

Using online discussion forums to study attitudes toward cars and transit among young people in Victoria

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Abstract

Worldwide, young people are becoming less dependent on the car for their travel. This trend has been documented in the United States, Europe and Australia. However there is relatively little research into why this trend is occurring and how the attitudes of young people are shaping their transport choices. Popular press assumes that the shift is caused in part by changes in attitudes toward the car as a status symbol, increases in electronic communications and increasing environmentalist attitudes amongst the young. However there is little academic research supporting these assertions. This paper reports on qualitative discussions conducted with young Victorians to better understand their thoughts and feelings about travel (by car, transit and walking), getting a license and owning a car. It uses the innovative approach of recruiting young people online and running the discussions using an online discussion forum. It describes how young people talk about cars, explores whether they believe electronic communications can replace face-to-face contact and explores environmental attitudes around car travel. It identifies areas needing further research and provides a critique of the research method.

1. Introduction

Reliance on the car has serious negative consequences for Australian society. Road transport contributes 13% of Australia's national CO₂ emissions (Department of Climate Change 2009) and road collisions cost around 1,500 Australian lives and cause 4,500 permanent disabilities every year (Bureau of Infrastructure Transport and Regional Economics 2009). Despite these negative impacts, the number of passenger vehicles and kilometres travelled in Australia continues to increase (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2010b). Yet against this backdrop there is a remarkable emerging worldwide trend which is not well understood: young people are becoming less likely to get a driving license and depend on cars for their travel.

There is a large body of research on understanding mode choice and car ownership more generally (e.g. Joachim and Christian 2007). However this downward trend in car licensing amongst the young has only recently been recognised. Researchers, government bodies and even the car industry are beginning to question why this is occurring. Three possible explanations are often discussed but lack a strong empirical basis: the changing social status of the car, the growing role of electronic communications and a growing environmental awareness amongst young people.

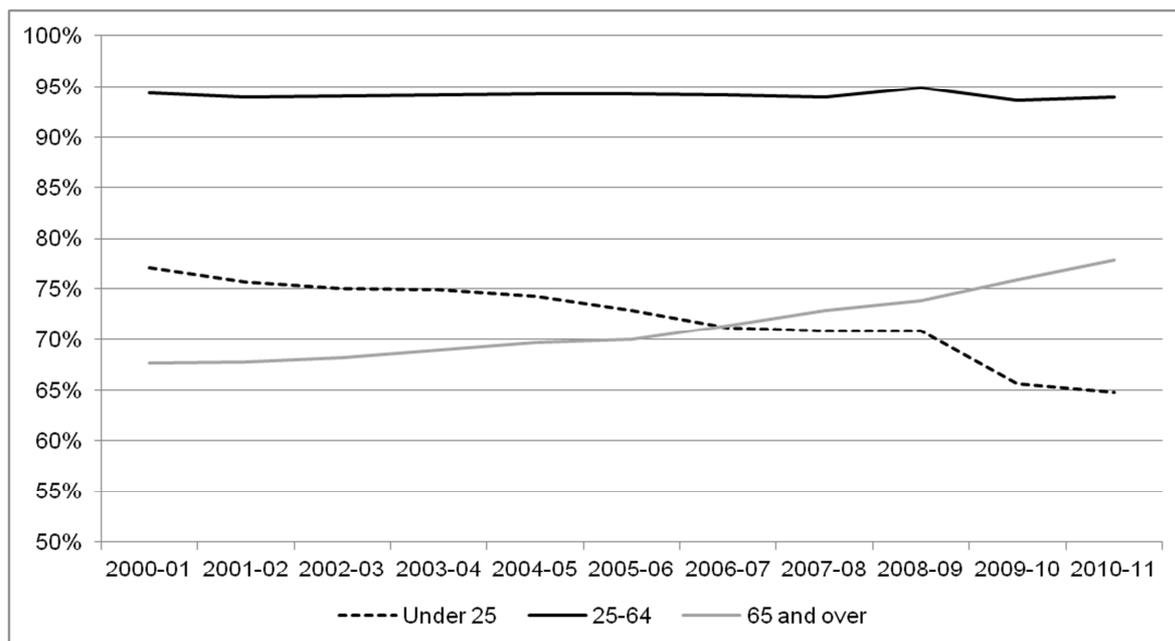
The following study uses an emerging new online research method to develop a preliminary understanding of how young people talk about transport and travel. It reports on qualitative discussions conducted with young Victorians to better understand their thoughts and feelings about travel, getting a license and owning a car. It uses an innovative approach of recruiting young people online and running the discussions using an online discussion forum. The paper will also provide a preliminary evaluation of this research method.

The paper takes the following structure. The next section contains a review of past literature on young people and driving, focussing on three key research areas. It is followed by a description of the research method including a description of the online focus groups and the two-step discussion method. The results of the discussions are then presented, focussing on three key research areas. A short reflection on using online focus groups is then presented, followed by a discussion highlighting areas for future research.

2. Research Context

In Victoria, the percent of under-25 year olds with a driver's license dropped from 77% in 2001 to 65% in 2011 (see Figure 1); at the same time licensing for those 65 and over rose steadily (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2006; VicRoads 2012). Research in New South Wales dating back to 1991 shows a similar trend amongst young people (Raimond and Milthorpe 2010). Furthermore licensing rates are steadily decreasing amongst young people in many countries in Europe and North America (Sivak and Schoettle 2011; Sivak and Schoettle 2012).

Figure 1: Licensed drivers as percent of age group, 2001-2011, Victoria



Source: Licensing data supplied by VicRoads (VicRoads 2012) and compared to population (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2010a).

Emerging research suggests that situational variables such as lower household incomes, residential location, parental lift-giving and household structural changes are contributing to these trends (McDonald and Trowbridge 2009; Raimond and Milthorpe 2010; Kuhnimhof et al. 2012). The impact of graduated license schemes, which have been introduced in many countries, is also highlighted as a possible reason (Raimond and Milthorpe 2010).

However in addition to these structural variables, a number of researchers have begun to consider whether changes in the attitudes of young people have contributed to this decline in car reliance. Three attitudinal shifts have been identified by researchers and the popular

media: the declining social status of the car, the role of electronic communications and increasing environmental concerns.

2.1 The changing social status of the car

Many social researchers have studied the role of the car as a status symbol, a symbol of prestige or an object of desire (Stokes and Hallett 1992; Hiscock et al. 2002; Steg 2005; Redshaw 2006). There is an emerging sense that these values are shifting amongst the younger generation as interests shift from cars to computers and electronic gadgets. For example a survey in Japan found that 27% of 40-59 year-olds listed cars as an interest, overall ranking 7th (just ahead of computers). This dropped to 23% of 18-24 year old university students, ranking 17th behind such interests as personal computers, portable music players, communication devices, anime, video games and TV (Kalmbach et al. 2011).

This alleged trend is capturing much attention in popular press in Australia, North America and Germany (Kuhnimhof et al. 2012) with newspaper headlines like “Young people choose computers over cars” (Campbell 2012). Car manufacturers are also concerned about young people losing interest in their products (Chozick 2012).

However thus far much of this concern is speculative, based on the popular press rather than academic research. Thus far the academic literature has little to say on the topic and not all of it is clear-cut. For example, at least one study of Dutch people with car licenses found that younger respondents were slightly *more* likely than older generations to value their car for symbolic reasons (e.g. ‘my car gives me prestige’) and affective reasons (e.g. ‘I love driving’) (Steg 2005). There is clearly disagreement within academic literature over whether young people are less likely to view cars as a status symbol.

2.2 Electronic communications are reducing the need to travel

The idea that the younger generations prioritise gadgets over cars is coupled with the belief that electronic communications (such as Facebook, texting or online chat) are reducing the need for young people to see their friends in person. This suspicion is somewhat supported by a survey in the United States that found that a small portion (5-10%) of 15-18 year olds had not started the licensing process in part because “Facebook, texting etc. Keeps me in touch with friends” (Williams 2011); however no respondents cited this as their primary reason. Another survey sponsored by the car-sharing scheme Zipcar found that over 50% of young people agreed that they sometimes chose to spend time with friends online instead of driving to see them (KRC Research 2010).

A recent analysis Sivak and Schoettle (2011) found that countries with more internet users had lower overall licensing rates. The popular press has quickly leapt on this study as evidence that young people are using the internet to replace face-to-face contact: ‘Today Facebook, Twitter and text messaging allow teenagers and 20-somethings to connect without wheels’ (Chozick 2012, p. 1). Yet this conclusion is premature: the study measured household internet penetration, not internet use by young people. There is no direct evidence suggesting that young people who use more electronic communications are less likely to see their friends in person. This clearly highlights the need to better understand the role that electronic communications plays in maintaining social contacts amongst young people.

2.3 Changing environmental attitudes

Media reports about the declining status of the car also cite environmental awareness as a related contributing factor. For example a survey commissioned by the car-sharing company Zipcar found that almost half of young people agreed with the statement ‘I want to protect the environment, so I drive less’ (KRC Research 2010).

However academic research casts doubt over whether young people are actually more environmentally aware than older generations, and more importantly, whether environmental attitudes actually influence their behaviour. One longitudinal survey in Sweden between

2002 and 2009 did find a slight increase in 17-year-olds citing environmental concerns as a reason not to get a license (Forward et al. 2010). However a different survey in Sweden found that adolescents were no more likely than their parents to believe that cars have a negative impact on the global environment (Sandqvist and Kriström 2001). Furthermore a British survey found that compared to all other age groups, people aged 16-24 were the *least* likely to say they were 'environmentally friendly in most everything they do' and were the most likely to say they don't do anything environmentally friendly (Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 2009). These findings cast serious doubt over whether changing youth car reliance can be credited to a change in environmental attitudes.

3. Research Method

The increasing uptake of home internet connections has seen a similarly rapid development of online research methods. Web surveys are now a common method of quantitative data collection; however qualitative research has been slower to explore online methods (Mann and Stewart 2000). Since the turn of the millennium, qualitative online methods have been applied in health, market research and sociology and are considered particularly appropriate where discussion participants are geographically dispersed or the subject area is personally sensitive (e.g. body image) (Fox et al. 2007). They are also considered particularly appropriate when studying young people who may have greater difficulty accessing conventional focus groups and are considered particularly competent in communicating online (Fox et al. 2007).

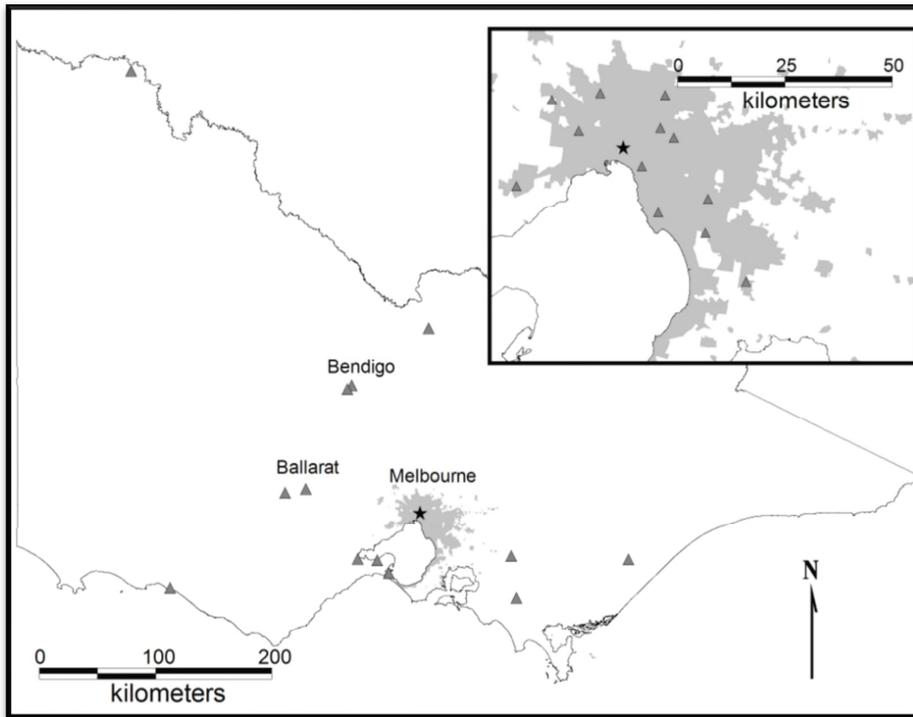
Online focus groups may be held in real-time (synchronous) through chat rooms or non-real-time (asynchronous) through discussion forums (Mann and Stewart 2000). An asynchronous discussion forum was selected for this study as it allowed young people the freedom to participate in their own time.

3.1 Focus group participants

Out of the 4,891 people contacted by the market research company, 69 (1.4%) filled in a screening questionnaire, qualified for the discussions and opted-in to be contacted with further details. Of these, 28 people completed the registration process to participate in the discussion giving an overall response rate of 0.6% from initial contact. Four of these respondents had very low participation rates (between zero and five posts), although their responses were used.

Two discussion groups were run. One contained 13 respondents from the greater Melbourne region and will be referred to as the 'Metropolitan' group. As Figure 2 demonstrates, their home locations are geographically diverse, ranging from within 4km of the central business district to satellite suburbs over 40km from the city centre. The regional focus group contained 15 participants from a range of towns and remote areas across Victoria. Such a geographically diverse sample would be difficult to attract using conventional face-to-face focus groups.

Figure 2: Metropolitan and regional focus group participant home locations



Note: star represents Melbourne's central business district

Table 1 indicates some characteristics of focus group participants. Although a quota was in place to attempt to balance genders, more women than men ended up participating. Some 43% of participants either had no license or L-plates (only able to drive under supervision). Half of participants had P-plates (able to drive independently with some restrictions such as the number of allowed passengers) and 7% had a full license. Most participants lived at home with their parents and were studying. In the results section of this paper, participants will be identified using a code representing their gender (M or F), age and license status (N, L, P or F).

It should be emphasised that the purpose of qualitative research is not to gain a representative sample but to illustrate broad themes that can be explored in further research.

Table 1: Characteristics of focus group participants

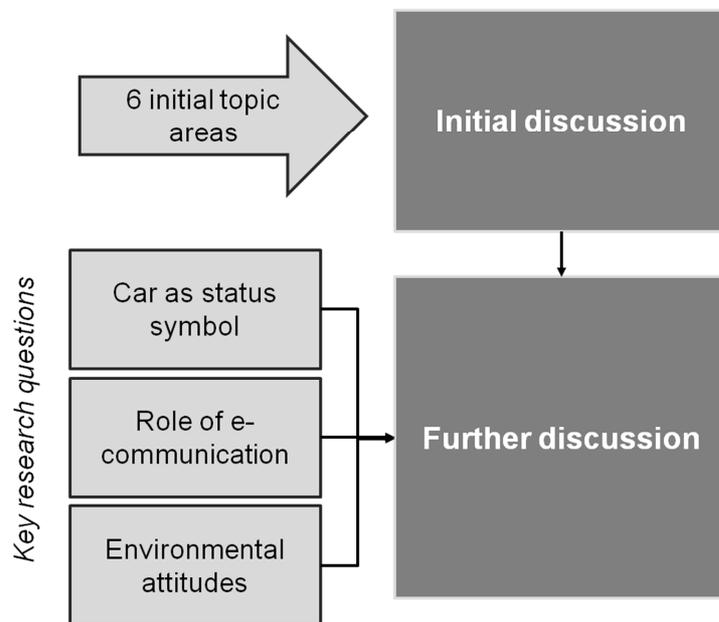
Location	Regional Victoria	54%
	Metropolitan Melbourne	46%
Gender	Female	61%
	Male	39%
License status	None	11%
	L-plate	32%
	P-plate	50%
	Full licence	7%
Household makeup	Living with parents	89%
	Living with roommates	11%
Employment status	Studying	71%
	Working part time	14%
	Working full time	7%
	Unemployed	7%
Age	17	11%
	18	25%
	19	14%
	20	25%
	21	25%

3.2 Approach

The discussion forum was hosted by Monash University using the program 'Sakai' (<http://www.sakaiproject.org/>). Six discussion topics were set up to stimulate discussion and further topics were introduced after a few days. Participants were required to post at least twice on every topic to encourage repeated participation but they were able to post at any time that suited them. The forums were open for one week and participants who met the required number of posts were offered a \$25 gift card. Researchers checked the forums throughout the week to ask questions, stimulate further discussion, and check for inappropriate or abusive posts (no abusive posts occurred).

The three primary areas of research interest were: cars as status symbols, the role of electronic communication or attitudes toward the environment. However these three topics were not introduced at the start of discussions in order to gain an understanding of how 'top of mind' these issues are for participants. After a few days, these topics were gradually introduced to gain a more direct understanding of the topics (see Figure 3).

Figure 3: Discussion flow



Instead, six general discussion topics were presented at the beginning of the week:

1. Describe your travel in a typical week. Where do you go and how do you usually get there? How do you choose what travel mode to take (e.g., drive, walk, public transport). How well do your current travel arrangements work for you?
2. In your opinion, what sort of city is Melbourne ['your local area' for the regional group] in terms of transport and travel? What sort of city would you like it to become? Would those changes actually change anything in your life – like where you'd want to live or how you'd travel?
3. What do you think of the process of getting an L-plate and P-plate license? If you don't have a license, are you planning on getting one in the near future?
4. How important is owning a car to you? If you don't have your own car, what would it mean to you to have one? Do your friends see cars the same way you do?
5. Who pays for the car, petrol, insurance, etc? How important are these costs to you? If you don't have a car, is cost a major factor in this?
6. Will how you travel today change over the next 5, 10 or 20 years? What would have to happen to change the way you travel today?

These original topics were supplemented by follow up questions as needed (for example discussion in topic 2 was focussed on the central city, so a follow-up question was added to prompt discussion about Melbourne's suburbs). Not all of these six topics will be discussed in this paper.

4. Results

4.1 Initial discussions

The initial six discussion topics provided a wealth of discussion around young people's travel, more than can be reported in this paper. However a few contextual points are worth mentioning.

The travel habits discussion participants varied greatly. Some were captive public transport users with very complex, multi-modal travel involving walking, lifts and multiple transit modes. Complex trip chains like this were not unusual:

'I drive or get a lift to the station in the morning and take the train to Melbourne central then a tram down Elizabeth to work. I take the train home again, and either get a pick up from my mum or drive home depending on whether I drove to the station or not.' (M21P)

Some expressed an explicit preference for public transit over car travel, even showing a remarkable level of tolerance for infrequent services, long walking distances or long travel times on public transport.

Others expressed quite entrenched dependence on their car. Across all discussion topics, in both the metropolitan and regional groups, cars were described with reference to providing freedom and control over their time and activities. In the words of one participant, moving from a reliance on lifts and shared family car to owning his own car made 'all those problems disappear' (M21P). They acknowledged that even though a car was a financial burden, this cost was worth it to 'be able to drive wherever you like when you want to' (M18P). This dependence was heightened in regional and rural areas where one young woman spoke of being lost without her car and having to 'resort to begging lifts' when her car was being repaired (F21P).

In the first few days of discussion, the three key research areas were not directly addressed by the researcher. This was an explicit choice to determine whether any of the three areas were 'front of mind' for young people when they talked about travel. After a few days, the three research areas were introduced to different parts of the discussion to bring the topics into the explicit discussion. The following sections describe how the three research areas unfolded.

4.2 The car and social status

4.2.1 Unprompted discussion

The symbolic social status of a car can be a difficult thing to directly measure. One of the initial discussion prompts asked young people to reflect on how important owning a car is to them. It was thought that if cars were seen as an object of desire or social status this may be reflected in this discussion, although they were not initially prompted on this topic. There were very few spontaneous expressions of social status around whether or not someone had a car. Even in the regional discussion where car licensing and ownership was considered a 'given' and an 'expectation', this was expressed in practical terms as a necessity 'that you probably can't live without' (M20P).

Instead, the discussion of ownership was more richly described in the discussion about paying for a car. The discussion provided a clear sense that paying for the purchase and upkeep of a car is a symbol of responsibility and maturity. It is referred to as an achievement, a part of growing up and an expression of independence.

My parents are always encouraging, telling me that if I need a car, they'll buy it for me, but I've always rejected it. It's because I don't necessarily need one yet, and I would like to pay for my own car. It is a part of growing up and being independent I guess. Learning to do things yourself. I'm not going to have my parents paying for things for the rest of my life am I? Get a job, pay for it yourself the hard way. (F18L)

There were a variety of arrangements across participants including shared 'family' cars, parental help with payments and full purchase and payment of vehicle costs. Those who purchased their own car sometimes express a sense of jealousy toward those who have a car purchased for them. Furthermore, expressing this sense of responsibility and maturity implies that people who do *not* pay their own expenses have not reached this level of maturity. Being keenly aware of expenses can generate frustration with those who do not have to face these responsibilities:

It bugs me when my friends who don't drive show no regard for the expenses of driving, and want me to drive them around without realising how expensive it can be. They rarely offer to chip in for petrol, and I don't expect it, I just get frustrated that it's something that doesn't even occur to them because they don't have to worry about it. (F21F)

Although these attitudes were expressed in a more general sense, they were never expressed directly toward other members of the discussion group. However, perhaps sensing this jealousy and frustration, those who had a car purchased for them or had a newer model car sometimes felt the need to justify this situation in considerable detail.

I consider myself extremely blessed to own the car I do. It's a 2010 model Toyota Aurion. My friends often comment on how lucky I am to own it, and I feel proud to have such a nice car. I got it for much cheaper than RRP because my cousin works at Toyota and he got us into an auction where they sell off demo cars. (M21P)

Generally young people expressed a stronger sense of ownership over their car if they bought it themselves or performed their own repairs and modifications. In the words of one young woman, 'I reckon it means so much more when you buy the car yourself, its just that bit more special, and you can turn around and say 'hey, I worked my butt off for that, and it's all mine!' (F21P). In contrast, people who shared a car with family members or were given a car were less likely to express this sense of pride: 'some people take a lot of pride in their car and do a lot of modifications to their car ... but for myself I don't really get a choice, because I share my car, they [sic] is a baby seat in the back and crumbs all over the back seat' (F20P).

Many participants did talk about the love they had for their car, suggesting that cars do capture the interest and affection of many young people. However this affection was not couched in regards to social status and was often expressed toward old or decrepit cars: 'I love my car because I have built it from the ground up, even though it is not one of the best cars around it means a lot to me' (M21P).

4.2.2 Prompted discussion

Several days into the metropolitan discussion group the moderator specifically asked whether participants (or their friends) saw a car as a status symbol. The presence of a car did not appear to infer status in and of itself, but participants did state that owning an expensive car conferred higher social status than an old or inexpensive car. They also mentioned building or modifying cars as a reflection of pride in the vehicle. One young woman on her Ls mentioned that she was not jealous of her friends' cars, but instead was jealous of 'trivial' things that concerned her like 'the latest gadget' (F19L).

Although qualitative research is not meant to provide a representative sample of all young people, these discussions did not uncover a strong sense of the car as a status symbol.

4.3 Travel and the role of electronic communication

4.3.1 Unprompted discussion

Much of the early discussion of travel was couched in context of socialising with friends and maintaining friendships – in the words of one participant, seeing friends whenever he wanted was ‘the most important thing in the world’ (M18P). There was a clear contrast present when some members of a friendship group had access to a car and others did not. Those without access to a car spoke of having to ‘mooch’ lifts off of people and being unable to meet up when they are ‘randomly’ invited to hang out. One young woman with a car expressed frustration with her closest friend who doesn’t have a license: “it gets very annoying having to always pick her up, drop her off, drive her places, have her turn up late for everything coz she missed her bus, etc.” (F21F).

In addition, relying on public transport or lifts to socialise was usually also spoken of with frustration. Many of those without a driving license spoke of public transport as a barrier to maintaining friendships. They spoke of ‘drifting away’ from friends and the frustration of buses and trains not running late at night when they wanted to socialise.

Importantly, all of the initial discussion of socialising focussed on how people visited their friends in person. Not one person spontaneously suggested that electronic communications replaced or reduced the need to see friends.

4.3.2 Prompted discussion

Several days into the discussion, participants were specifically asked ‘Do you think Facebook, mobile phones and IM [instant messaging] chat can make up for not seeing your friends in person?’ In the resulting discussion, it was clear that electronic communications were seen as a complement to face-to-face contact with friends, not a substitute. Online communications were seen as a way to organise times to meet up in person or a way ‘keep in touch’ with past friends. Electronic-only bonds were described as somewhat tenuous; one young woman states that ‘all the friends that I just talk to online are slowly drifting away’ (F19L). However some young people with restricted car access found themselves in a position where electronic contact became their only contact:

‘As I do not drive - I do find it difficult to maintain friendships. Especially now that I have entered university - it is absolutely impossible to not drift away from previous high school friends. Social network sites, mobiles and IM chat is basically the handy way these days to remind my high school friends that I am still around and is essentially what strengthens our relationships despite its virtual form... However it does not replace the essential bonding through face to face contact, and I do feel that because I do not have my own transport - my bonds with previous friends are not as strong as it [sic] used to be’ (F19L).

4.4 Environmental attitudes and travel

4.4.1 Unprompted discussion

When the discussion groups were opened, none of the topic prompts mentioned the environment. This was a conscious decision in order to see whether young people spontaneously mentioned environmental concerns in the course of the discussion. There was only two spontaneous comments from a young woman in the regional focus group: she admired someone’s travel habits as good for the environment and later said that in order to travel in a sustainable fashion her work and home would have to be closer to each other. No participants spontaneously mentioned environmental concerns as a factor influencing their mode choice or decision to get a driving license.

4.4.2 Prompted discussion

After several days a new discussion topic was added asking young people to reflect on the environment, health and safety impacts of their travel choices. Even after this prompt, quite a few people chose to discuss health and safety and did not even discuss environmental

impacts. Furthermore, people who relied heavily on public transport rarely contributed to this topic and did not say that environmental concerns were a reason for their travel choices.

Instead, those who discussed environmental impacts tended to be car drivers who expressed a degree of ambivalence. Many said they were conscious of the environment and expressed a desire to travel sustainably. But this desire was usually immediately followed by justifications for why they could not do anything about it.

'I do consider the environmental impact my travel is having, however I feel as though there's not a lot I can do to help the situation when it comes to travel. Like others, I cannot walk/cycle to work/uni etc, and my car is not a gas-guzzler, nor does it pump out fumes.' (F21F)

'I do not ever think about the environment impacts whilst I travel. It is not because I don't want to, but because it's unrealistic for me' (F19L)

Many young people expressed a sense that their impacts were minimal and there was 'nothing they could do.' However others discussed strategies they used to reduce their impact, such as carpooling or trip chaining. One young woman said that whilst she could not do anything about her travel she instead made sustainable choices in other aspects of her life.

Some young people outright rejected the idea that their travel choices could have a negative impact at all. One young man, for example, assumed that because his car did not emit visible smoke fumes like 'those massive diesel trucks' then his impact was negligible (M21P). Another expressed doubts in climate change altogether:

'I honestly can't say I have really thought about it at all. It just hasn't been a prominent thing in my mind as I'm not a big believer in climate change.' (M18P)

This sense that 'nothing could be done' in the present was sometimes coupled with an expression that things would be different in the future. Some young people were confident that petrol-based engines were on their way out and would soon be replaced by alternative fuels. Yet these alternatives were described in a more abstract, future-oriented way. Perhaps this future focus is used by some as a justification for why they did not have to change their travel habits in the present.

5. Reflections on using online focus groups

This section provides a short summary of the strengths and weaknesses of using online focus groups to collect qualitative data.

There were two main disadvantages to the method: recruitment difficulties and difficulty in guiding the discussion. Although online methods are meant to make it easier to organise focus groups, we experienced some difficulties in finding a recruitment company that could meet our needs. Most online research companies specialise in quantitative research or run their own panels, making recruitment difficult. The recruitment company employed had to contact nearly 5,000 potential participants in order to find 28 who were willing to participate, giving a very low response rate (0.6%) from initial contact. Furthermore, the researchers had intended to run a group composed entirely of people without a license but across both the metropolitan and regional groups only 3 people did not have a license.

Guiding the discussion also proved somewhat difficult in the asynchronous format. Although the discussions generated meaningful responses, the asynchronous format made it difficult to probe for greater depth of responses. Several times the moderator asked someone to expand on or clarify a point but the participant either did not notice the question or did not want to respond. This may have been exacerbated by the large number of participants (which made it more difficult to track individual discussions) and the fact that the Sakai platform makes it difficult to keep track of which posts are new. A 'new post' notification system, perhaps through email notifications, may help resolve this issue.

Overall, however, the online focus groups were considered a qualified success and several more discussions are planned for the future. The primary strength of the method was the ability to engage with a geographically dispersed and difficult-to-contact group of young people scattered across Melbourne and the state of Victoria. The method also kept costs down, although this will vary depending on how participants are recruited.

Furthermore, participants appeared to enjoy the discussion. Several young people told the moderator they found the discussions interesting and that they learned a lot about what other people think about transport issues.

6. Discussion and implications

This paper used online discussion groups to study the attitudes of young people toward the car, the relationship between transport and e-communications and the role of environmental attitudes in shaping transport choices.

The car symbolised many things to young people: freedom, independence, fondness, adult responsibility and in some cases a necessity. However the basic act of owning a car was seen not as a symbol of status and people who did not own a car were not characterised as lower status. Rather, owning and in particular paying for a car was seen as an adult responsibility and non-car-owners were sometimes spoken of as more dependent or less mature. Compared to past decades, it may be that owning a car is no longer a luxury that conveys but instead is seen by some to be a necessity that conveys responsibility.

Young people spoke quite passionately about the importance of spending time with their friends and discussed at great length how transport could either facilitate or hinder this. E-communications were seen as a way to facilitate and strengthen face-to-face friendships and were not seen as a substitute. Just as the advances in the home telephone did not replace the need to travel, it is unlikely that e-communications will significantly reduce the need for young people to socialise with their peers.

Not one person spontaneously mentioned that environmental concerns shaped their travel choices. Even when an environmental topic was introduced by the moderator, reactions were quite mixed. Often young people justified why they 'had no choice' but to use their car. Very few mentioned modifying their current behaviour; more often they spoke abstractly of how future changes (such as alternative fuels) that will one day solve the problem for them.

This study provides a preliminary understanding of how young people talk about cars and travel in Victoria. It is important to reemphasise point that qualitative research is not meant to stand in for a representative sample of views. A lack of responses amongst 28 participants does not mean that these issues are not important to any young people. Not all young people have ready internet access or the interest in spending time online which likely excludes some segments of the population.

Furthermore, qualitative research cannot quantify the influence an attitude has on a behaviour. This study suggests that some of the attitude variables the popular press credits with the reduction in licensing are not top-of-mind for young people, which immediately leads to the question: then what *is* causing the decline?

This study is only the first preliminary step in what is becoming a broad body of research understanding the licensing and travel decisions of young people. This qualitative research has helped focus an upcoming quantitative survey of a representative sample of young Victorians. The survey will include questions about the symbolic status of the car, the use of e-communications and environmental attitudes. However these attitudes will be measured in conjunction with the living arrangements and socio-economic conditions of young people. Only then can the relative influence of attitudes be directly compared to situational variables in order to give a better understanding of why young people are becoming increasingly less car reliant.

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