger requirements of how the rail industry uses social media, especially in the context of disruption**
2. To explore passenger experiences of how the rail industry uses social media such as Twitter and Facebook to keep them informed during disruption and the information they provide; understand the demand for this channel going forwards
3. To assess awareness and perceptions of social media applications in the context of rail travel and the extent to which each is used and trusted, especially compared to train company specific sites e.g. passengers' expectations in terms of how train companies should respond to passengers via social media, ideal response times, the hours/days of coverage, the tone/language used, etc.
4. To evaluate blogs, forums and communities and understand the potential for passengers to update each other using these channels.
5. To assess interest and appeal of using station specific Twitter feeds / Facebook pages rather than train companies for station updates
6. To understand how social media are used for general and other transport needs to identify any learnings in terms of best practice
7. To explore how passengers expect to use social media to keep updated on delays and disruption during the Olympics
8. To understand what passengers see social media being used for – just disruption, or for making complaints, customer engagement or marketing? Also to understand the implications for other more traditional channels – do passengers see social media taking over, or will the traditional still be required?

## 2. Methodology & Sample

Qualitative research comprising focus groups was conducted to meet the research objectives. The sample was constructed to represent passengers travelling primarily for commuting, business or leisure purposes (some were travelling by rail for multiple purposes). All were recruited on the basis of being regular users of Twitter and some to have used Facebook.

Fieldwork was conducted in London and Manchester in March 2012. Full details of the sample structure are outlined below:

**Six discussion groups**, each lasting approximately 90 minutes as follows:

1. **Commuters, 20-35 - North London**
2. **Commuters, 36-50 - North London**
3. **Commuters, 20-35 - South London**
4. **Commuters, 36-50 - South London**
5. **Business Users, 25-50 - Manchester**
6. **Leisure Users, 25-50 - Manchester**

An additional mini group was also conducted to supplement the findings from group 2, which comprised only five respondents.

### **Recruitment Criteria:**

- A mix of both sexes in each group
- A mix of social grades to reflect the profile of user type
- All were paying for journeys made (including those using railcards and season tickets). All concessions (i.e. free staff passes) were excluded
- A mix of different train companies were represented in each group\*
- Minimum of half in each group had also made journeys by bus / coach / air in the past three months
- All were frequent Twitter users and had used it in the context of rail travel in the past month (i.e. all had read rail tweets in the last month and some had also followed a train company on twitter)
- Almost all were also frequent Facebook users
- None to rate the train company used for qualifying journeys below 4 out of 10 in terms of general levels of satisfaction

### **London Groups**

- All were using National Rail for commuting purposes 3+ days per week
- Minimum of half in each group were also making business and / or leisure journeys by train on a regular basis

**Manchester Groups**

- All had travelled by rail for business or leisure purposes in the past month
- Some in each group were also commuting by train on a regular basis

\*The following train company mix was achieved in each of the groups:

**North London:** First Capital Connect, London Midland, Greater Anglia, c2c

**South London:** Southern, First Capital Connect, Southeastern and South West Trains

**Manchester:** Business or leisure journeys were made on Virgin to Milton Keynes or beyond or on CrossCountry to Wolverhampton or beyond. Commuting journeys could be made using any train company

## 3. Main Findings

### 3.1 Social Media Context

The research highlighted an important distinction in perceptions of social media: Facebook is used as a truly 'social' medium and Twitter is more likely to be used as an information channel.



Facebook usage is more socially driven and tends to have a highly personal focus. It is primarily used to interact with friends and for making social arrangements. Twitter is used to broadcast and receive information in real time and to keep ahead of other media to find out what is going on.

*“You might update your Facebook status to say you are annoyed or to voice concerns or say thanks but you wouldn’t use it for train information because who would read it?” [Commuter, London]*

*“I use Facebook to communicate with friends, if I’m bored I might have a look at their photos and see what they are up to. Twitter is better for finding out about things, and quickly” [Business User, Manchester]*

Twitter is all about instant accessibility and device choice is therefore a function of this. Smartphones are now used anywhere and everywhere and have become part of the morning routine for many e.g. checking emails and Twitter or Facebook updates before getting out of bed or while in the bathroom. A smartphone is likely to be closer to hand than a laptop and less effort to access than a PC. A few owned a tablet and used it mainly for leisure purposes (video, reading magazines/newspapers, iplayer etc.). These claimed increasing use for social media since the tablet was interchangeable with their smartphone and choice simply depended on whatever is closest to hand at the time.

## 3.2 Twitter in a Rail Context

### 3.2.1 Experiences and Expectations

All participants were recruited on the basis of having read rail related tweets in the recent past. Many were following their train companies on Twitter, but awareness was at a latent level for others who had not investigated the train company's own feed.

Others claimed their train company Twitter feed met their rail related information needs to some extent. Business users in Manchester were the most engaged passenger segment and all were following Virgin as the train company they used most often. Commuters and some leisure passengers had low expectations of the usefulness of Twitter based on low confidence of information previously provided by train companies via other channels in the past ("leaves on the line", "wrong type of snow" etc.).

*"You get so used to being let down by transport companies that you think your comments won't have any impact. From experience you don't expect great customer service because rail staff are generally quite unhelpful so why would things suddenly change?" [Commuter, London]*

*"I follow Virgin Trains on Twitter as it is the train company I use the most. I think they are usually quite good at updating and sometimes responding to passengers." [Business User, Manchester]*

Commuters in particular had low expectations that train companies would respond to tweets from passengers due to poor perceptions of customer service delivery in the past. Instead, they were more likely to obtain and trust real-time service information from other passengers using the same line, almost always in a passive rather than interactive way. Reading tweets from other passengers' seems to create a sense of solidarity, particularly among commuters when experiencing disruption (we are all in

it together). Business travellers were less likely to use Twitter in this way, perhaps since some reported positive experiences of Virgin responding directly to tweets in the past.

The indications from the research are that most users are receptive to train company Twitter feeds in principle, so the rail industry's challenge is to communicate more effectively that they are available and then to deliver against passenger needs.

### 3.2.2 Passive Tweets From Train Companies

An additional challenge will be for train companies to recognise what to deliver through their Twitter feed, as well as when and how often.

During delays and disruption, passenger requirements are for train company tweets to be:

- **Direct** – short and sharp information to fit with expectations of what a tweet should be, i.e. accessible bite sized information
- **Factual** – accurate and in real time
- **Consistent** – important that tweets are synchronised with other sources of real time information (displays, passenger announcements at stations / on trains etc.). There was a common expectation that the Twitter feed should not replace traditional information sources but act as a complementary channel
- **Professional** – ‘talk to me as a passenger, not as a friend’ is the tone that is expected, especially when delivering bad news
- **Helpful** – where possible, the train company should provide details of alternatives e.g. next train, bus options etc.



**SouthernRailUK** @SouthernRailUK

5h

UPDATE: 11:53 London Victoria to Epsom cancelled due to a broken down train

*“This is direct and straightforward and tells it how it is, which is good. The only thing I would say is that it should also say what I should do, wait for the next train or take another route.” [Commuter, London]*



**c2c Rail** @c2c\_Rail

5h

Morning tweeps. No current delays or cancellations to report. Have a fabulous Friday everyone

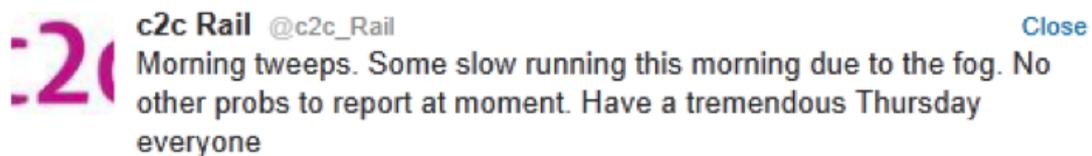
*"It's good to get an update if things are running well, you know they are online and checking. And the friendly language is fine here, as there are no problems with the train." [Commuter, London]*

During good service, the role of the tweet has greater flexibility:

- **To reassure** – some passengers would welcome a tweet to confirm that there are no problems
- **To build confidence** - the association of regular 'good news' from the train company helps in this respect, but accuracy is essential. One respondent had unfollowed a train company as a result of unreliable information. There is a balance to be struck in terms of providing helpful status updates and overwhelming passengers with irrelevant information
- **Scope for friendly tone** – e.g. Good Morning, tweeks etc. (but not 'have a nice day')



*"It's fine to say 'morning', but the important bit about the trains is at the end. I don't like all these comments about the weather it's all a bit too much and sounds a bit desperate!" [Commuter, London]*



*"I'm not going to have a tremendous day if my train is slow because of fog. It would be better if they could also have said by how long the trains were slow running." [Commuter, London]*

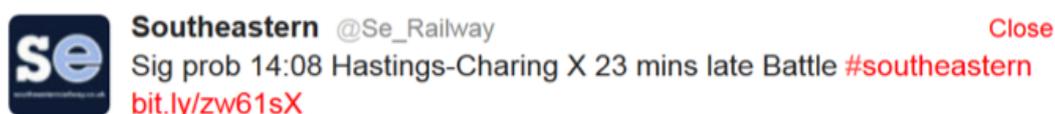
### 3.2.3 Language and Tone

The language and tone used can be informal, as long as the priority is to provide passengers with relevant and accurate information.

- **Abbreviations:** It is important that content is clear and easy to understand and free from industry acronyms and abbreviations.
- **Informal Language:** Passengers do not want tweets to use overly familiar or potentially insincere language e.g. have a nice day.

## The Use of Social Media During Disruption Passenger Focus April 2012

- **Technical Language:** Passengers do not want to hear overly generic excuses. At the other extreme, anything overly technical that a layperson would not understand is not helpful. The example provided regarding 'track circuit failure' was assumed to be an accurate description of the problem, but unacceptable on the basis of being regarded as industry jargon.



*"This is a bit too much like text language for me. You can see what it says if you read it closely, but it's not that helpful for a quick scan as you have to think about it."* [Commuter, London]



*"It took me a while to work out what 'information on train service me' means and with the smiley face, it's like a 14 year old has written it. It should be professional as they are representing a company."* [Commuter, London]

### 3.2.4 Passive Tweeting

Passengers had mixed views about whether the Twitter feed should be operated by a person, named or otherwise, rather than being automated but were agreed that the key requirement was for information provided to be accurate.

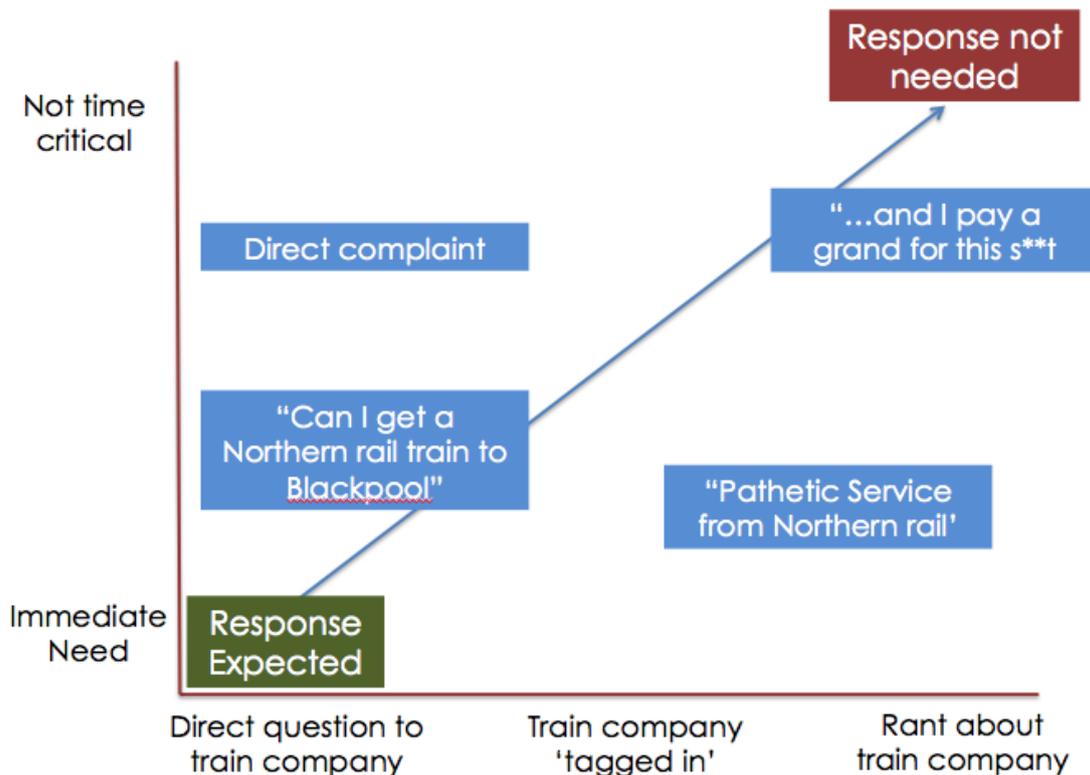
- **Person vs. Machine:** Many were unable to tell which was which out of the examples presented during the research.
- **Personalisation:** Most do not expect or want to know that they are dealing with a particular customer services advisor on Twitter. It is sufficient to know that the train company is online and able to provide them with information.

- **Extent of Coverage:** Due to passenger expectations of Twitter as an information source, most expect the feed to be active at all times of service provision. However some felt that at certain times (e.g. very late at night) it would be appropriate for a feed to provide only information, i.e. without personal replies being provided.

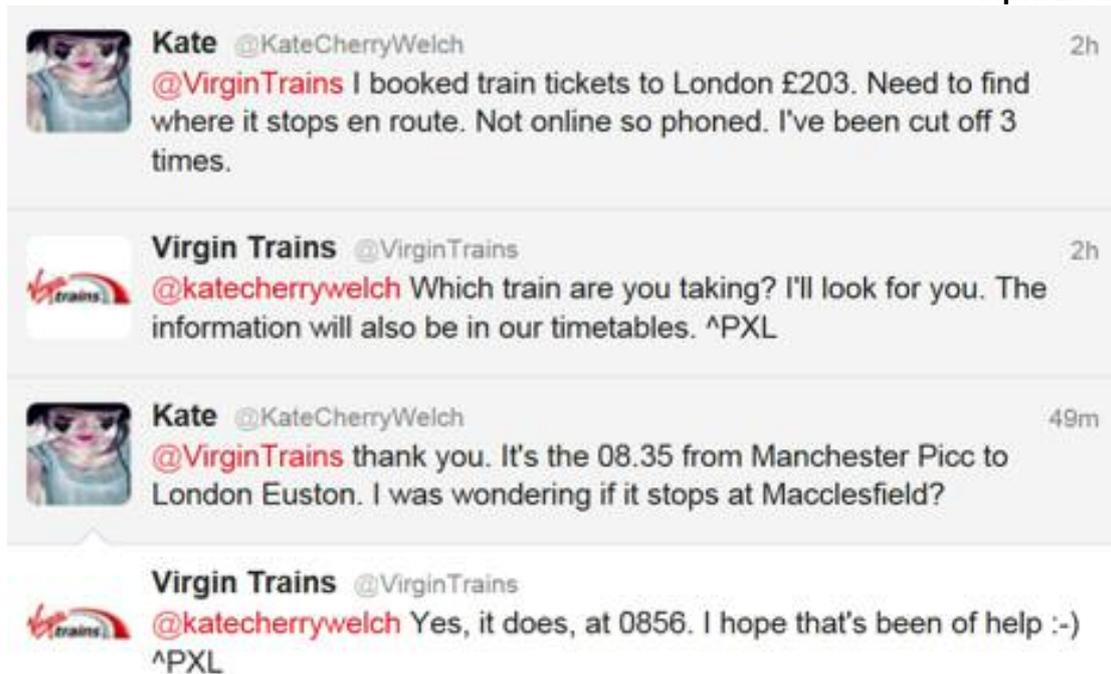
*"I don't think the tweeters need to give their name when giving general updates, it's enough to know that the train company is online. It's only when you are dealing with someone about a specific complaint that you might want to know their name."*  
[Leisure User, Manchester]

### 3.2.5 Interactive Tweeting

There is an unwritten protocol that is acknowledged to govern Twitter usage and dictates the terms of engagement for train companies when interacting with passengers. This can be summarised by the following diagram:



- **Immediate Need:** Relates to a live or imminent situation or problem faced by a passenger e.g. next train due during an unplanned disruption. This especially applies when Twitter is perceived to be the only viable communication channel available e.g.:



- **Rant:** Low expectations that a train company should get involved when a passenger is broadcasting complaints about the service. Passengers expect some degree of bad language to be tolerated as this comes with the Twitter territory. Directly threatening or abusive language should be addressed but the train company should take care not to antagonise the situation further by adopting a patronising tone.
- **Train Company ‘tagged in’:** A response was most likely to be expected if a train company was asked a direct question, but tagging in a train company was intended to make the train company aware of the comment rather than because a reply was expected.
- **Complaints:** Twitter was generally not considered to be the appropriate way to make a complaint due to being too public, too informal and character limited. Most would expect a response however and to be directed to the relevant channel.
- **Response times:** When Twitter is used and a real-time response is required but not provided quickly, the need for interaction often becomes redundant and most agreed that there would be no point in a train company responding later e.g. once the journey has been completed.

### 3.2.6 Non-Service Related Tweeting

The overall view was that these tweets were occasionally acceptable but serve the needs of train companies more than passengers.

There were no strong objections in principle to using Twitter for **marketing purposes** but some caveats were felt to apply:

- Must not be instead of information about delays and disruptions and likely to be seen as inappropriate at such times.
- Some feeling from commuters that these tweets should not be sent during peak hours.
- Some were concerned about getting a constant stream of offer messages on a daily basis, fuelling concerns of having to sift through lots of content before finding relevant information.
- Should focus on financial or other benefits to passengers e.g. sale of advance tickets, mobile app available, two for one deals etc. (as illustrated by the Arriva Trains Wales example below).

Most reject the use of Twitter for **informal non service related questions / comments** to passengers:

- Felt to cross the line that separates the information requirements of Twitter and the more social, personal world of Facebook.
- Exacerbated by the use of informal language that passengers dislike in a Twitter context.
- Can give the impression of train company resources being misused.
- A few also felt that this can make the train company look desperate, as if they have nothing meaningful to contribute (such as the TransPennine Trains example below).



**Arriva Trains Wales** @ArrivaTW

Advance Purchase tickets now available for the Diamond Jubilee weekend and up to 8th June 2012! Buy today to get...

[fb.me/1ERWMFmOA](http://fb.me/1ERWMFmOA)



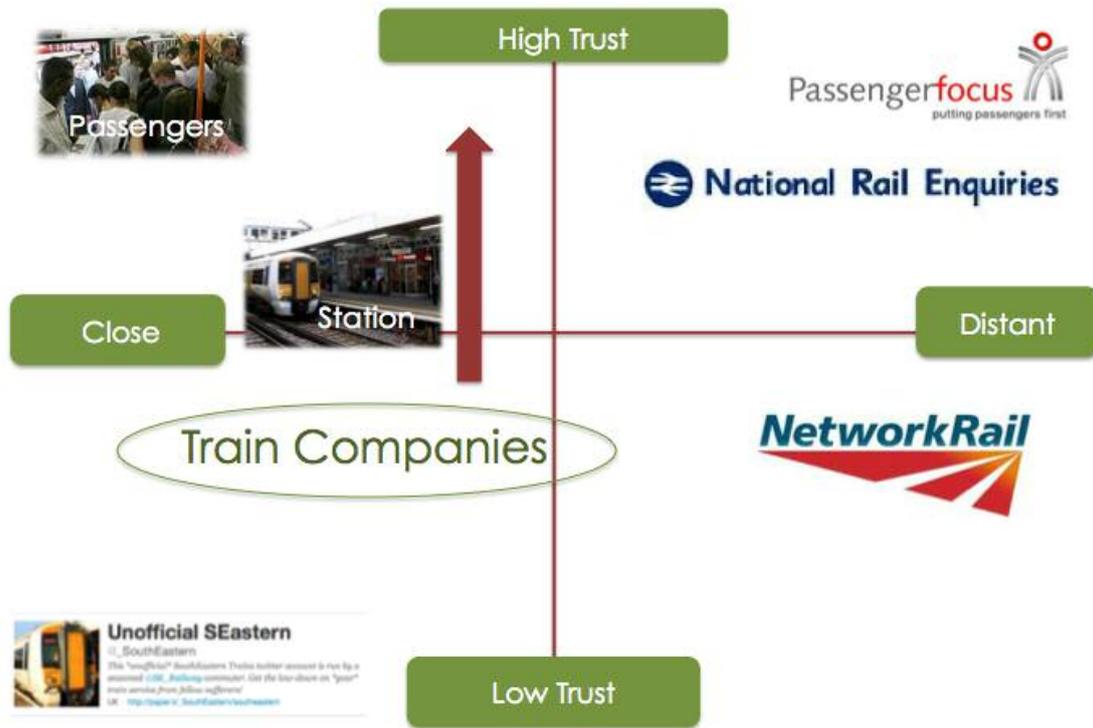
**TransPennine Trains** @TPE [Reply](#) [Retweet](#) [Favorite](#) · [Open](#)

The #XFactor live tour is heading to Sheffield's Motorpoint Arena on Wednesday - who's going?

*"A single tweet to say 'check our website for great offers' is enough because there is already too much rubbish to sift through." [Commuter, London]*

### 3.2.7 Trust of Sources

Industry sources using Twitter can be mapped on the dimensions of passenger proximity and perceived trust, as follows:



There is clear potential and need for train companies to become a more trusted source of information on Twitter than is currently the case. Most perceive that other passengers are likely to be in a better position to provide accurate information (relating to disruption especially) than industry bodies. Station-specific Twitter feeds sit in between passengers and train companies on both dimensions.

*“It would be nice to get tweets from the train company but I would trust them more if they were from other passengers who are in the same situation as me and want to get home. The train company is less likely to give you accurate delay information.”*  
 [Commuter, London]

Passenger Focus was virtually unknown, but a high expectation of trust comes from their status as an independent watchdog. However, none expected them to have a role to play in the context of delays and disruption.

## 3.3 Other Social Media in a Rail Context

### 3.3.1 Experiences and Expectations

Although there is a common, latent expectation that companies will have a Facebook presence, it ticks a box for most passengers rather than being something they have any desire to engage with. However, there was no objection to the principle of using this channel to interact with a niche of more engaged passengers.

For the majority, there is a disconnect between how Facebook is used and the nature of the relationship that exists with train companies. Facebook is at the core of their personal lives, so many are reluctant to let train companies into that space. Actively 'liking' a train company on Facebook would therefore indicate a type of relationship with the train company that most respondents could not recognise (rail enthusiasts were excluded from the research). A few leisure passengers in Manchester had 'liked' Virgin on Facebook based on a feeling that Virgin had a more 'cool' status than other train companies that made it feel more acceptable to 'like' their brand.

There is also a concern that 'liking' a company will result in unsolicited items appearing on personal news feeds (a few had 'unliked' brands or companies that they had closer relationships with than train companies, due to intrusion of this nature).

*"I wouldn't 'like' a train company on Facebook. I wouldn't want information from them appearing on my news feed and clogging up a space where I really only want to see what my friends are up to." [Business User, Manchester]*

### 3.3.2 Train Company Use of Facebook

The research has highlighted that there is a less obvious role to be played by Facebook, especially in the context of delays and disruption.

However, positive responses to some of the stimulus materials presented for research suggested that Facebook is regarded as being appropriate for more casual, non-service related interaction opportunities with passengers, such as ticket promotions and competitions. Most also considered Facebook to be the ideal channel for more detailed marketing information or for providing more detail on information posted to Twitter. One respondent (who 'liked' the Virgin Facebook page) suggested that Facebook could be used to provide channel-specific special offers (to help encourage interaction).

Facebook enthusiasts also expected that information available on a train company's website should also be duplicated through this channel, in order to provide maximum coverage to keep passengers abreast of longer term issues e.g. broken lifts / escalators etc.

### 3.3.3 Rail Forums

Many passengers had reservations about the esoteric nature of forums and those who use them in a general sense and these tended to be amplified in a rail context. Responses to two examples shown for the purposes of this research can be summarised as follows:



Some questioned the need for a forum of this specific nature specifically for disruption, on the assumption that if there were delays, the train company would be aware of it through other channels. Alternatively, others felt it would be quicker and more efficient to approach the train company directly about disruption rather than go via a third party site.

The consensus was that this site would be more useful for making complaints about services or facilities and a few felt that it could be beneficial in lobbying for change if enough passengers were behind one issue, but in reality respondents felt they would be likely to use it for general purposes or in relation to disruption.



The format of this site felt overwhelming and gave the impression of having to sift through huge quantities of irrelevant information, which was completely off-putting to all. Interest in this forum was expected to be limited to rail enthusiasts and it was not expected to be a helpful source of information in the event of delays and disruption.

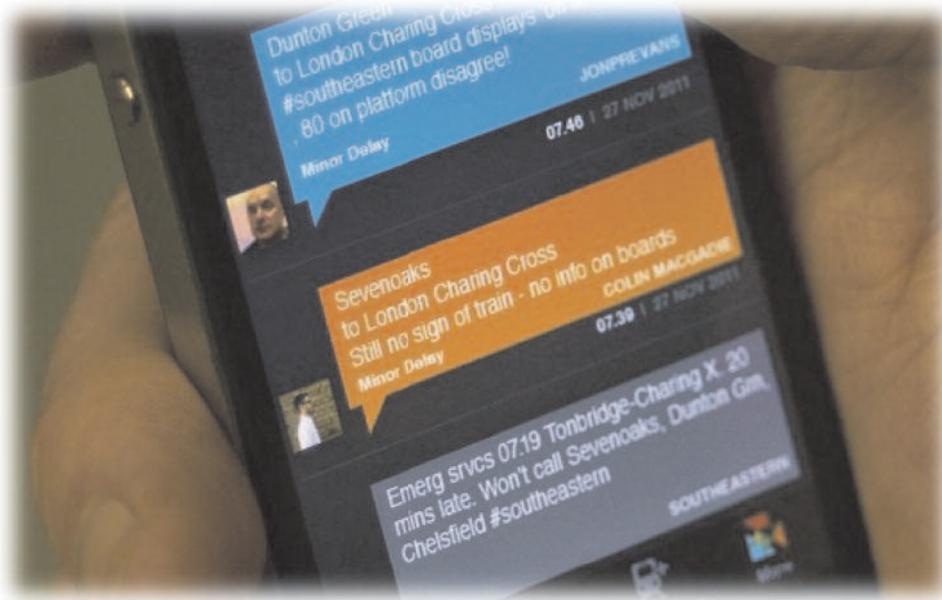
*"Life is too short for this kind of stuff. Do I really want to be listening to someone else who is as miserable as me spreading the sadness?" [Commuter, London]*

### 3.3.4 Personalised Phone App

# mynet travel

The mynet travel site was met with universal interest by respondents. The basis of its appeal is the ability to customise what you receive to specific journeys, thereby avoiding the need to sift through large quantities of irrelevant material. This was felt to epitomise requirements of social media in the context of delays and disruption for many of the passengers represented in this research. They felt that it met their needs in terms of journey personalisation and relevance.

Similarly, there was some spontaneous mention of the possibility of having Twitter feeds that were segmented by specific purpose in order to keep important, service-related tweets separated from non-essential messages, such as anything with an overt sales and marketing focus. This was expected to contribute to the facility to tailor information needs to the specific requirements of passengers.



*"This is the best format for this type of information to make it completely personal so you don't have to scour 100 tweets to find what you are looking for." [Commuter, London]*

*"This looks really interesting, it's everything we've been saying, to be able to have information related to your specific journey. I think this could be really helpful." [Business User, Manchester]*

### 3.3.5 Unofficial Train Company Sites

Respondents were shown examples of content from I Hate FCC and Southeastern Unofficial during the sessions. Some were aware of unofficial train company sites such as these but none were regular followers or contributors to them. Most regarded these as more likely to provide entertainment rather than being regarded as a serious source of information. Although they were acknowledged to play a role for passengers wanting a public forum for their rants against train companies, none regarded them as being credible in the event of needing updates on disruption due to the biased nature of their content.

*“There’s no point in this, it would be better to engage with the train company to get things done. This is for people with too much time on their hands.” [Commuter, London]*

## 3.4 The Future of Social Media in a Rail Context

### 3.4.1 The London Olympics

London commuter groups and business users frequently travelling to London were aware of the logistical challenges that the Olympics represents for the public transport network and many were clearly expecting the worst. They recognized that in order to satisfy passenger needs during this time, it will be essential for users of public transport to have constant access to information that is integrated, consistent and reliable. On the basis of past experiences, most therefore acknowledged that the industry to act in a way that was considered to be out of character in order to fulfill this requirement.

All anticipated an increased need for accurate and reliable real-time information and for the various industry bodies to work in a coordinated way in order to deliver this. Respondents were clear about the need for communications to provide practical help for passengers rather than to have a marketing focus. In this respect, requests included updates on: alternative routes, additional services, longer trains, details of congestion at specific venues or particular routes, event start and finish times and impact on travel etc.

The Olympics are therefore expected to provide an acid test as well as a steep learning curve for using Twitter to inform passengers during a time of heightened information needs as a result of the anticipated overcrowding leading to disruption.

### 3.4.2 Channel Integration

There was universal recognition that Twitter is likely to become an increasingly important element within the channel mix used by train companies to deliver information to passengers.

Respondents expected that train company Twitter feeds would complement rather than replace traditional sources by integrating with current customer service and information channels. This was illustrated by responses to a number of disruption scenarios tested in the research:

**You are travelling by train and it starts to snow heavily:**

- Expect to be told alternative routes and which stations are open and closed along the affected route.
- Expectation that the train company Twitter feed should be used to provide information in addition to the website, information boards, train staff etc.
- Most would also look at tweets from other passengers as a reliable source of real-time information and updates about the extent of the disruption and service availability

**You arrive at a mainline station and all information boards are showing services as delayed:**

- Most were able to identify with this scenario
- Station staff were claimed to be the most natural first port of call in this situation
- In the event of staff being unavailable or unable to provide sufficient details, many would be prepared to look to Twitter in addition, but would not be satisfied if this was the only channel available to them.

**You wake up at home to heavy snow and do not know if your station is open:**

- This was felt to represent a good example of the potential usefulness of train company and station specific Twitter feeds working together to meet passenger information needs
- Many expected Twitter to become their default and most accessible channel for information in the future (given the widespread claimed propensity to check social media first thing in the morning)
- This was also recognised as a good example of when personalisation, perhaps through an app such as MyNet Travel, would be useful

Reactions to these scenarios had implications for how train company Twitter feeds were expected to be operated and managed in the future. Many acknowledged that appropriate interactions with passengers are likely to be positively received in a general sense and have the potential to surprise and delight when a response is received in unexpected circumstances. However, concerns were also expressed about resource allocation and whether train companies would be able to maintain any level of personal interaction in the future if the demand for social media was to rise in the way that most anticipated.

## 4. Conclusions

This research has provided evidence that there is a clear opportunity for improvements in how social media are used by the industry in future, especially in the context of meeting information needs in the event of delays and disruption. Requirements in this respect should be regarded by the industry as being realistic since they are often felt to exist in the context of relatively low passenger expectations as a result of poor previous experiences in this area.

The research has illustrated that trust of information provided through social media is a critical consideration. Currently, passengers are more likely to expect that other passengers are better placed than train companies to provide accurate, real-time details of relevant information in relation to service disruption. The nature of the Twitter medium places an unprecedented demand on the industry for fast and accurate information in order for it to be regarded as credible and trustworthy by users.

The use of social media has changed the landscape in which information is provided and received as passengers become more demanding in terms of speed and accuracy and less tolerant of what has historically been perceived as a variety of unacceptable stock excuses to explain disruption. Rail users think it is reasonable to expect that this channel evolution comes with increased emphasis on integration and personalisation of information from the industry. Many recognise that a stern test will be provided by anticipated information requirements during the Olympics later this year, especially for London commuters.

Although an established protocol for Twitter usage is widely acknowledged to exist, passengers do not expect train companies to adhere to this as a rigid template. Indeed, a degree of individual personality would be regarded as welcome and desirable to the extent that passengers expect some customisation within the following parameters:

- It is more important to adopt a tone that is professional rather than attempting to be 'my friend'
- Twitter feeds should be informative rather than informal
- Focus on real-time issues in order to maximize the relevance of information for passengers
- Interaction is expected but for specific purposes and circumstances
- Details provided must be consistent with other (traditional) channels of information and should complement rather than replace them
- Usage for non-service related issues should be restricted

**The Use of Social Media During Disruption  
Passenger Focus  
April 2012**

- Extent and times of coverage should reflect timetables but a mix of human-operated and automated Twitter feeds is acceptable

## 5. Appendix

### 5.1 Discussion Guide

## Social Media (90 minute Groups) Discussion Guide Final

### Introduction and Context

- *The project has been commissioned to provide a detailed understanding of what passengers think of social media e.g. Twitter, Facebook, and how they use it day-to-day, in relation to transport generally and in relation to train disruption and delays*
- *Outlook are conducting the research on behalf of Passenger Focus, the independent watchdog for rail passengers whose mission is to get a better deal for rail passengers*
- *Research output may have important implications for future guidelines to the rail industry in terms of how they use social media to communicate with passengers.*
- *Respondents have been selected to be representative of various rail passengers using different train companies, and all views are therefore important and will be listened to*
- *Outlook and Passenger Focus need help from respondents to identify and understand issues. This is a genuine opportunity to make a difference for all rail users*
- *Essential for output of session to be open minded and constructive. Not acceptable therefore simply to identify negative issues or problems but to think about realistic possible resolutions*
- *[Moderator to explain that feedback will help inform decisions taken, but that any views expressed will not necessarily be implemented]*

### Background (5 mins)

#### *Round room*

- Name, occupation, types of train journeys undertaken and frequency.
- Whether using Twitter / Facebook (or both), how long used, why joined, how often use.

### Use of Social Media for Information (10 mins)

- What are your main reasons for using Facebook / Twitter, why. **[Moderator note any spontaneous mentions of finding out information etc.]**
- Have your reasons for using Facebook / Twitter changed in any way since you first signed up, how, why. How (if at all) do you expect your usage to change in the future, why.
- Tell me a bit about how and where you access Facebook / Twitter, what devices do you use, why **[spontaneous then prompt on extent of**

**accessing on smartphone / mobile / tablet / PC and on the move vs. at home/ work e.g. if use twitter do you get tweets sent to your phone so you are notified or go to the website / app to check.**

- To what extent do you use Facebook / Twitter to **access information**, why. What kind of information, give me some general examples, why.
- Have you ever **joined a group or 'liked'** an organisation/company/ forum etc. on **Facebook** to be able to get information, who, why
- To what extent do you **'follow'** organisation/companies/people on **Twitter** to get information, who, why.
- How do the organisations etc. you have 'liked' 'joined' 'followed' etc. keep you informed. How useful is it, why/not.
- Do you ever **actively pass on information / tweet information** to others, what kind of info, why.
- What are the **benefits** of getting information/updates from organisations / companies using social media, why. Any **drawbacks**, why.
- Any organisations / companies you have come across on Facebook/ Twitter that are **particularly good at keeping you informed**. What do they do, what do you like about it, why.
- How important do you think it is for organisations / companies to communicate with consumers in using Facebook/Twitter, why/not. Is it something you expect nowadays, why/not.
- Overall, to what extent do you rely on Facebook / Twitter for information, why. To what extent has this changed from when you signed up to Facebook/Twitter, why.

#### **Use of Social Media related to Public Transport (20-25 mins)**

*Explain that you want them to now think about their information needs in relation to public transport generally. So this could be in relation to air travel, buses, local transport e.g. trams, rail etc.*

#### ***Moderator Note: Include all public transport, but ensure you include the use of social media for travel on buses***

- How have you used Twitter / Facebook to access information about public transport generally. **[Moderator to get examples]**.
- How useful was the experience, why/not. Positives and negatives, why.
- How trustworthy / credible did you feel the information was, why/not.
- What about when there is **disruption to public transport**. What are your information needs, what are the key things you want to know there and then, why. **[Spontaneous then prompt on air travel, buses, local travel e.g. Underground, trams]**
- How have you used Twitter / Facebook to access information when there has been delay or disruption on public transport generally. **[Moderator to get examples]**.
- How useful, why/not. Positives and negatives, why.
- How trustworthy / credible did you feel the information was, why/not.
- Have you ever actively posted / tweeted information about delays / disruptions to public transport, who to, what did you say, why. What were your expectations of doing this, why.

- Now I want you to think specifically about **disruption to rail travel**, what are your information needs, what are the key things you need to / want to know, why.
- Does the kind of information you look for vary depending on where you are, why/not. **[Spontaneous then prompt on home vs. at the station vs. on the train mid journey]**
- Does the type of information you need depend on whether you are commuting, travelling for business or travelling for leisure, how, why/not.
- How have you used Twitter / Facebook to get information when there has been a delay or disruption on rail travel, why/not **[Moderator to get examples]**
- Any particularly good / bad experiences, what, why. **[Moderator explore fully covering the below:]**
  - How trustworthy/credible did you feel this information was, why/not. Do you trust it more / less than what is posted on the TOC's own website, why.
  - How accurate did you think the information was, how did you know.
  - How timely was the information, were you regularly updated, why/not.
  - What can you remember about the tone / language. Was it appropriate, why/not.
  - To what extent did the information help you make an informed decision about what to do next, why/not.
  - How could the information you accessed using social media have been **improved**, why.
- **[Briefly round room]** Tell me who (related to rail travel only) do you **follow on Twitter / like on Facebook**, why. **[Spontaneous then prompt on TOC, Network Rail, National Rail Enquires, other]**
- How about **Passenger Focus**, have you heard of Passenger Focus, what do you know. Does anyone follow them on twitter **[if yes]** what do you think, how useful.
- What kind of thing might be useful for Passenger Focus to update you on using twitter, why. What are you not interested in why/not.
- Have you ever **posted / tweeted information to others e.g. friends** about delays / disruptions to rail travel, who to, what did you say, why. What were your expectations of doing this, why.
- Have you ever **posted / tweeted information directly to a TOC** on Facebook/Twitter, why/not.
- **[If yes]** What were your expectations, why. Did you get a response. How did you feel about this. [if got response] Were you satisfied, did it meet expectations, why/not. How could it have been better
- What are the **benefits** of using Twitter / Facebook when there are disruptions to rail travel, why. Any **drawbacks**, why **[explore fully]**
- Are there TOCs / other organisations / people that are **particularly good** at providing information on Facebook / Twitter about rail disruptions, who, why. Any that are **not so good**, who, why.
- Do you see social media as a relevant channel to make a complaint about or to a TOC, why/not.

**The Use of Social Media During Disruption  
Passenger Focus  
April 2012**

- Have you / would you ever make a complaint about or to a TOC using Facebook/Twitter, why/not. What kind of complaint **[Spontaneous then prompt on whether they would use if for a formal complaint, or an informal comment on performance]**
- Do you prefer to use social media to find out information / interact with a TOC rather than speak to a member of staff at the station, why/not.
- Do you prefer using social media for updates compared to real time information boards at the station, or noticeboards, why/not.
- Overall, how useful has the information accessed on Facebook / Twitter been in relation to rail travel, why / not.
- What could make it more useful, why.

**Examples of Social Media Communications (15-20 mins)**

*Show examples of general and specific TOC, National Rail Enquiries, Network Rail and TfL Twitter and Facebook communications. Explore views and ensure you compare and contrast examples in terms of language used, responses from TOCs, passive vs. interactive where relevant **[Rotate order shown in groups]**.*

- What are your reactions to this, why. Anything positive / negative, why
- How useful is the information, why/not. How does this make you feel about the organisation, why.
- Do you trust this information, is it credible, why/not
- How do you feel about the **language and tone**, why **[spontaneous then prompt on use and appropriateness of smiley faces, informal language, apologies etc.]**. What is unacceptably informal?
- Does the language used impact on how you feel about the information provided, why / not.
- When **technical railway language** is used [e.g. track circuit failure], do you know what it means?
- What kind of tone & language is appropriate when informing of delays & disruption (e.g. C2C delays due to fog, but have a tremendous Thurs), what is not, why. What about when communicating customer engagement / marketing
- Do you always expect the TOC to say sorry / apologise, why/not. How sincere does this feel, why.
- Given that tweets are character limited, is it more important to apologise or provide information. How do TOCs best get the right tonal balance, why.
- To what extent do you expect TOCs to respond to passengers' posts/tweets, why/not.
- When would you definitely expect a response, when would you not why/not.
- What would you expect a TOC to do if a customer was tweeting / communicating via Facebook using **abusive language**, why/not. **[Spontaneous then prompt around whether TOCs should accept that a certain degree comes with the social media territory and at what point it would be reasonable for a TOC to refuse to deal / ask them to moderate their language etc.]**

- How long would you expect it to take for a TOC to respond, what does this depend on, why
- What daily coverage would you expect [**spontaneous then prompt on 24 hours, when trains are running, peak times only, Monday to Friday only, why**] e.g. TransPennine
- How acceptable is it for TOCs to **refer customers to traditional customer services**, why/not. When is this acceptable, when is it not, why. When is it essential that the issue is dealt with there and then via social media, why.
- To what extent do you want TOCs to use social media for **marketing**, why/not. What is acceptable, what is not, why.
- To what extent do you want know the **TOC employee's name** e.g. First CC 'John R now signing off' etc. why/not.
- **[Overall]** From the examples we have looked at which are most effective in their communications with passengers, why.

Refer to **National Rail Enquiries & Network Rail Facebook and Twitter examples**

- How useful do you think the information on here would be, why/not.
- To what extent would you **trust** this information, why/not. Would you trust it more or less than the TOC twitter or Facebook feeds, why/not.
- To what extent would you follow / join National Rail rather than your TOC, why/not.
- Would you prefer information from National Rail or the TOC, why

Show examples of **unofficial Twitter and Facebook accounts** e.g. *South Eastern Unofficial on Twitter and I hate FCC on Facebook*

- How useful do you think the information on here would be, why/not.
- To what extent would you **trust** this information, why/not. Would you trust it more or less than official TOC twitter or Facebook feeds, why/not.
- To what extent would you follow / join an unofficial source of information if one was available for your TOC why/not
- Overall, would you prefer information from an unofficial TOC source or the official TOC, why.

Show **Station Specific Twitter Examples (Rugby and Stafford) Facebook examples (London Euston, Glasgow Central)**

- How useful do you think the information on here would be, why/not.
- To what extent would you **trust** this information, why/not. Would you trust it more or less than a TOC twitter or Facebook feeds, why/not.
- To what extent would you want to follow your local station rather than your TOC, why/not.
- Would you prefer information from your local station or the TOC, why/not.
- **[Overall]** Would you prefer to get information about delays and disruptions via Facebook or Twitter, from your TOC, your local station, National Rail Enquiries, Network Rail, an unofficial group, why. What does this depend on, why

#### **Non TOC Rail Forums and User Groups (10 mins)**

- Have you accessed any other sites / forums to access information when there has been disruption to rail travel, what, why

- **[If used respondents to give examples]** How useful were they, why/not.
- Did you trust the information provided, why/not. To what extent do you trust information on these sites more / less than official TOC information, why.
- Did you read only, or post a comment / question, why/not. [If posted] what were you expecting. What was the result, why.
- **[if not used]** Why have you not used, lack of awareness or something else, why.
- Who do you think these websites / forums are aimed at, why.

Show **UK Rail Forum & Fix my Transport** websites available on the internet and for each explore and explain each as follows.

**UK Rail Forum** is a UK based forum for discussing all aspects of the railway. **Fix my transport** is a way of reporting transport problems online where they can be commented on by other passengers and resolved by operators.

- What do you think of this, why. Positives, negatives, why
- Would you ever use something like this, why/not.
- When (if at all) can you see this being useful, why/not.
- How trustworthy do you think the information is here, why/not. How credible, why/not.
- Would you be more or less likely to trust this information than information coming directly from the TOC / station, why/not.

Show **MyNet Travel app** detail on website and explain app

- What do you think of this, why. Positives, negatives, why
- Would you ever use something like this, why/not.
- When (if at all) can you see this being useful, why/not.
- How trustworthy do you think the information is here, why/not. How credible, why/not.
- Would you be more or less likely to trust this information than information coming directly from the TOC / station, why/not.

### **The future of Social Media for rail travel: Brainstorm (20 mins)**

Explain that to bring the session together we want to build some best practice guidelines for TOCs about customer expectations and how they should utilise social media in the future. Explore using any of the following scenarios:

- **Scenario One:** During the Olympics you have to travel to London. You will be passing through one of the busy stations at peak time e.g. London Bridge or Kings Cross
- **Scenario Two:** You are making a long train journey home on Sunday afternoon, it starts to snow heavily en route, you are worried about being able to get home
- **Scenario Three:** You wake up at 7.00am, unexpectedly the snow is much heavier than expected, you are concerned about your commute or business / leisure journey, you don't know if your station is open, or if any trains are running.

- **Scenario Four:** *You are travelling to Birmingham for an important engagement, you reach Euston / Piccadilly Station only to find out that all trains are showing as delayed on the information board.*

**Explore as follows:**

- How would you expect to use social media in these situations, why
- What would you expect from the TOC in terms of information, why. how would this change as the situation/journey progresses, why.
- What kind of language would you expect the TOC to use here, why
- Would you post / tweet directly to the TOC in this situation, why/not.
- If you did post/tweet direct to the TOC, what would you expect them to do, why.

*Explain that to bring everything we have been talking about together you want to get a list of best practice and things for TOCs to avoid when communicating with customers using social media.*

- **[Moderator to flip chart a list of best practice and things to avoid for TOCs using social media]**

*Explain that we have focussed mainly on disruption and that we want to get their thoughts on other areas where TOCs could use social media to communicate with customers.*

- How else could TOCs use social media aside from updating on disruption. What would be useful to you, why
- Would you expect TOCs to use social media to inform you about e.g. advance cheaper tickets / deals etc. How useful would this be, why/not.
- Would you expect to be able to communicate with a TOC using social media if you had a customer service issue e.g. if you were sold an incorrect ticket, were unhappy with service on a train etc., why/not. How useful would this be, why/not.
- To what extent do you think social media will replace TOC's traditional communication channels, why. How do you feel about this, why.
- Overall, how would you like to see TOCs use of social media developing in the future, why.

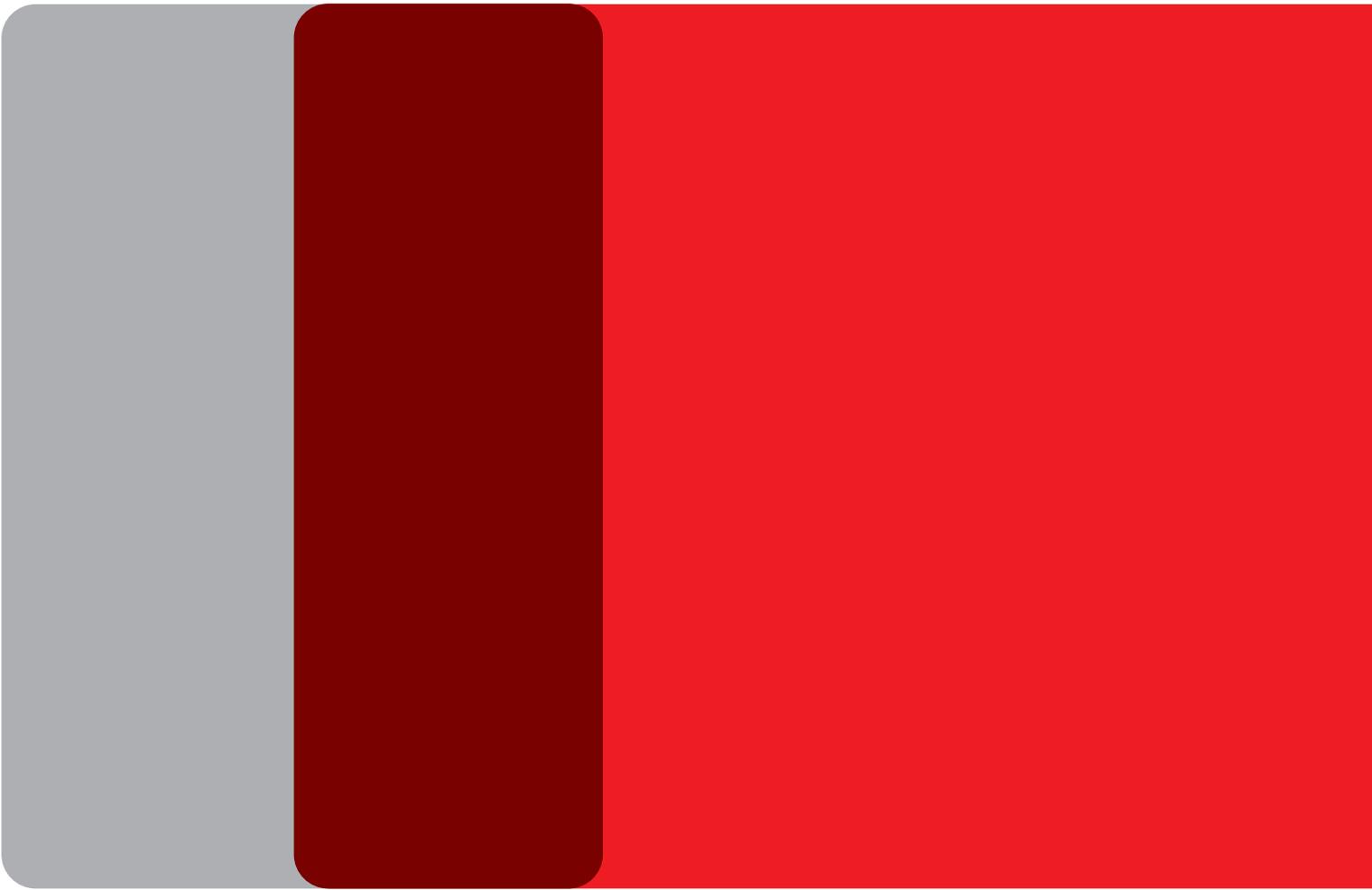
**Summary (5 mins)**

- Overall, how do you feel about what we have discussed tonight. What has been the most interesting thing we have discussed.
- If you could give your TOC one key piece of advice about how to use social media to communicate with you better as a customer during disruption what would that be, why.
- What do you expect to use social media for in future in a travel context









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