

Back to the Future of News: Looking at Locative Media Principles in the Pre-News Era

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Introduction

Locative media enables us to use smartphones to gain a better understanding of places around us. Most of this information is more historical than newsworthy. However, locative media allows news organizations to shape news in an innovative and engaging way. This study discusses how the “culture of curiosities” shaped the birth of news in 16th and 17th century, and proceeds to use this culture to explain the great potential of locative information for a new generation of information consumers. In order to do so, this study analyzes two representative applications: Foursquare and Fieldtrip.

DID YOU KNOW?

Readers from the 16th and 17th centuries perceived news like a maze without consulting analog maps (Vittu, 1994). In order to solve this problem, maps or geographical guides were specifically printed to help newspaper readers (Kenny, 2004). This practice was repeated across centuries, as can be seen in the image below.



Man updating a map with the latest news during the First World War in 1917, Paris.

FUTURE RESEARCH AND TRENDS

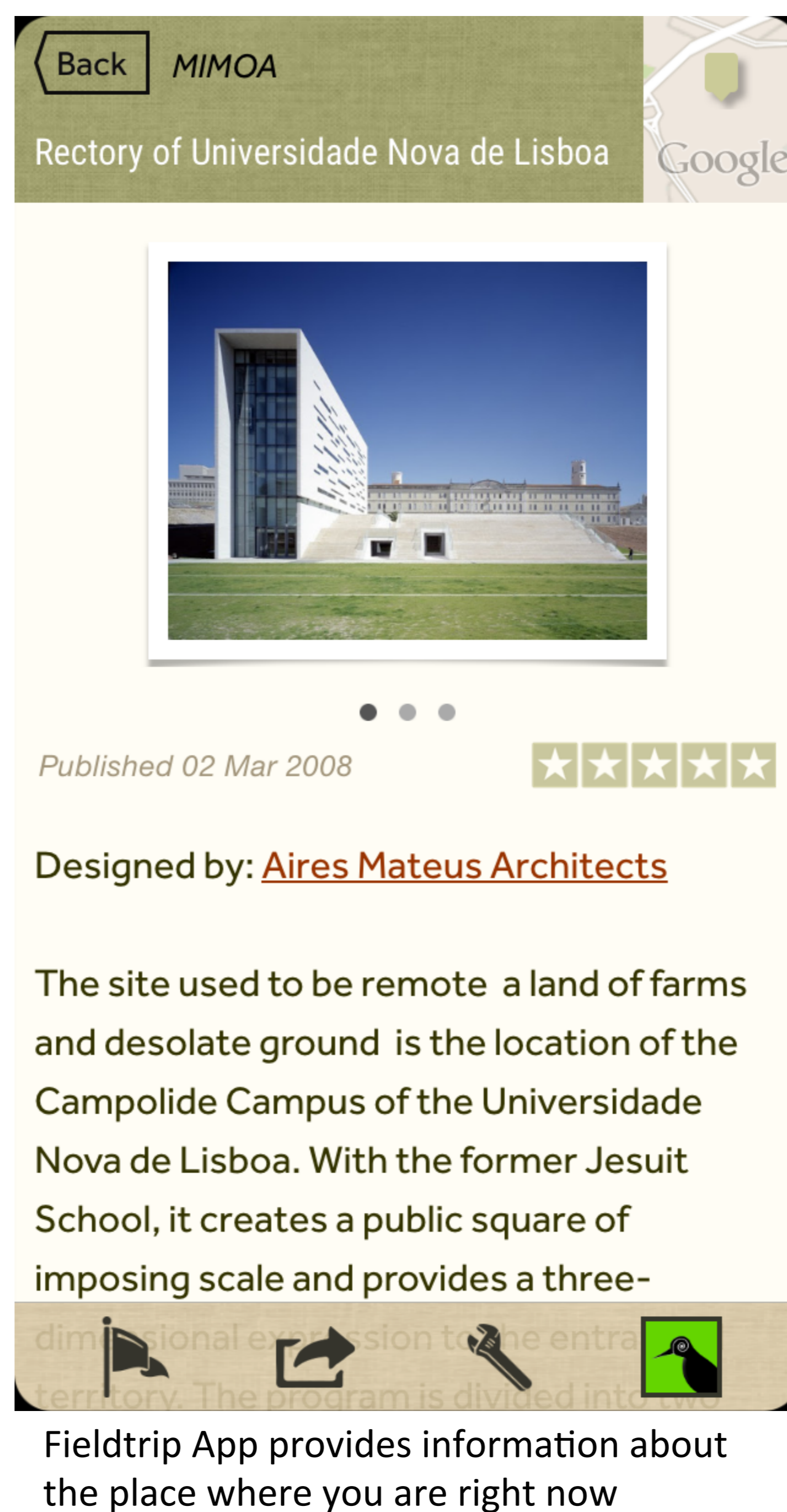
Psychology studies have found that curiosity improves wellbeing and increases happiness (Kashdan & Steger, 2007; Kashdan, 2009) or that helps us learn (Gruber, Gelman and Ranganath, 2014). This reminds us that curiosity was a framework to engage readership in the late 17th and early 18th century (Kenny, 2004). The curiosity approach offers a way out to explore the opportunity of filling this hole and engaging the residents with their locality through the spread of locative information. However, further empirical research is required to address critical questions such as:

- What is curiosity for Millennials?
- What triggers their curiosity and when?
- Do applications such as Foursquare or Fieldtrip trigger Millennials’ curiosity about their surroundings or places where they happen to be?
- How can we use the curiosity approach to leverage locative media applications to engage residents with their locality?

Approach

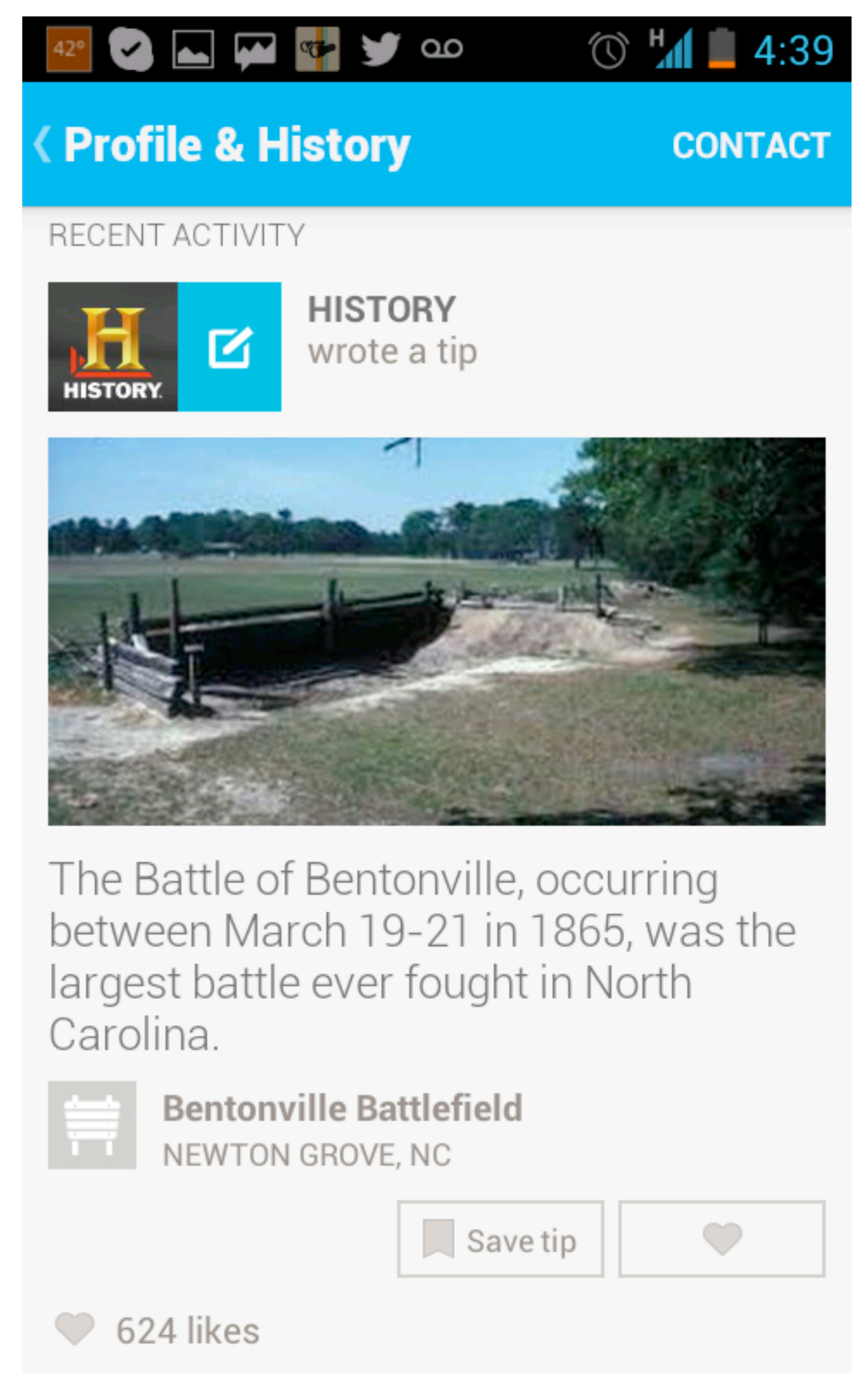
This study draws on a historical parallel between the 21st century and the 16th and 17th centuries, when the culture of curiosities shaped knowledge as a whole, including the birth of news (Kenny, 2004; Benedict, 2001; Ball, 2012). This study tries to bring up the fundamental needs of news readers based on a historical approach rather than an empirical one. Thus, the direct association with locative media and news is enabled by the fact that news items were made into curious discursive objects by their relation not only to time, but also to space (Kenny, 2004). The aim is to explain how an appeal to curiosity and an expanded sense of information tied to geography, both provided by locative information systems, might be of interest to both smartphone users and to the news industry.

ARE YOU CURIOUS ENOUGH TO



Insights

- History may be a surviving mechanism for digital journalism. As at the time of culture of curiosities, it is relevant to stress that journalism is not restricted to hard news. In this sense, mobile, location-aware technologies provide tools to explore the spatial and historical characteristics of information. History plays a critical role in the production of information for locative journalism projects.
- Rather than simply being visual interfaces for geotagged content, maps are tools to enhance people’s sense of place and help them to reconnect with the physical world.
- This study suggests that location-based news triggered by the curiosity approach might help young generations to reconnect with their locality and surroundings.



Example of a Foursquare Tip on History Channel

DID YOU KNOW?

The way media outlets are using Foursquare fits exactly into the metaphor of collection of curiosities in two ways: 1) rather than providing continuous narrative, the information provided is organized into a collection of fragments, what are called “tips”, a textual way to suggest things to other people on the application, limited to 200 characters with a possibility of having also a link (as shown in the Figure above on the right). 2) Some of these tips are a mixing of contemporary and historical information that is less likely to be found in traditional media.