

Jumping for Fun? Negotiating Mobility and the Geopolitics of Foursquare

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Abstract

Rather than assume that there is some universal “right way” to engage social media platforms, we interrogate how the location-based social media practice known as “jumping” played out on the popular service Foursquare. We use this case to investigate how a “global” or universal system is constructed with an imagined user in mind, one who enjoys a particular type of mobility and experience of place. Through the analysis of official Foursquare policies and mission statements, discussions among developers, interviews with and conversations among Foursquare users, online traces left by jumpers, and correspondence between designers and users on discussion forums, we identify how certain practices and participants are discursively constructed as normative, while other practices and groups are marginalized. Through the study of “jumping,” and its association with Indonesian players in particular, we highlight tensions between the assumptions and industrial strategies of Foursquare designers and the emergent practices and norms of early adopters and avid participants. We argue that the practices of “Indonesian” Foursquare jumpers and the discourses surrounding their use of Foursquare illustrate that practices understood as transgressive or resistive might best be read as strategies for engaging with a platform as groups contend with marginalizing social, economic, and/or political conditions. The case study examined in this article highlights the practices of participants who attempt to integrate themselves into the design of a social media system and the “workarounds,” tensions, negotiations, and logics that manifest in that process.

Keywords

location-based social media, cheating, mobility, Foursquare, Indonesia

Introduction

In September 2010, Chris Thompson, a blogger for “About Foursquare: an unofficial blog covering Foursquare badges, news, and apps,” recounted a tension among Foursquare users. According to Thompson’s post, a battle raged between “honest foursquare users” and those who “play the game a little, well, *differently* than everyone else.”¹ He continued to describe a population of Foursquare participants who “appear to trot all over the globe, unlocking a badge in Los Angeles one minute and another in London the next. Without some sort of teleportation device, it would be impossible to travel as quickly as they do.” Thompson’s observations about the practice of checking in to geographically distant Foursquare venues in an impossibly short amount of time did not go unnoticed by other Foursquare users: many referred to it, bluntly, as cheating. Foursquare users even gave this practice a specific name: “jumping.”

Users’ competitive jockeying for visibility on official and unofficial scoreboards defines much of Foursquare’s raison d’être as a location-based social media platform. The

practice of “jumping” riles many users who see such reporting inconsistencies as flagrant, duplicitous abuse of Foursquare’s system. But perhaps even more noteworthy was that jumping was often discussed among users as a decidedly Indonesian activity. Users who “jumped” became a controversial group early on in the Foursquare community: while some considered jumpers unabashed frauds, others read their actions as a distinct form of play. The players who regarded jumpers as cheaters often called for disciplinary action on the part of Foursquare representatives and

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employees. However, Foursquare never completely blocked the practice.

Rather than assume that there is some universal “right way” to engage social media platforms, we interrogate how the location-based social media practice known as “jumping” played out on Foursquare and came to be associated with Indonesian players, to examine the digital traces and discursive construction of a global socio-technical system with a particular set of politics. Through the analysis of official Foursquare policies and mission statements, discussions among developers, interviews with and conversations among Foursquare users, online traces left by jumpers, and correspondence between designers and users on discussion forums, we identify how certain practices and participants are discursively constructed as legitimate, while other practices and groups are marginalized.

While this article analyzes a specific case study, the questions addressed here relate to social media more broadly: What happens when social media platforms are designed with particular participants in mind and/or for particular types of activities? We contend that the case of “Indonesian” Foursquare jumpers—and designers’ and users’ reactions to the practice of jumping—is an illustrative example of how local engagements with ostensibly global systems surface the geopolitical biases of social media platforms. Specifically, the case of Foursquare jumping reveals how the “global” or universal system is actually constructed with a particular type of user in mind, one who enjoys a particular type of mobility and experience of place. Ultimately, we argue that the practices of “Indonesian” Foursquare jumpers and the discourses surrounding their Foursquare use illustrate that practices which are understood as transgressive or resistive might best be read as a group of users’ strategies for engaging with a platform as they negotiate marginalizing social, economic, and/or political conditions. The case study examined in this article highlights the practices of participants who attempt to integrate themselves into the design of a social media system and the “workarounds,” tensions, negotiations, and logics that manifest in that process.

A Note on Methods

What Is Foursquare?

Dennis Crowley and Naveen Selvadurai founded Foursquare, a location-based social media application, and launched it in early 2009 at the Austin-based film, interactive media, and music festival, South by Southwest (SXSW). While Foursquare is designed for relational interaction with places on a local level, the service also implements a game-like component, awarding points, rewards, and rankings for certain behaviors. Once it became a mainstream social media app, much of Foursquare’s user activity involved claiming virtual badges and points for exploring new locations, traveling vast distances, frequenting certain locales, participating

in events, or visiting iconic venues. “Mayorships” were awarded to participants who checked in to a venue more often than other participants. Some participating or “claimed venues” offered “specials” or discounts to Foursquare users when they checked in. Check-ins or location announcements are typically carried out manually through a smartphone app or desktop web browser, and they are broadcast to a pre-selected network of “friends.” Some check-ins, such as those endowing mayorships, are announced by Foursquare publicly to a global audience.

In 2010, a year after the platform launched, Foursquare claimed to have 1 million users. By 2011, the company announced that 10 million people had Foursquare accounts, and in April 2012, Foursquare reached 20 million users.² Part of this growth was attributed to an increasing number of international participants. In 2012, a survey of Foursquare use showed that over 50% of Foursquare participants resided outside of the United States (TechCrunch, 2016). Foursquare continues to dominate the location-based social media market as other prominent competitors dissolve or reinvent their service in order to acquire more users.³

In order to investigate jumpers’ practices and perceptions of jumpers on Foursquare, we conducted a discourse analysis, supplemented by interviews with US-based Foursquare users. We initially collected data for this article in 2011–2012, approximately 2 years after the platform’s launch, when user practices were well established. We continued to follow the platform from 2012 to 2015 in order to gauge Foursquare’s response to user practices and debates as well as jumpers’ reactions to design changes, policies, and community practices over time. Foursquare’s game mechanics, design, and purpose have changed significantly since 2011, and many of the services and affordances we analyze in this study are now defunct or outdated. Although some of the functionalities discussed in this article are obsolete, this study focuses on the meaning and actions mobilized through social media systems more generally, rather than anchoring meaning and action to a particular incarnation of one social media platform (Lomborg, 2015). In addition, tracking design changes and interactions among users and between users and developers over the course of 5 years allowed us to monitor changes to the platform and user base over time and follow the throes of the debate around jumping to its resolution.

Information about intended Foursquare use, game mechanics, and the social decisions behind certain rules and regulations within the Foursquare platform was gathered from the Foursquare website, Foursquare Terms of Service and “House Rules,” official and unofficial Foursquare blogs, official statements and press releases from Foursquare employees, and news coverage of Foursquare developments. Additionally, we archived and analyzed discussion threads about jumping as cheating carried out on Google Groups between third-party developers working with the Foursquare API, Foursquare founders, and in-house developers. We also

consulted technology reports about Indonesia's mobile adoption rates and use, popular technology services, and the country's current technology industry landscape.

In order to explore everyday uses and the range of practices on Foursquare, as well as opinions on jumping as cheating in particular, the lead author conducted semi-structured interviews and focus groups with US-based users, and participants who actively track and expose Foursquare jumpers and cheaters. We gathered and analyzed online conversations among Foursquare users and between customers and Foursquare developers on getsatisfaction.com: a website that hosts a Foursquare "customer community" and allows for discussion among customers as well as between customers and companies. These forums were particularly useful in gathering information about international perceptions of jumping and jumpers. Although the act of jumping can be ephemeral and difficult to identify, Indonesian jumpers in particular leave many digital traces that are archived online.⁴ We followed the Kaskus Foursquare Jumper Community (*Komunitas Foursquare Kaskus*) forums, Facebook page, and Twitter account. The names of participants and identifying information from discussion boards and social media have been omitted to offer anonymity to the original posters.

Literature Review

Location-Based Social Media as Playful Platforms

Motivations for mobile social media and location-based social media platform use vary greatly among participants (Lindqvist, Cranshaw, Wiese, Hong, & Zimmerman, 2011). Although location-based social media services tend to be understood as tools for real-time location announcement based on physical presence, scholars have found that location announcement on these systems can be performative and playful rather than precise (Cramer, Rost, & Holmquist, 2011; De Souza e Silva & Sutko, 2009; De Souza e Silva & Hjorth, 2009; Farman, 2014; Schwartz & Halegoua, 2014). Sicart (2014) suggests that play is expressive, potentially disruptive, as well as contextual and appropriative of the context in which it exists. Therefore, playful uses of globally distributed social media can express situated experiences of what it is like to use a platform from a particular social or physical position within local constraints and cultures. As Flanagan has suggested, critical and creative play can interrogate social norms as well as help players make sense of the world they inhabit (Flanagan, 2009). Therefore, playful or creative uses of location-based social media systems might not only question accepted platform norms and practices of mobility but also cultivate an enriched understanding of their place within global and local networks and cultures.

In the case of Foursquare, participants are invested in the playful elements and game mechanics of the platform such as competing for points, ranking, and virtual loot (Cramer

et al., 2011; Frith, 2013) to connect with social networks. Scholars argue that the gaming experiences and relationships to game space encouraged by location-based, mobile platforms are distinct from those associated with console games. For example, Richardson (2010) has theorized that location-based mobile games erode the magic-circle, or dedicated game space, and integrate a sense of play onto a wide array of everyday spaces. While objectives such as acquiring points or status on a leaderboard might be clearly delineated as "leveling up," uncertainties around what constitutes "a win" and blurring game space through gamification—applying game design to non-game experiences—might complicate what counts as cheating and the situations where cheating happens within these games.

Foursquare and Illegitimate Participation

Consalvo (2007) has found that there are multiple definitions and reasons for cheating in games. Her findings suggest that players cheat not to win but to continue playing a game when they are "stuck" or do not want to quit (Consalvo, 2007). Other scholars' findings have supported this perspective noting that there is often a "social and creative value in cheats" (Fields & Kafai, 2010, p. 83) as well as a dedication to the game (Dumitrica, 2011). Consalvo and Serrano-Vazquez (2015) found that social media game players define cheating either as breaching the game's social norms and disrupting expected social behaviors in order to gain an unfair advantage or acting in contradiction to the game's or platform's formal rules (i.e., Terms of Service) (Vázquez & Consalvo, 2015, pp. 834–835).

Some scholars have noted that Foursquare has few outcomes that could be perceived as winning the game, and thus, cheating on Foursquare may hold little coherency, only affecting other players indirectly (Glas, 2011). However, studies of cheating on Foursquare have noted how breaking the link between the digital announcement of physical location and the representation of physical location within Foursquare comes to mean different things to different players. Glas specifically notes the "phenomenon of Indonesian cheaters" who check in to places in which they are not physically present and suggests that perhaps this "Indonesian" practice is viewed as status enhancing by other Indonesian players due to the cultural value placed on "being able to play with or subvert pre-programmed rules." The author refers to this type of practice as a "dishonest check-in" or "deviant behavior" (Glas, 2011).

In their study of Foursquare, Humphreys and Liao (2013) have also noted that certain types of play are considered illegitimate or are regarded as cheating or "stealing." In addition to making virtual claims over place visible to players located all over the world, Humphreys and Liao observe that Foursquare notifies players of when their "home territories" and virtual claims come under threat of being usurped by other players. According to the authors' findings, the

stronger the “person-to-place” connection, the more likely a participant was to regard a “stolen” mayorship as illegitimate or cheating. This cheating was understood by the authors not as a deviant or dishonest behavior, but as stealing a “hierarchical position from which one can make a claim over a place,” which is “inexorably tied to territoriality and the exertion of power” (Humphreys & Liao, 2013, n.p.).

These expressions of ownership or territoriality have been studied in video games as well. Thomas (2008) and Nakamura (2009) have noted two different, yet related, cases where players have attempted to exert territorial control over players whose activities they understood as illegitimate or distinct from their own. In both cases, players who were read as illegitimate were located in East Asia or coded as Asian and were targeted most visibly by Anglo or Western players. Despite claims to a frictionless world of global media flows, location-based services such as international gaming platforms reassert the spatial dimensions of geopolitical power relations.

Mobile Social Media in Indonesia

Debates concerning media globalization tend to emphasize interactions between the globalization of media industries, transnational reach of media texts, and the relationships between these texts, creative industries, and local cultures or nation-states. The growth of global digital media studies has called attention to the processes and practices that differentiate the Internet into localized Internets (Chan, 2014; Goggin, 2011, 2012; Halegoua & Aslinger, 2015) and the perception of imported media as local due to their appropriation and integration into everyday life (Miller, 2011). However, interactions that occur *between* geographically dispersed, diverse groups using global digital media platforms and the problems or conflicts that manifest through their encounters with difference have been less frequently analyzed. We know far less about the unexpected encounters and interactions *between* global users and their respective, localized practices of media consumption.

Due to proliferating rates of smartphone and US-based social media adoption, Indonesia provides a valuable context through which to study interactions among international social media users. Indonesians have historically relied on Internet cafes or *warnet* (public Internet kiosks) for Internet access instead of at-home Internet subscriptions (Hill, 2003). Since the early 2000s, many urban and rural Indonesians have leapfrogged personal computers in favor of mobile and smartphone ownership and adoption rates continue to rise (Nielsen, 2011; Poushter, 2016; Safitri, 2011). Public and mobile Internet use is not only convenient or economically viable, but ethnographic studies of Indonesian mobile phone and Internet use have found that the mobile phone symbolizes modernity, openness, and a “cool” opportunity to consume and construct new lifestyles, texts, and identities (Barendregt, 2008). Internet and mobile phones are read as

tools to navigate social and political contexts that are brimming with creativity, democracy, and sociality, as well as anxiety and violence (Hill & Sen, 2005; Humphreys & Barker, 2007).

The widespread adoption and symbolic value of smartphones in Indonesia coincided with mobile social media development trends within international technology industries. Indonesia has been a particularly receptive market for US-based social media platforms and exhibits a vibrant social and mobile mediascape (Vaswani, 2012). During the time of our study, Indonesian youth and urban elite pervasively used smartphones and mobile social media platforms like Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter for social and entertainment purposes such as consuming and distributing international pop culture, social networking, and information retrieval (Jung & Shim, 2014). Due to the mainstreaming of smartphones, which afford location-awareness and geo-positioning, the use of location-based social media platforms increased exponentially. In 2010, 1 year after Foursquare’s launch, Google Trends ranked Indonesia above the United States in Foursquare use (Lacy, 2010a). Although an extensive user base for mobile social media platforms exists, national and international entrepreneurs have noted that due to the reluctance of Indonesians to pay for web-based content, preferences for pay-as-you-go Internet models, and the lack of credit cards or universal payment systems, Internet companies have had difficulty monetizing the Indonesian market (Hill, 2003; Lacy, 2010b).

In the following sections, we examine Foursquare features around which community norms and jumper practices have developed. Unlike previous studies of Foursquare’s gamified system and user experience, we focus on badges instead of points or mayorships. Badges rather than mayorships, points, leaderboard status, or specials became the site of contestation among jumpers, global participants, and Foursquare developers. After a discussion of the Foursquare’s ecosystem and jumpers’ place within it, we offer an analysis of what jumping means within Foursquare and for global social media platforms more generally.

Badges

Foursquare’s original game mechanics included the accumulation of badges—colorful, digital icons that marked a range of officially highlighted achievements. From 2008 until 2014, the lure of badges, arguably even more than obtaining points or a ranked position on a leaderboard, drove the gamification of Foursquare’s routine mobility patterns and behaviors (Frith, 2013). Participants were able to acquire unique badges that represented and rewarded participants for their presence or experience within a given location. For example, the “Local” badge is awarded when a participant “checks-in” to a specific venue at least three times in 1 week; “School Night” means that a user has checked in after 3:00 a.m. on a week night; and “Photogenic” is awarded when a user checks

in to three venues with a photo booth. At the time of data collection, there were over 200 badges offered to Foursquare participants. Only designers employed by Foursquare were able to create badges for public use, making them uniquely scarce, coveted prizes among users.

A common understanding of badges within the Foursquare ecosystem was that they—iconically and virtually—shaped mobility through collecting and cataloging personal movement and experiences. Frith found that participants made special trips to certain locations or went out of their way to attain badges (an activity referred to as a “badge hunt”), significantly influencing mobility patterns and travel behaviors. For Frith’s participants, the pleasure of collecting badges was closely related to exploring and being physically present in the place where the badge is earned.

While several badges could be acquired from a variety of locations around the world, the majority of official badges could only be unlocked by checking in to a venue located within the United States. Badges were frequently coordinated with exclusive US-based events like SXSW or US-based television networks like Bravo or The History Channel. Other badges refer to US popular culture or the New York– and San Francisco–based tech scenes and can only be unlocked by people located at particular industry headquarters, technology conventions, or exclusive parties and events. In some cases, Foursquare designers created exclusive “special friend badges” such as the “Mr. Bill” badge, which could only be claimed at the birthday party of David Bill, the former CTO of CoTweet (a San Francisco–based social media company).

Overall, there are more badges dedicated to New York City (NYC) and San Francisco than any other US or international city. Since 2009, complaints about the lack of local badges outside of New York and California have appeared in Foursquare user forums and on customer service sites like getsatisfaction.com. Participants in US cities such as Boston, DC, Miami, and Milwaukee (among others) were adamant about their desire for place-specific badges. Many users offered their assistance to Foursquare developers in the form of lists of tourist attractions, local cuisine, cultural events and traditions, and suggestions for badges specific to their cities. For example, one getsatisfaction.com user suggested,

I think there should be more (or any) DC-specific badges! I went to NYC awhile ago and got a NYC-specific one almost immediately (Far, Far Away) but haven’t gotten any DC ones that I know of. I can think of a few ideas—checking in east of the Anacostia River, . . . a Metro one, a DC Tourist badge for checking in at the Mall, Smithsonian, monuments, the Duck tour, etc. I like Foursquare but wish there was more for DC! . . . It’s a big city with lots of users, but no badges? No fun.⁵

The discrepancy between the small number of badges available and the large number of geographically dispersed users was a common complaint among Foursquare

participants located outside of NYC and San Francisco at the height of Foursquare acrimony over Indonesian jumpers. As the above quote suggests, many Foursquare participants connected a lack of badges to a lack of “fun” or depleted pleasure derived from engaging with Foursquare in a particular city or town. International users voiced similar complaints and used getsatisfaction.com to lobby “team Foursquare” to create more place-specific badges that could be unlocked outside of the United States.

As a getsatisfaction.com user from Australia maintained, the badge system implies a priority on the part of Foursquare developers to cater to a US-based audience:

As an international (non-US) user of Foursquare, I see a lot of inconsistencies between participating countries; or more-so, between the US and everywhere else. One of these inconsistencies, and the one I would like to bring to attention is the lack of special badges outside of the US . . . and today it was tweeted that the History channel (US version) has released another US only badge (see tweet here: <http://twitter.com/Foursquare/status/. . .>). That’s fine, I’m glad that more companies are getting involved and the badge system in the US is so diverse, but it brings up the question of “Where is our badge? When are we going to be recognised as users of Foursquare?”⁶

Although Foursquare created a service for users to suggest local badges, complaints from geographically dispersed users continued. Dennis Crowley and other Foursquare employees repeatedly answered queries publicly, during 2010 and 2011, with assurances such as

Hey 100% agreed, and you’re about to see this stuff soon. We’ve been quietly rebuilding our infrastructure to support a much wider variety of badges and have been brainstorming and asking users for suggestions for the past 6 months (!) or so. Look for big changes soon:) ps: http://Foursquare.com/suggest_badge—Dennis Crowley⁷

Jumping as Social Practice

While there are many behaviors that have been identified as illegitimate on Foursquare (from mayorship stealing to spam), the practice of “jumping” involves a user checking in to a location on Foursquare that does not coincide with their physical presence in a geographic location, as marked by global positioning system (GPS) coordinates. Jumping does not require any specialized skills or technical knowledge. It is an act that can be easily accomplished through the mechanisms of the Foursquare platform. Yet, avid users considered jumping an illegitimate use of the Foursquare service and even “immoral.”

While Foursquare’s technical system does not allow users to check in outside a designated distance from the geo-location coordinates (via GPS) of a user’s phone, users could easily use Foursquare’s mobile site (<https://foursquare.com/>)

mobile) to jump. Unlike the mobile phone app, the mobile site does not verify GPS coordinates but can be used to pinpoint the location of an available badge. Jumpers have also been known to use third-party applications such as Pocketcrowd⁸ which enable participants to use a smartphone to check in with precise GPS coordinates at locations where they are not currently located. After individuals check in to these locations, badges will be unlocked and displayed on their user profiles.

Although jumping occurs globally among different regional players, the practice of jumping for badges is an organized social activity in Indonesia and has been identified on the most public and popular Foursquare user message boards as a particularly “Indonesian” practice. Since 2010, Indonesian jumpers have turned to online forums such as Kaskus,⁹ use Twitter to coordinate information sharing,¹⁰ and organize meet-up events on the Kaskus Foursquare Jumper Community Facebook page.¹¹ These websites and social media platforms are used primarily for sharing information about new, available, or defunct badges and for displaying images and information about the badges with instructions regarding how to jump to obtain them. In 2014, the year Foursquare retired all badges and game mechanics on the system, the Facebook page had 4,757 “likes,” and the Twitter account boasted 9,125 followers and 5,858 tweets over the course of 4 years.

The communities that formed on these online platforms occasionally organized face-to-face meetings to compare badges, discuss Foursquare, acquire badges that depend on the co-presence of other users (like the Swarm badge), and generally meet people interested in social media, technology, and other shared interests. Regional coordinators posted group photos from their local meet-ups in cities across Indonesia such as Jakarta, Medan, Surakarta, and Surabaya. Sometimes these photos appeared with professionally printed banners that read (in English), “We are family. We jump and we collect the badge.” Participants on these forums celebrated shared anniversaries,¹² K4SQUS founder’s birthdays,¹³ sent holiday wishes,¹⁴ organized charity events, and checked in with other Southeast Asian jumpers after catastrophic events.¹⁵

The largest online network of Foursquare jumpers (*Komunitas Jumper Kaskus* [K4SQUS]) resides in Indonesia’s leading Internet forum, Kaskus. In the original thread dedicated to jumping, the group’s founder *Denztyo* emphasized playful, collaborative problem solving when outlining the goals of the community and the philosophy behind why the Indonesian community gathers badges in this manner:

“Why Jumper”

1. There are only a few badges available in Indonesia.
2. We’ve already unlocked the few that are available.
3. It’s fun and each badge has a unique flair to it.

4. Foursquare is only a game with social networking, so it’s just a puzzle made by Foursquare for us to figure out how to unlock.

“We Jump, We Get The Badges, and We Love That”¹⁶

When a local newspaper, *Media Indonesia*, ran a feature story about jumping in 2012, the people interviewed reiterated some of *Denztyo*’s ideas about jumpers’ motivations as well as the social and community aspects.¹⁷ The headline under a picture of nine, beaming young men holding cell phones read, “Spry hunting for unique badges” (“*Sigap Berburu Lencana Unik*”). As one excited jumper noted, “To me this is a media to learn and interact with others. Meet, gather, exchange ideas, and together bring more information to us that the friendship network was so vast and unique.” Another jumper expressed that hunting badges took time, discipline, and precision; although it was very challenging, jumping for badges offered a unique type of fun and rewarding experience. Moreover, the hunted badge was unique and special, even if it was virtual.

The first two tenets of *Denztyo*’s post—there are only a few badges for Indonesian venues, and these badges were fairly easily and quickly acquired—are significant in understanding jumper practices. Community statements in online forums imply that Foursquare participants are drawn to badges because they are rare in Indonesia. They are elusive, a challenge to obtain, and necessitate tracking, hunting, and collective intelligence to acquire because they are located in faraway places for other participants. These tenets also imply that Indonesian Foursquare jumpers were, at least initially, interested in playing the game according to Foursquare’s “House Rules” (i.e., checking in only at a place you’re physically located) in order to obtain badges. When Foursquare released a Jakarta City Badge on 4 May 2012, the post received the most comments and likes out of any post on the Facebook page. Commenters cheered, “Finally!” “Yay!” “Very cool!” and “Jakarta finally got a city badge!” Others were excited about the fact that players could acquire the “Welcome” (*Selamat Datang*) badge by checking in to five Jakarta spots: “Wow! Cool! There’s badges now.” Several commenters even tagged @foursquare in their posts to show their appreciation.

Jumping as “Illegitimate” Practice

While the practice of jumping has thrived in particular among close-knit networks in Indonesia, on a global level, many Foursquare users have framed jumping in harshly negative terms. In the lead author’s interviews with Foursquare users, participants from around the world generally viewed jumping as cheating and voiced discontent with fellow participants who jump. Many of the participants interviewed mentioned a moment when they noticed someone checking in or claiming a mayorship at a distant location and confronted them about their inappropriate behavior online or

face-to-face. As one interviewee who has taken it upon himself to identify and report jumpers noted,

It's related to morals, to values. That's why you have laws. That's why you have the unwritten rules . . . Going back to your question, why it bothers me? Because it's not fair. That's not the way that you play the game.

Because Foursquare, as a game, is based on locating oneself in physical space—and then reaping benefits for being in that place—jumping complicates Foursquare's brand as a gamified, location-based service. Jumping on Foursquare offers the possibility of collecting rewards, particularly badges, without adhering to the goals (i.e., physical location detection) that underlie the game. Additional community rules (“House Rules”), created by Foursquare in order to govern the global game, emphasize “do's and don'ts” for participation on Foursquare, the first of which clearly states, “Don't check in when you're not at a place,”¹⁸ which reinforces dominant social norms.

Cheating as Indonesian

Although the practice of checking in “when you're not at a place” happens everywhere, “jumping” for badges is often read as a particularly negative or abusive form of cheating that Foursquare users closely link to Indonesia. For example, on the popular message board, getsatisfaction.com, one user complained, “3 days out and this person has 43 badges! 43 badges in 3 days??? Has to be a cheater . . . [user's real name]-Indonesia?” Referencing a separate incident, another user wrote,

. . . funny thing is—most, if not all of his friends are cheaters also . . . great way to get rid of a bunch of them in one swoop. WTF is up with that country [Indonesia] that makes the vast majority of them cheaters??¹⁹

Another episode incited similar comments:

It just makes anyone with badges in that country [Indonesia] look bad when everyone over there has badges from South Africa, New York and Atlanta but still in high school. (i did some investigation lol). Few bad apples can make the whole country of users look bad.²⁰

Getsatisfaction's message board users perceived Indonesian jumpers to be poor players with poor sportsmanship, who had the potential to not only disrupt but also “ruin” Foursquare. Users who believed this often suggested ways that Foursquare employees could mark, shame, reprimand, or even oust jumpers from the platform:

Nothin against Indonesians, but they are all epic foursquare failures. To the highest degree. I dont get how they can unlock a badge from Atlanta or New York that even New Yorkers DONT even have having not set foot within the U.S. Theyre gonna ruin

the idea of the game/networking. Maybe the foursquare team could do something about it? OR—if they can prove the cheating (prob fairly easy) then maybe they can unlock a special hidden “cheater badge” that cant be removed . . . Kind of like putting it out there that this person is shady for all to see lol.²¹

Foursquare users' discussions of jumping offer several tacit understandings of the motivations behind jumping. Below we consider the most common motives attributed to jumping that anchor interpretations of the practice as cheating. Embedded in each folk theory explaining jumping found on getsatisfaction.com are cultural assumptions and universalizing notions of geographic access and mobility, fair play, and emotional value ascribed to the “nature of Foursquare” as a geo-locative social media platform.

Cheating for Locative Value

Players who see themselves as more “legitimate” than other participants because they physically check in expressed that they monitor and police (or at least highlight) the illegitimate actions of jumpers. Although most of this effort occurs virtually, via discussion boards, blogs, or Twitter, some participants monitored or policed jumper behavior within the physical environments they checked in to. For example,

This guy definitely cheats. [link to Foursquare account]. He doesn't have a huge amount of mayorships but I guarantee that he isn't visiting these places. He's the mayor at one place that isn't going to be open until June. He's also the mayor at a location that I frequent and know the owner. I showed him his picture and he told me he didn't remember seeing him for a long time yet he checks in every day. It's totally bogus and he needs to get flagged.²²

Participants, like the player quoted above, argued that jumpers engaged with the platform contrary to what they perceived as the norms of the platform and in tension with the majority of other players. One of our interviewees articulated the difference between jumpers and other players' interaction with place and physical presence in this way:

How can you have the experience of being in a place? You cannot do that by jumping. So, if I go to a restaurant and the food is really good I will only tell if I went there. If I go to a movie theater and I find out the air conditioning is pretty good in a hot summer, then I will find that out only by being there . . . By, you know, experience. Not just by doing something virtual. So, they live in a virtual world. I live in the real world. Put it this way, important for me about the real world is about living in places about giving honesty back honesty. Their world is about, “Hey, I've got badges, and I don't even know what that means. I know that I've got a badge and that's all.”

Cheating for Financial Value

For other Foursquare participants, check-ins to a physical location carry financial value, distributed and accrued by

venues and players alike. Jumping registered as akin to stealing or deception. Participants expressed their frustration about jumping by constructing jumpers as cheating Foursquare out of the potential to monetize users or vendor relationships. One user explains,

It's "just a game" until you start taking away revenue opportunities (eg. honest users, paying sponsors) from the company. And if seeing all of these "jumpers" as cheaters causes just one potential client to skip over them and maybe go to GW [Gowalla] or SCVNGR [Scavenger]²³ or something, then that's reason enough to ban them all from the "game" . . . IMO.²⁴

Several users understood jumpers' activities as not only cheating by "stealing" from Foursquare but also robbing businesses. Users noted that jumpers also duped claimed venues.²⁵ As one interviewee explains,

Let's also consider venues that are claimed by businesses that want to track their metrics and customers. What do you think a sudden influx of checkins from out of the country to obtain a badge does to their statistics? It makes them garbage. And it makes that business not want to even use the service. What good are metrics and statistics if they're all garbage because an entire country wants to use the service "differently"? None at all.²⁶

A manager of a claimed venue in the Boston area even referenced stealing as a way to explain the effect that jumping had on their business:

Well, when the mayor would come in I'd be like wow, man, you've been the mayor for a while and he was like well yeah, I work right upstairs I can just check in from my office and we'd be like, you're getting free product from us, so maybe don't brag about stealing from your local coffeeshop. I mean, because you are stealing, right?! Acknowledge that.²⁷

Cheating For Emotional Value

Foursquare participants also felt that jumpers' behavior diminished the intrinsic value of their "honest" check-ins, virtual rewards, and time and effort spent gaining badges legitimately. As one user explained,

. . . when users playing by the rules invest travel, time, money etc in unlocking a badge only to find out that someone who has never left their couch, neighborhood, state, etc have unlocked the same badge—that experience for better or worse just lost a little value. . . . You get pissed and feel like a sucker. Foursquare needs to keep these users—because these are the users who leave their computer, venture out into the world and are influenced where they spend \$.²⁸

Another wrote,

What's the point of making someone feel like they're special with hard to achieve badges if a whole country just unlocked the

same badge by cheating? Need an example? I just FINALLY unlocked the Pizzaiolo badge. But I did it the RIGHT way. I actually went to (and ate at) 20 different pizza places. It took me around 7 or 8 different cities and 8 months, but I got it. I was quite proud of myself for unlocking that one. But then I couldn't help but think my badge was a bit "tainted" by "jumpers" who just wanted to collect the badge. It feels like my badge is less "valuable" because so many other people are cheating to unlock it . . .²⁹

Foursquare's Role: Designers' Responses to Jumpers

Through their vehement and numerous complaints online, as well as their effort to police and publicly highlight the actions and identities of perceived cheaters, certain types of players worked to construct the meaning and boundaries of legitimate and illegitimate play on Foursquare. Users who viewed their Foursquare use as legitimate were "annoyed" and "frustrated" not only with jumpers but also with Foursquare employees' inaction and refusal to further regulate gameplay through the design of the platform or to boot jumpers off the platform. Foursquare participants suggested that the company's laissez-faire attitude toward cheating was represented in the strategic design of the Foursquare platform itself. For example,

@[username] i think that a good way to fix the cheating problem [without having to remove access to 75% of Foursquare's users would be to fix the loopholes in the system. There are plenty: <http://getsatisfaction.com/foursquare> . . . Once those loopholes are closed, we still have users, except they'd have no choice but be honest players . . .³⁰

Here, another individual discussed their frustration:

☹ I'm frustrated . . . I am getting ready to bounce from foursquare because it seems like they don't care about cheaters as long as they get as many users as possible . . . It's as if foursquare changed the link to protect him [an identified jumper] from abuse instead of removing him for cheating. If that's so, I'm disappointed in Foursquare.³¹

While the "House Rules" are clear about what constitutes "fair play" or intended play, Foursquare participants frequently note design elements that allow participants to play against the rules without having to hack the system. Some of these design elements include Foursquare creators' insistence that the GPS verification for check-ins remains lax (in comparison to other location-based social media systems).³² Foursquare employees have been vocal about the fact that they don't want GPS verification of participants' geographic location to be too restrictive, as they see it "interfering with normal use," and have encouraged developers building on the Foursquare API to retain this affordance.³³ Most notably, Foursquare developers maintained the availability of the

mobile site and web check-in options, even after numerous complaints by participants that these access points were hubs for jumping. The ability to check in from a distant locale and still receive badges (albeit not points or mayorships) was understood by Foursquare participants as an explicit accommodation for jumpers within the platform's ecosystem. And Foursquare never made an official, explicit statement in favor of or against jumpers, propagating a sense of ambivalence toward the situation.

Discussion: Emergent Uses

Jumping Between Physical and Virtual Game

As we illustrate above, jumping as a practice draws strongly from social, local interaction and emphasizes interacting with a socio-technical system in unexpected ways. Framing the practices of jumping as cheating assumes that there is a "right way" to use geo-locative social media. These frames also abstract "Indonesian participants" as disruptive players unable to appreciate the practical, financial, and emotional logics that Western-identifying players frequenting the site's popular discussion forums attach to the platform.

Much like Korean *Diablo II* players (Thomas, 2008) and *World of Warcraft* gold farmers (Nakamura, 2009), complaints about Indonesian jumpers' Foursquare activities and chosen mode of organized play revealed certain assumptions about users' relationships to physical place, locations, and access to resources devoted to physical mobility. In most public discussions of jumping, Indonesian Foursquare users were interpellated as certain types of players, judged by some authority as acting "badly" or "inappropriately" in a particular location and considered "out of place" (Cresswell, 1996). These displaced actions or "transgressions" generate unexpected encounters between distinct populations through situations "where things appear to be wrong." Jumping on a global social media service creates a moment where rules of play and associations between virtual representations of physical presence are denaturalized. Those with power and "authority" have the opportunity to reinscribe that space with particular meanings and definitions of proper behavior.

Jumpers transgress and disrupt perceived norms and expectations of place constructed by more economically and socially powerful participants. These players "jump" and play on their own terms, in response to the absence of opportunities to play through local badges or direct engagement with Foursquare as a global social media property designing experiences with them in mind. The conflict therefore tests the power of the dominant groups and reveals what feminist geographer Doreen Massey calls the "power-geometries" constructed within hybrid spaces. As Massey (1994) notes, power geometries or differential access, control, and experiences of global flows reveal the ways in which "the mobility and control of some groups can actively weaken other people" (p. 150). Players who live in places where badges are

abundantly available have, by definition, the means and ability to physically obtain these badges and are imagined and integrated into the socio-technical space of Foursquare, literally, by design. Those who do not have the opportunity to be mobile in the same ways represent their alternate experiences of global social media systems through differential mobilities on screen. They turn the absence of badges into a feature of their gameplay, redesigning the gamescape. In doing so, Indonesian jumpers tacitly critique the devaluing of their locations and disregard for the constraints on their ability to effortlessly travel the world.

What we see in the case of Foursquare jumping is not clean resistance and dissent; instead, participants create and encounter "friction," "the awkward, unequal, unstable, and creative qualities of interconnection across difference" (Tsing, 2011, p. 4). Although jumping might be read as disruptive or deviant by players who are able to connect their physical and virtual mobility, behaving "out of place" may be one of the few ways players in marginalized places can engage with location-based social media systems. In the case of Foursquare, friction manifests in the form of heated debate, policing behavior. Location-based social media systems, in particular, lend themselves to demands for retaliatory action instigated by performances of differential mobilities. Because the cityscapes of NYC or San Francisco dominate Foursquare's imagined terrain, Indonesia-based players developed a way to play the game that both highlights the asymmetries that define their engagement with a global social media system and showcases a different sort of mobility. The adaptive practice of jumping underscores Foursquare's assumptions about players' relationships to the physical/digital connection of mobility while demonstrating the capacity of players to creatively make use of those assumptions.

Foursquare users who believe that they are "playing by the rules" directly associate their Foursquare check-ins with their physical mobility and physical presence. These participants are playing a virtual game that is necessarily bound to physical location, physical mobility, knowledge, and place-based discovery. They rely on this relationship between physical and virtual contexts in order to claim their play as "legitimate."³⁴ The jumpers' virtual game relies on the understanding of distant locations as metadata and a set of geospatial coordinates rather than a place where they are physically embedded. However, jumpers' engagement with Foursquare as a "virtual game" is heavily dependent on their physical location, due to their physical distance from cities and locales where badges and rewards are readily accessible.

Players based in Indonesia are structurally distanced from "legitimate" play that involves a user gaining badges and rewards for physical presence, physical mobility, and knowledge of physical places. This form of play is excessively difficult and expensive to accomplish for Indonesian players. Their physical and social distance from the places where badges can be obtained has reshaped Indonesian users'

everyday relationship to place and the practice of “checking in”: while they practice the “correct” way to use Foursquare locally, they reimagine Foursquare’s normative uses when engaging with international users and uses of the platform. This localized use of Western products coincides with larger trends within Indonesian popular culture. Instead of resistive manipulation, Luvaas (2010) offers a reconceptualization of “bricolage” to account for Indonesia’s active engagement with and appropriation of Western commercial images and products. Instead of dissociating and subverting the meaning of Western cultural artifacts, Luvaas’ study of Indonesian designers and youth found cultural practices that asserted Indonesian’s “in-betweenness” as consuming subjects (Luvaas, 2010, p. 6). Through their distinct form of play, Indonesian jumpers also demonstrate a desire to participate in a global game/community while asserting their place as users who shape platform use, creating value for their local community and as consuming subjects who are in-between valued markets. By finding ways to collect as many badges as possible, this local community of users creates meaning and salience for a platform that doesn’t fully cater to them as a market. Indonesian jumpers worked together to create a game that could be played while remaining in a location that is not fully incorporated into the service.

Conclusion: Conflicts with Expected Universality

Since the initial data collection period, Foursquare has attempted to address some of the geospatial biases in their game mechanics by providing more international badges for popular cities around the globe and by continuing to allow jumping to occur without awarding points for check-ins. Thus, a local game to collect badges was allowed to persist alongside the global, networked game. The desire to collect all badges or as many badges as one can persisted even after Foursquare introduced more international and Indonesia-based badges around 2012. In 2014, the Foursquare service was redesigned entirely, removing badges from the system, and in September 2014, the *Komunitas Jumper Kaskus* group was disbanded.³⁵ Indonesian jumper forums exist online solely in memoriam and are now inactive.

As Humphreys and Liao (2013) note, “Mobile social networks are another site where these relationships over space are being negotiated, not physically but socially” (n.p.). This study of Foursquare jumpers illustrates some of the ways in which globally adopted social media platforms and activities reify social hierarchies of value, where some places and populations of those places are incorporated and imagined as more relevant than others. Foursquare “jumping” illustrates a moment where expectations of universality among home grown, early adopters conflicts not only with marginalized local practices abroad but with platform designers’ desire to maintain polysemy within the system in the name of global expansion. We find that while location-based social media primarily rely on information about users’ location in order

to function, there are performative aspects of location announcement that manifest around expressing inexact or unverifiable location. These aspects are alternatives that emerge from marginalization within the platform and should be recognized and considered by designers, marketers, scholars, and social media participants not as routine cheating but as indications of the platform’s politics. Locative media are tied to location and announcement of physical presence in particular ways, but in everyday practice, the expressions of location and physical presence are more creative and complex than proclaiming: “I am here now.” Researchers and designers need to consider the social, cultural, and industrial contexts under which users and their mobilities are constructed through platform design, user experience, and interaction, as well as industrial strategies and constraints.

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Notes

1. <http://aboutfoursquare.com/foursquare-indonesia/>
2. By mid-2015, Foursquare reported it had reached 50 million monthly active users. Retrieved from <http://venturebeat.com/2015/08/18/foursquare-by-the-numbers-60m-registered-users-50m-maus-and-75m-tips-to-date/>
3. Although Foursquare outlasted other location announcement apps such as Gowalla and BrightKite, the service has now reinvented itself as a location recommendation service. The company launched a separate app, Swarm, which retains the check-in and location announcement function (Hamburger, 2014; Larson, 2014).
4. We observed and analyzed Foursquare check-ins provided by participants on websites, discussion boards, and during interviews, but did not do a large-scale survey and analysis of Foursquare check-ins. Legitimate check-ins often appear as if the participant could be jumping, making it difficult to differentiate a legitimate check-in from cheating or jumping without adequate context for the check-in. We relied on translated and English language interviews, articles, Facebook pages, tweets, and websites dedicated to the Indonesian Foursquare community.
5. The Foursquare “community” on getsatisfaction.com is now inactive. All quotes from getsatisfaction.com were retrieved from discussion threads within <https://getsatisfaction.com/foursquare>
6. <https://getsatisfaction.com/foursquare>
7. Foursquare API Google Group. Retrieved from <https://groups.google.com/forum/#!forum/foursquare-api>
8. <http://pocketcrowd.com/>
9. <http://www.kaskus.co.id/>
10. <https://twitter.com/JumperKaskus>

11. <https://www.facebook.com/K4SQUS/>
12. "Today, we've jumped together for 4 years. Thank you for all of togetherness, laugh & jokes. Pic, our 1st gathering (2010)." Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/JumperKaskus/status/511498575411294208>
13. <https://www.facebook.com/K4SQUS/photos/a.264800870273366.65561.220647284688725/426721754081276/?type=3&theater>
14. "Happy Eid Mubarak 1433 to all moeslem around the world and Jumper who celebrate. May Allah Bless You!" Retrieved from <https://www.facebook.com/K4SQUS/photos/a.264800870273366.65561.220647284688725/343174135769372/?type=3&theater>
15. "We heard big earthquake in thailand today and the effect was very bad:' (Hope all of jumper thailand is O.K #PrayForThailand." (Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/JumperKaskus/status/463315854017720322>).
16. See Denztyo (2010).
17. Link to newspaper article here: http://199.180.133.179/koran/mediaindonesia_27-07-2012.pdf. Image of the newspaper clipping with headline and photo as it appeared on the K4SQUS page www.facebook.com/K4SQUS/photos/a.264800870273366.65561.220647284688725/335524053201047/?type=3&theater; <https://www.facebook.com/K4SQUS/photos/a.264800870273366.65561.220647284688725/335524053201047/?type=3&theater>
18. Subsequent rules instruct participants not to add fake venues, not to check in to someone's house, not to create tips with inappropriate language or negative language directed at another user, and not to spam via tips or otherwise. Retrieved from <https://foursquare.com/info/houserules>
19. See Note 18.
20. See Note 18.
21. <https://tonyfelice.wordpress.com/foursquare/#comment-481>
22. <https://getsatisfaction.com/foursquare>
23. Gowalla and Scavenger were competig location-based social media platforms.
24. <https://getsatisfaction.com/foursquare>
25. Claimed venues are businesses that have claimed their Foursquare presence and are able to offer specials or discounts to customers and receive information and metrics about the customers who check in to their venue.
26. G.R. Halegoua, personal communication with Foursquare participant, June 2011.
27. G.R. Halegoua, personal communication with Foursquare participant, June 2011.
28. ("List of foursquare badges," n.d.) <https://tonyfelice.wordpress.com/foursquare/#comment-497>
29. <https://getsatisfaction.com/foursquare>
30. <https://getsatisfaction.com/foursquare>
31. <https://getsatisfaction.com/foursquare>
32. See Dennis Crowley, 30 November 2009, 6:23 p.m., Google groups for 4sq developers
(we still have a few bad apples in certain cities that loooove stealing mayorships from the comfort of their couches)
33. Dennis Crowley, 30 November 2009, 6:23 p.m., Google groups for 4sq developers
34. Foursquare participants who maintain this perspective tend to be located in the United States, particularly in New York City (where Foursquare is currently located) or other urban spaces where tech industries and early adopters reside and where a plethora of badges and rewards are readily available.
35. Statement of dissolution of the group can be found here: <https://www.facebook.com/K4SQUS/35> on 17 September 2014. The founder of the group states,

The main reason I disperse Jumper Kaskus community is, because foursquare no longer going to produce or create badges. It has been answered directly by twitter @4sqsupport . . . Where the main purpose or goal of this community is sharing how to unlock badges foursquare, but now the purpose of it is not there . . . Thanks for all the help to enlarge this community, togetherness, laughter and jokes.

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