

# Is the World real ? Or do most of us live in our own Truman show ?

**Bárbara Florença**  
University of Madeira  
Funchal, Portugal  
a2007802@max.uma.pt

## ABSTRACT

The main objective of this report is to study a travel online community Dopplr and to find to what extend registered users rely on other users's opinions and reviews to support their own decision about travel destinations, transport facilities, lodging options, restaurants and bars, shopping and visiting places. A survey was made to randomly chosen user. I found that although information found on Dopplr has some influence, the biggest is the information found on the internet.

## Keywords

Dopplr, Social Web, Travel Trends, Travel Choices.

## INTRODUCTION

This class is about social web, so the focus very much on cross-cultural relationships. Outside the web cross-cultural relationships are manly done by travelling. Therefore, the project theme I found interesting was Travelling Social Webs.

### Personal Motivation

Personally I love to travel. Made just a few travelling journeys and it seems never enough.

Many of the class students are from other countries, so I am counting on some collective motivation. I am imagining that they share the same passion as I do.

### Why Dopplr ?



Figure 1. Dopplr logo

Dopplr seems to have some interesting characteristics. It is a newborn (December 2007). It is European. Its design is very innovative; graphics are out of usual and interesting. Also scores for inventing new features, like the traveling

report with the color coding, the social atlas and the carbon calculations.

Dopplr allows users to interconnect by sharing their traveling plans with people they trust. When travels overlap, dopplr will notify the users.

Tips and traveling advices can be found for each traveling destination.

## BACKGROUND WORK

With the internet and the technology development, internet has imposed its presence at our workplaces, homes, phones and even public places. It is everywhere and accessible to everyone. Internet made communications global, culture global, economies global, almost any aspect of the so called "civilized societies" can be globalized. But how global did it made travelling as well ? Is that process just beginning ? Or has the travel activity has already had a huge impact ?

Not the act of travelling by itself. That has been always global by nature. We are interested on finding out how globalized are our traveling choices. Do people still travel to places because someone in the family or any friend was there and recommends? Or because the travelling destination has some promising photos on the travel agency brochure ? Or the travel destinations choices are influenced by the internet ? An what about places to stay, places to visit, places to eat and places to shop choices ? How much are all of these influenced by the internet ?

But before we adventure ourselves on the internet role on travelling choices, we are giving a bit of though on how much travelling most people do and for which reasons.

### Looking at the big picture: How global is the act of travelling itself ?

In the last decades, tourism has raised its status to a major domain of contemporary life and became a huge international industry. Tourism has become a respected specialty in sociology, anthropology, geography, political science, economics and some other disciplines. [1]

The top international destinations in 2009 are: [4]

Rank	Country	International tourist arrivals
1	 <a href="#">France</a>	74.2 million
2	 <a href="#">United States</a>	54.9 million
3	 <a href="#">Spain</a>	52.2 million
4	 <a href="#">China</a>	50.9 million
5	 <a href="#">Italy</a>	43.2 million
6	 <a href="#">United Kingdom</a>	28.0 million
7	 <a href="#">Turkey</a>	25.5 million
8	 <a href="#">Germany</a>	24.2 million
9	 <a href="#">Malaysia</a>	23.6 million
10	 <a href="#">Mexico</a>	21.5 million

### Do we really travel ?

Scientific evidence [2] has shown that most of us don't really travel a lot. In fact, most of us, most of the time, have a reduced mobility range. A scientific study was conducted with 100 000 subjects. The goal was to study the trajectory of anonymous mobile phone users. Their position was tracked for a six-month period, given by the communications tower. The investigating team found results that contradict the random trajectories predicted by the prevailing Lévy flight and random walk models. Results show that the human trajectories had a high degree of temporal and spatial regularity.

Each subject was characterized by a time independent short travel distance and also a significant probability of returning to the same places. Therefore, the individual travel patterns collapse into a single spatial probability distribution. This fact, contrary to common belief and despite the diversity of their travel history, humans follow simple reproducible patterns.

### For those who travel, why do they travel ?

Dean MacCannell proposed in the early 1970s a social tourism thesis that people travel in a quest for authenticity. However that issue, has become less and less relevant. The globalization made a huge impact on the natural and cultural diversity of most countries

Post-modern philosophers, like for example, Jean Baudrillard, a French sociologist, stands by that the contemporary world is dominated by "simulacra," without originals. This was a result, not only by the globalization due to the internet that occurred in the last years, but as a consequence of many decades of culture blending during imperialist expansion, globalization and the post-modern hybridization of cultures. [1] So nowadays, what do people look for when they travel ? According to Cohen [1], now that the quest for authenticity in the contemporary world, has become futile, people now prefer to pursue different experiences going to a somewhat similar place to their own. Ironical, isn't it ? But with a twist: greater variety, higher quality, more agreeable ambience than what is available in at their own home.

Fun and enjoyment are now the main motives for travelling. Remember that this paper is about travelling choices, when people actually have a choice. We exclude no-choice travels, like, for example, business travels, when people don't really choose the destination and most likely don't choose places to visit, eat or shop neither.

The fact that fun and enjoyment is now the main motive, attractions have become more and more manmade, bigger, more technological sophisticated of "contrived" or "manmade". Think of the popularity of manmade attractions opposed to natural attractions. The Disney World plus a so many amusement parks, entertainment centers, shows and festival scattered all over the world. The Forbes list of the most visited places in the world verifies this statement. Leading the list we have Times Square in New York. We need just a quick glance at the list to check that in the Top 10 of the most visited places in the world, only one is a nature's wonder, all the other are manmade. Six out of 10 are either amusement or theme parks. The other three are monuments.

1. Time Square in New York, USA – 35 million visitors per year
2. National Mall & Memorial Parks in Washington Monument, Lincoln and Jefferson Memorials – Washington DC, USA with 25 million visitors per year
3. Disney World's Magic Kingdom in Florida California, USA – 16.6 million visitors per year
4. Trafalgar Square in London, England – 15 million visitors per year
5. Disneyland Park in Anaheim California, USA – 14.7 million visitors per year
6. Niagara Falls in Ontario, Canada and New York USA – 14 million visitors per year
7. Fisherman's Wharf/Golden Gate National Recreation Area in San Francisco, USA – 13 million visitors per year
8. Tokyo Disneyland/DisneySea in Tokyo, Japan – 12.9 million visitors per year

9. Notre Dame de Paris in Paris, France – 12 million visitors per year

10. Disneyland Paris in Marne La Vallee, France – 10.6 million visitors per year.

## METHOD DESCRIPTION

A survey was conducted amongst dopplr users. The main focus is to assess which is or was the influence of Dopplr in the user's life as a traveler. We intended to assess if Dopplr is merely an online place where users register their travels, but their own travel choices are not influenced by Dopplr, neither their site inputs influence other users.

Or if, on the other hand, Dopplr is much more than a traveling journal. If it developed to be a traveling guide, a site full of advices from unknown "friends"; a hotel booking, shopping, eating and visiting guide; above all that a traveling trend setter.

The individuals that participated in this study were contacted online and asked for their cooperation. There was no payment at all for this contribution.

## Sampling

Dopplr users were selected randomly. Dopplr does not publish email addresses or personal contacts. However each member may choose to disclose their own email, a link to a personal page, to a personal blog.

The contacts found were used to send a personalized email requesting the volunteer participation in the survey along with a brief explanation of the survey context and the link to the survey. A total of 65 messages were sent, either by email or messages posted on blogs or contact forms.

## Survey

The survey is called "Dopplr in your life", was divided in sections. Each section aims a specific kind of information about the individuals. However the survey was designed to be clear, concise, quick answering (3 to 4 minutes) and ensure the minimum of dubious answers. The questions are a total amount of fifteen questions, most of them closed with single or multiple selection, seven table / matrix questions type. The questions were divided into three pages and on top of each one a % bar informs the individual, how much is left to go.

## Survey Sections

### a. Presentation

In this section the individual what is the main focus for the survey, how his privacy is insured and how the results will be treated and used.

Dopplr in your life Page 1/3 0%

### Who am I ?

My name is Barbara. I am a student of a Master of Science degree in Computer Science (<http://www.m-iit.org/mel>) in the University of Madeira, PORTUGAL. I am doing a research about how a particular social web, Dopplr ([www.dopplr.com](http://www.dopplr.com)) influences the travelling choices of its users. The course is called social web (<http://hci.uma.pt/courses/socialweb>). The lecturer is Vassilis Kostakos (<http://dme.uma.pt/people/faculty/vassilis.kostakos>).

### About the survey

This survey is designed to be simple and quick answering. It should take only 3 minutes of your time. I need at least 5 caring souls that answer this for me until the 9th Decembre. Please be one of them. The survey is anonymous. No personal information is collected. Any reference to email boxes used to send the survey results or any other personal information will be deleted and will not be used in any other activities. No one else will have access to the collected information. The only information that will be used will be the overall results of all the survey answers received. Please help me to do this paper.

Figure 2. Survey Presentation.

Each individual may leave an email to receive the survey results, if that is desired. If not, the field may be left blank.

### b. Statistical Data

The demographic questions assess general information about the individual, such as age, gender, nationality, family status, country residing and existence of children.

1. If you want to receive this research report, leave us your emailbox. If you don't, leave it blank. After the report sent your contact information will be deleted.

Email

2. Statistical data

Age \*

Gender \*

Nationality \*

Family status \*

Country residing \*

Do you have sons, daughters or other children living with you ?

☐ Yes

☐ No

If you said yes, how many ?

Back This survey has been created with 2ask Next

Figure 2. Statistical data.

### c. General Questions about Traveling Habits

This section focus on traveling frequency, destinies, goals (business, pleasure or for health reasons) and usually with who.

Dopplr in your life Page 2/3 33%

3. How often do you travel ? \* Choose only one answer

☐ Several times a month ☐ Several times a year ☐ Once a year ☐ Less than once a year

4. With what main purpose do you travel the majority of times ? \* You may choose more than one option

☐ Pleasure ☐ Business ☐ Health issues

5. With who do you usually travel ? \* You may choose more than one option

☐ Alone ☐ With family ☐ With friends ☐ With work peers

Back This survey has been created with 2ask Next

Figure 3. Travelling habits

#### d. Questions regarding Dopplr Influences

These questions aim to assess to what degree Dopplr may have influenced the traveler's choices. It inquiries about the amount of times the individual logs in to Dopplr and how Dopplr influences on travelling destinies, transportation, lodging, eating, shopping and visiting places choices. A final question inquiries if any of the above mentioned activities were ever made due solely by Dopplr influence.

**Dopplr in your life** Page 3/3 67%

6. How often do you login to Dopplr ? \*

☐ No longer registered ☐ Less than once a year ☐ Once a year ☐ Several times a year ☐ Several times a month

7. How much each influences your choices on your travel destination ? \*

Number the given option by order of importance

	4=major influence	3=influences a bit	2=few influences	1=minor influence
Family or friends reviews	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Information by travelling agencies	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Information by marketing campaigns	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Information on internet	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Information on Dopplr	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

8. How much each influences your choices on the transportation facilities ? \*

Number the given option by order of importance

	4=major influence	3=influences a bit	2=few influences	1=minor influence
Family or friends reviews	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Information by travelling agencies	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Information by marketing campaigns	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Information on internet	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Information on Dopplr	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

9. How much each influences your choices on where you stay ? \*

Number the given option by order of importance

	4=major influence	3=influences a bit	2=few influences	1=minor influence
Family or friends reviews	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Information by travelling agencies	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Information by marketing campaigns	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Information on internet	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Information on Dopplr	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

10. How much each influences your choices on where you eat ? \*

Number the given option by order of importance

	4=major influence	3=influences a bit	2=few influences	1=minor influence
Family or friends reviews	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Information by travelling agencies	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Information by marketing campaigns	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Information on internet	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Information on Dopplr	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

11. How much each influences your choices on where you shop ? \*

Number the given option by order of importance

	4=major influence	3=influences a bit	2=few influences	1=minor influence
Family or friends reviews	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Information by travelling agencies	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Information by marketing campaigns	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Information on internet	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Information on Dopplr	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

12. How much each influences your choices on places you visit ? \*

Number the given option by order of importance

	4=major influence	3=influences a bit	2=few influences	1=minor influence
Family or friends reviews	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Information by travelling agencies	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Information by marketing campaigns	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Information on internet	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Information on Dopplr	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

13. Because of reading about it on Dopplr, have you ever... \*

Number the given option by order of importance

	Yes	No	Not sure
...gone to a specific country or city ?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
...used a specific transportation facility ?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
...stayed at a specific hotel or other lodging ?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
...went at a specific bar or restaurant ?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
...shopped at a specific place ?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
...visited a specific place ?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

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Figure 4. Dopplr influence.

#### e. Wrapping it up

A text at the end of the survey, thanks the individual for collaborating and mentions once again the privacy policy.

**Dopplr in your life**

**End of the questionnaire**

Thank you for your cooperation. Let me remind you that I will insure your privacy.

Figure 5. Final message.

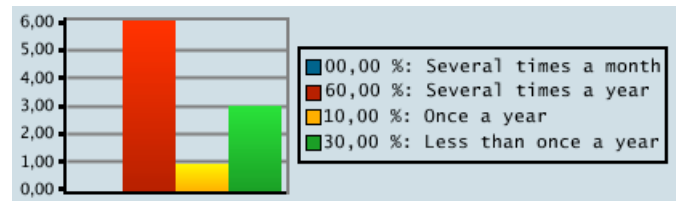
## RESULTS

A total of 10 individuals responded to the survey.

Ages range from 19 to 54. 60% are men. 40% are born and reside in the UK, 30% are born and reside in the USA, 10% are born and reside in Italy, 10% are born and reside in France and 10% are born and reside in Canada. 50% are single. 40% are married. 10% are divorced.

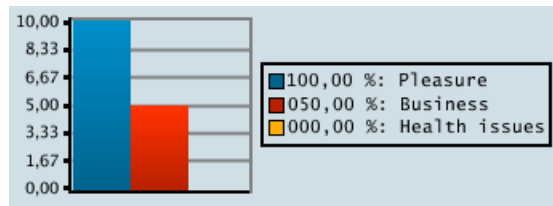
70% don't have any children living with them, while 10% live with one to 3 children.

A majority of 60% travels several times a year. 30% travels less than once a year, while a minority (10%) travels once a year.



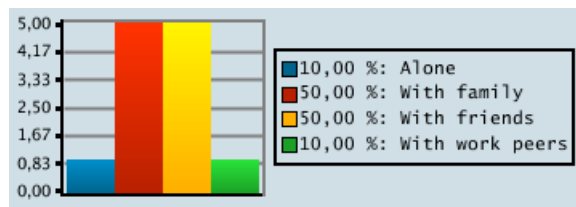
Graphic 1. Question 3 - How often do you travel ?

All the individuals referred pleasure as the main purpose for travelling, while 50% referred business purposes. No one mentioned travelling for health issues.



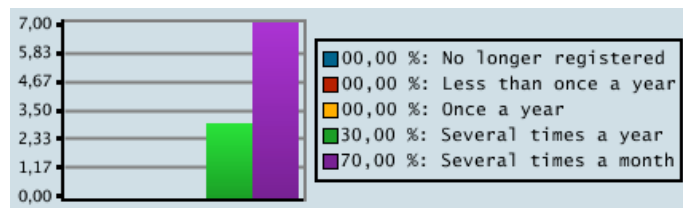
**Graphic 2. Question 4 - With what main purpose do you travel the majority of times ?**

Half of the users surveyed referred that usually travel with friends and family. A minority also travel with work peers (10%).



**Graphic 3. Question 5 - With who do you usually travel?**

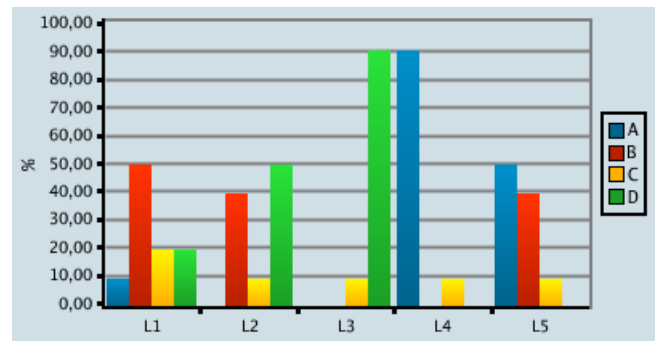
The majority (70%) logs in Dopplr several times a month and the minority logs in several times a year. No one selected the less frequent options.



**Graphic 4. Question 6 - How often do you login to Dopplr ?**

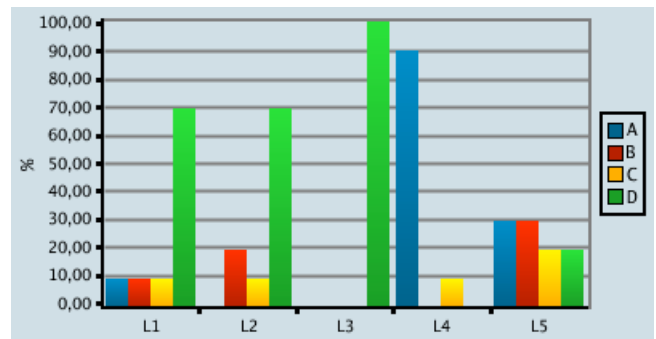
- Legend:**
- A 4=major influence / B 3=influences a bit
  - C 2=few influences / D 1=minor influence
  - L1 Family or friends reviews
  - L2 Information by travelling agencies
  - L3 Information by marketing campaigns
  - L4 Information on internet
  - L5 Information on Dopplr

The internet based information (other than Dopplr) is the major influence for choosing the travel destination (90%), followed by the information on Dopplr, family and friends reviews and information by travelling agencies.



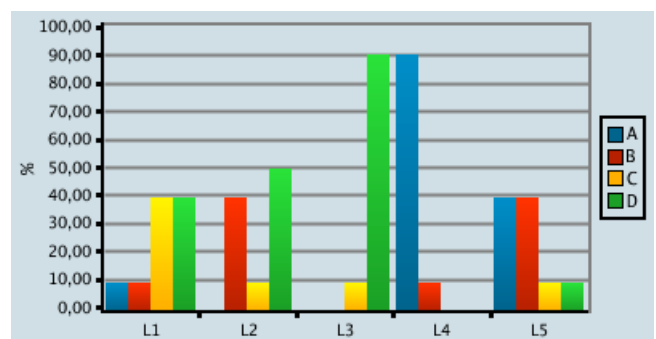
**Graphic 5. Question 7 - How much each influences your choices on your travel destination ?**

Internet based information is the major influence for choosing the transportation facilities (90%), followed by the information on Dopplr (30%) followed by family and friends reviews. 30% also referred Dopplr as influencing a bit, along with information by travelling agencies and family and friends reviews.



**Graphic 6. Question 8 - How much each influences your choices on the transportation facilities ?**

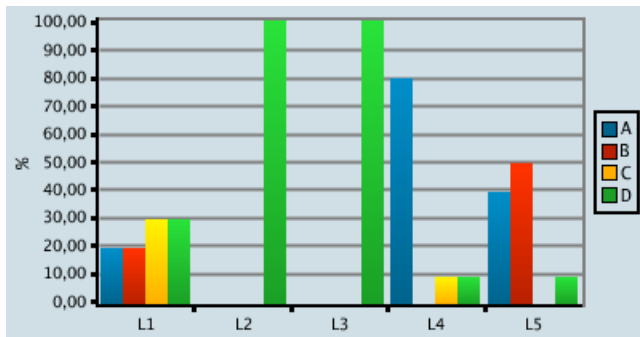
The internet based (90%) and Dopplr information (40%) are a major influence on lodging choices, followed by information by family or friends reviews. Information by travelling agencies is referred as influencing just a bit (40%) along with Dopplr.



**Graphic 7. Question 9 - How much each influences your choices on where you stay ?**

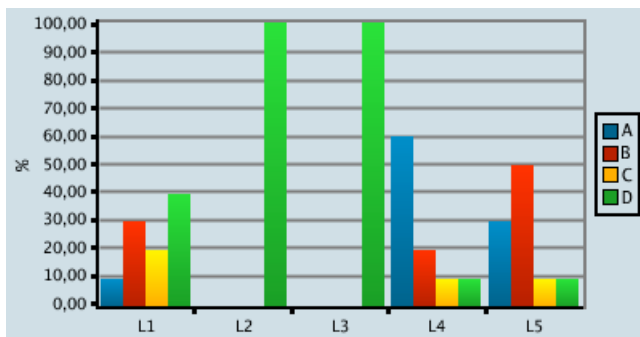


Where to eat are mainly influenced by internet based (80%), Dopplr information (40%) and family or friends reviews (20%). Information on Dopplr (40%) and family and friends reviews (20%) is mentioned as influencing a bit.



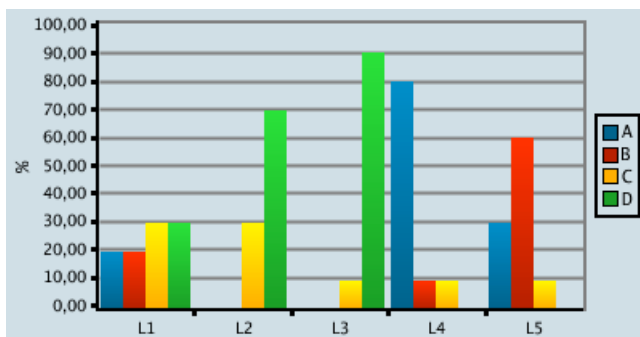
**Graphic 8. Question 10 - How much each influences your choices on where you eat ?**

Where to shop is mainly influenced by internet based (60%) and Dopplr information (30%) and family or friends reviews (10%). As having a bit on influence, Dopplr information (50%), family and friends reviews (30%) and internet based information (20%).



**Graphic 9. Question 11 - How much each influences your choices on where you shop ?**

The visiting places are more determined by information on the internet (80%), on Dopplr (30%) and by family and friends reviews (20%).

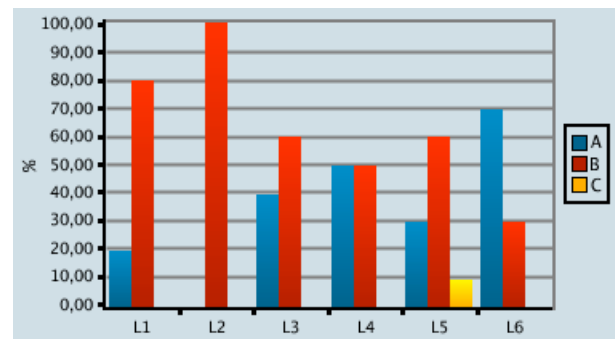


**Graphic 10. Question 12 - How much each influences your choices on places you visit ?**

The majority of the individuals mentioned that visited a specific place (70%), went to a specific restaurant or bar (50%), stayed at a hotel (40%), shopped at a specific place (30%) or visited a country or city (20%) due to Dopplr influence. No one mentioned having used a travelling transportation due to Dopplr influence.

**Legend:**  
**A** Yes / **B** No / **C** Don't Know

- L1 Visited a country or city
- L2 Used a travelling facility
- L3 Stayed at a hotel or lodging
- L4 Went to a restaurant or bar
- L5 Shopped at a specific place
- L6 Visited a specific place



**Graphic 11. Question 13 - Because of reading about it on Dopplr, have you ever...**

## DISCUSSION

The majority of the individuals that took the survey travels several times a year, 30% travels less than once a year and only 10% usually travels at least once a year. These are high percentages for high frequency travelling. This is actually expected, because this survey was made only to Dopplr registered users. Since Dopplr is an online community designed for frequente travellers, this characteristic is part of Dopplr users' profiles. A majority logins Dopplr quite frequently, several times a month or a year.

All mentioned that travel for pleasure purposes, rather than for business purposes. This fact allows the kind of influences that were surveyed. When the main purpose is for business and travelling is with coworkers, the traveller does not really have a choice on the travelling destinations and transportations used, and minor choices on where to stay, eat, shop and visit. Also, the fact that 50% usually travel with family, increases the visiting and shopping amount of activities made.

Internet based information (other than Dopplr) along with Dopplr information were the most mentioned factors that influence the travellers choices on countries or cities to travel to, the transportation facilities used, where to stay, eat and shop and places to visit.

On **all** of these choices, internet based information was constantly the most influencing factor. Dopplr information was the second major influencing factor. The third was family and friends review. Information given by travelling agencies and marketing campaigns were not mentioned at all by any of the users as being a major influence. Furthermore these were the most pointed out factors as being the minor influencing factors.

For the choices on transporting facilities, where to eat and where to shop, 100% of the users pointed out marketing campaigns what influences the least.

For the choices on where to eat and where to shop, 100% of the users pointed out information by travelling agencies as being the least influences and 70% pointed as well it for the transporting facilities choices.

Dopplr seems to influence the mostly choices places to visit (70%), restaurants or bars to go to (50%), hotels or lodging options (40%), places to shop (30%) and countries or cities to visit (20%). Dopplr has not revealed itself as being an influence on the use of specific facilities.

Information given by travelling agencies were expected to be higher rated on levels of influencing travellers choices, considering these are the travelling professionals that are most in contact with travellers when they make book the travels and make the ultimate choices on where to go.

### Survey

It would be very interesting to study in the future, how much do travellers still use travelling agencies to book for flights, train or bus, hotel or lodging, excursions, tours and other activities. According to our survey, the internet based and Dopplr information are the main information sources that Dopplers use in order to make their travelling plans and choices. Is this a consequence of using more the internet for bookings rather than travelling agencies ?

Would this be true also for other travelling online community users, or just for Dopplers ?

Specifically regarding the internet based information influence (other than Dopplr), is it also true for other travellers that don't use Dopplr or any other online travelling community ?

Is this trend starting with travelling enthusiasts (frequent travellers and travelling online communities users) ? And will it also be true in the future for other travellers profiles ?

These are the questions that this survey arises for futures studies.

### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

As usual my dear family is always the backup support that allows me to dedicate some of my time to research. A big thank you for them.

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