



**INFORMATION SYSTEMS  
AND INNOVATION GROUP**  
Department of Management

# Social Media Through the Lens of Agential Realism

Susan V. Scott, London School of Economics

[in collaboration with Wanda Orlikowski, Massachusetts  
Institute of Technology & London School of Economics]

16<sup>th</sup> June 2009





# Barad's Agential Realism



INFORMATION SYSTEMS  
AND INNOVATION GROUP  
Department of Management

- Inspired by Neils Bohr's philosophy-physics
- The instruments of measurement, and objects observed are part of the phenomenon under study
- Specific arrangements of an experiment at a particular time and place give it meaning
- Results are not a mirror that reflects reality but are experienced through the instruments



# Apparatus



INFORMATION SYSTEMS  
AND INNOVATION GROUP  
Department of Management

- Apparatus are not static laboratory setups, but a dynamic set of open-ended boundary-making practices that configure the phenomenon under study
- Apparatus are the sociomaterial means available to constitute something as observable and meaningful

*[Barad 2007]*



# social media



# Social Media



INFORMATION SYSTEMS  
AND INNOVATION GROUP  
Department of Management

The Facebook logo, featuring the word "facebook" in white lowercase letters on a blue rectangular background.

facebook

- web-based
- user-generated content
- peer to peer interaction
- open
- distributed
- multi-media





# TripAdvisor



INFORMATION SYSTEMS  
AND INNOVATION GROUP  
Department of Management

- largest online travel community, with over 20 million reviews on 1 million venues
- award-winning website operates in 14 countries and 10 languages
- 30 million visitors/month
- travel is one of the world's largest industries: 11.7% of world GDP, 8% of employment
- travellers report increasing influence of user reviews on travel decision making

Get advice from real travellers — more than 15,000,000 travellers from 190 countries planned trips here this week

Search  [Go](#)

### Plan the Perfect Trip

[Hotels](#)

[Flights](#)

[Restaurants](#)

[Things to Do](#)

[Photos & Videos](#)

[Forums](#)

### Find Hotels Travellers Trust

City:

Check-in:    
dd/mm/yyyy

Check-out:    
dd/mm/yyyy

Adults:

[Find hotels](#)

### Browse by Destination



### Rants & Raves

The best and worst revealed

**Khem Villas**  
Sawai Madhopur, Rajasthan

"This was our second hotel in our Indian adventure and yes, it is as good as all the reviews suggest." [more](#)  
By elizabennett

**The Claridges**  
New Delhi, National Capital Territory of Delhi

"As I stepped into the room there was an overpowering musty damp carpet smell." [more](#)  
By Helen\_Australia

### Featured Traveller Photo



**Kerala: Munnar Tea Plantation**  
Submitted by: [alfama\\_goa](#)  
[FIND OUT MORE ABOUT KERALA](#)

**TRAVELLERS' CHOICE® 2009**

**Best Bargain Hotels**

[Get the list >](#)

### Today's Top 10: Favourite Worldwide Attractions

1. Hong Kong Disneyland, Hong Kong, Hong Kong Region



Over 20 million traveller reviews & opinions!

- Home
- Hotels
- Flights
- Restaurants
- Holiday Ideas
- Free Travel Guides

The Strand Palace Hotel Reviews, London

Search [ ] Write a Review

- Visiting London
- Hotels in London
  - The Strand Palace Hotel
- Holiday Rentals **NEW!**
- London Flights
- London Special Offers
- More On London
- Before You Go
- Things to Do
- Restaurants
- Map
- Traveller Photos
- Traveller Videos
- Forum
- London Deals
- Discount Hotels
- Hotel & Air
- All Travel Offers

Home → Europe → United Kingdom (UK) → England → London → Hotels in London

# The Strand Palace Hotel

Today's Top Value hotels



- Hotel photos
- Map this hotel
- Hotel amenities
- Virtual tour

Hotel class **★★★★☆**  
372 Strand, London WC2R 0JJ, England

TripAdvisor Popularity Index  
#297 of 1,150 hotels in London

- Rating
- Details
- Photos (141)
- Map



- "Excellent Hotel!"  
8 Jun 2009 - toffeegirl9
- "Good hotel!"  
7 Jun 2009 - KathrynW1

Call now to book: 0871 200 0179 from Hotels.com

### Click here for best prices for The Strand Palace Hotel

- The Strand Palace Hotel: Save up to 75% on Hotels with Expedia Smart Deal**  
Expedia.co.uk Create your perfect trip. Save with Expedia.co.uk
- The Strand Palace Hotel: Up to 75% discount Smart Deal**  
Booking.com Low rates, no booking fees! Book online now, pay at the hotel.
- The Strand Palace Hotel: Hotels.com Summer Sale Smart Deal**  
Hotels.com Get up to 40% off extra - Lowest price guaranteed!
- The Strand Palace Hotel: Save up to 70%! TravelRepublic.co.uk** Make Your Holiday. For Less. Honest Reviews. Incredible Rates.

## Check Rates and Availability

Check-in: 19/6/2009 Check-out: 21/6/2009 Adults: 1 **CHECK RATES!**

dd/mm/yyyy dd/mm/yyyy

- Expedia.co.uk
- Hotels.com
- 1800HOTELS
- lastminute.com
- Booking.com
- TravelRepublic.co.uk
- LateRooms.com

Opens one window for each offer. Please disable pop-up blockers.

## Traveller Reviews

1-10 of 775

Sort by [ Friends first ] [ Date ] [ Rating ] English first

"Excellent Hotel!"

★★★★★  
toffeegirl9  
CT  
8 Jun 2009 **NEW**

Save Review

Stayed in a club single room for two nights and could not have

**Free Newsletter**

Interested in The Strand Palace Hotel and London?

We'll send you updates with the latest deals, reviews and articles for The Strand Palace Hotel and London each week.

**Sign up**

Save The Strand



# Research Methods



INFORMATION SYSTEMS  
AND INNOVATION GROUP  
Department of Management

- Drew on techniques of netnography (Kozinets, 2002)
- Analyzed reviews/rankings on TripAdvisor for two hotels in same region of the UK
- Conducted site visits to the two hotels and interviewed the hotel managers
- Reviewed published materials on travel industry, hotel ranking schemes, and information about TripAdvisor



# The Manor House and the Pub



INFORMATION SYSTEMS  
AND INNOVATION GROUP  
Department of Management

- Both are small establishments that are privately owned and operated
- Cater to different clientele and have different price points

ManorHouse



30 rooms; £140-£250

PubInn



18 rooms; £95-£125



# The Manor House and the Pub



INFORMATION SYSTEMS  
AND INNOVATION GROUP  
Department of Management

- Both graded highly by established schemes of the AA, British Tourist Board, etc.
- Standard criteria of operational issues and well-defined types of facilities, services
- Inspectors grade hotels based on anonymous visits; also serve as consultants
- Schemes play a critical role in strategies and practices of small business owners



Our vision was that by 2010, we would become the best country manor hotel in England. ... So, in order to become the best country manor hotel, what have we got to achieve? So, we broke this down into a number of components. One of which is to receive two rosettes from the AA. And we got that one. The next one is, we needed to achieve red stars, as opposed to black stars. ... I'm that far away, that far away [gestures a small distance].

*[Hotel Manager, ManorHouse]*



# The Manor House and the Pub



INFORMATION SYSTEMS  
AND INNOVATION GROUP  
Department of Management

- Recognized as different accommodation classes in established hotel grading schemes
  - ManorHouse is listed under *hotels*
  - PubInn is listed under *pubs/inns*
- Not configured as similar establishments or direct competitors by the apparatus of the AA and VisitBritain grading schemes

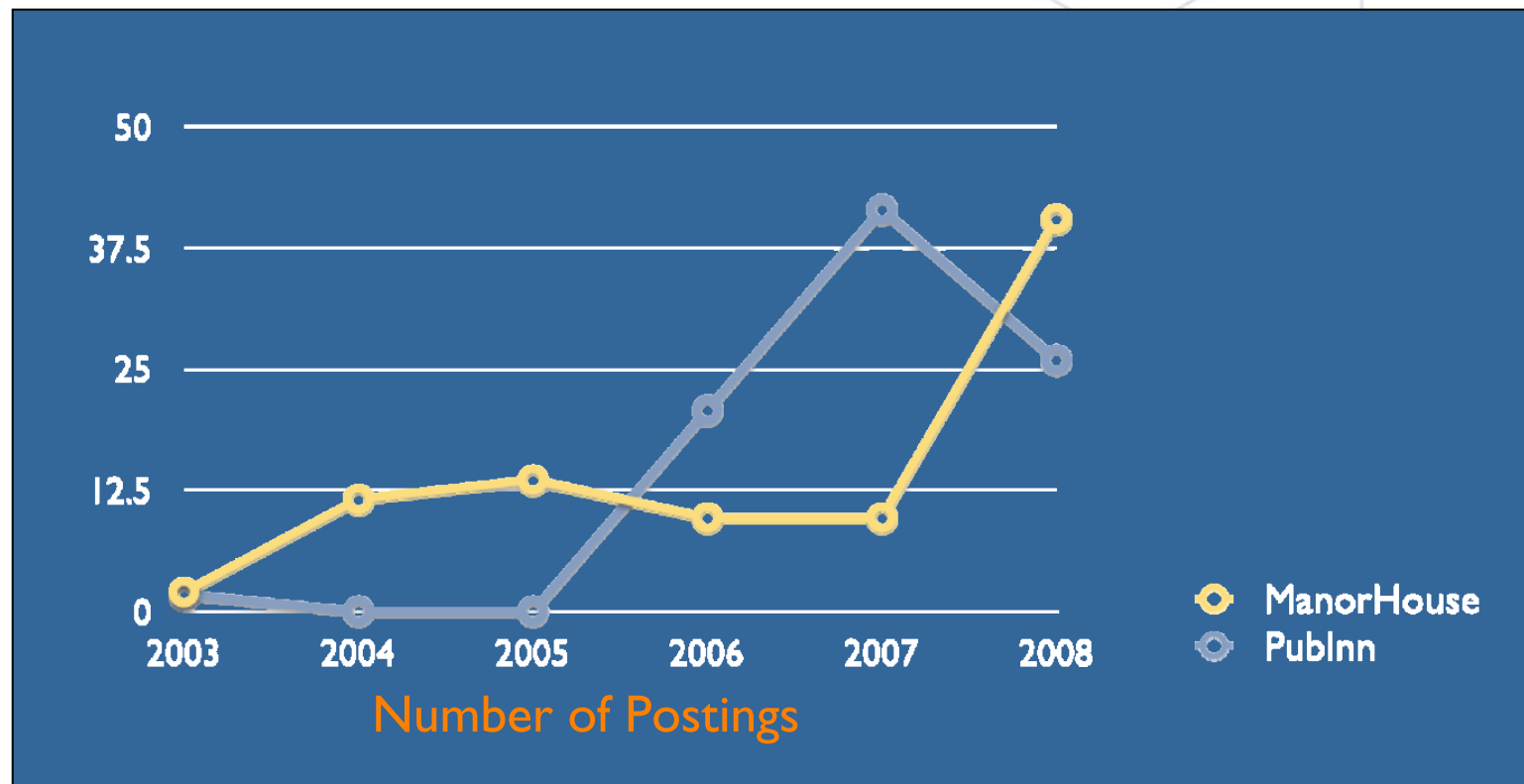


# The Manor House and the Pub



INFORMATION SYSTEMS  
AND INNOVATION GROUP  
Department of Management

- TripAdvisor reviews as of 15 April 2009
  - 52 for ManorHouse
  - 58 for PubInn



### Free Newsletter

Interested in **The Strand Palace Hotel** and London?

We'll send you updates with the latest deals, reviews and articles for **The Strand Palace Hotel** and London each week.

[Sign up](#)

[Save The Strand Palace Hotel](#)

[E-mail this page](#)

### London Hotels with Similar Rankings

292. Commodore Hotel  
4.5/5 (257 Reviews)  
Last reviewed 25 May 2009  
5 km W of The Strand Palace Hotel

293. Ascott Mayfair  
4.5/5 (27 Reviews)  
Last reviewed 5 Jun 2009  
2 km W of The Strand Palace Hotel

294. Park Plaza Sherlock Holmes London  
4.5/5 (233 Reviews)  
Last reviewed 11 Jun 2009  
4 km NW of The Strand Palace Hotel

295. Globetrotter Inn  
4.5/5 (56 Reviews)  
Last reviewed 1 May 2009  
10 km W of The Strand Palace Hotel

296. myhotel Chelsea  
4.5/5 (59 Reviews)  
Last reviewed 29 May 2009  
5 km SW of The Strand Palace Hotel

297. The Strand Palace Hotel  
4.5/5 (99 Reviews)  
Last reviewed 10 Jun 2009  
5 km SE of The Strand Palace Hotel

299. Americana Hotel  
4.5/5 (52 Reviews)  
Last reviewed 1 Jun 2009  
4 km NW of The Strand Palace Hotel

## Traveller Reviews

1-5 of 775

« 1 2 ... 155 »

Sort by [ Friends first ▼ ] [ Date ] [ Rating ]

English first ▼

“ Excellent Hotel! ”

### The Strand Palace Hotel



5/5

toffeegirl9

CT

8 Jun 2009 **NEW**

[Save Review](#)

Stayed in a club single room for two nights and could not have been happier. The room was small but nicely decorated and very clean.

All the staff I encountered were super helpful and friendly. You can't ask for a better location, the hotel is within walking distance to many of London's attractions.

### My ratings for this hotel

5/5 Value      5/5 Service  
5/5 Rooms  
5/5 Location  
5/5 Cleanliness

Date of stay May 2009

Visit was for Leisure

Travelled with Solo Traveler

Member since 08 April 2008

Would you recommend this hotel to a friend? Yes

*This review is the subjective opinion of a TripAdvisor member and not of TripAdvisor LLC*

Was this review helpful? Yes | No

[View profile](#) | [Send message](#) | [Compliment reviewer](#)

[Report Inappropriate Content](#)

**CHECK RATES!**

Call now to book: [Hotel amenities](#)

0871 200 0179 from [Hotel photos](#)

Hotels.com [Virtual tour](#)

Average price\*:

**£141**

(year-round)

“ Good hotel ”

### The Strand Palace Hotel



5/5

KathrynW1

Gloucester UK

7 Jun 2009 **NEW**

[Save Review](#)

**The Strand Palace Hotel: Save up to 75% on Hotels with Expedia Smart Deal**  
[Expedia.co.uk](#) Create your perfect trip. Save with Expedia.co.uk

**The Strand Palace Hotel: Up to 75% discount Smart Deal**  
[Booking.com](#) Low rates, no booking fees! Book online now, pay at the hotel.

**The Strand Palace Hotel: Hotels.com Summer Sale Smart Deal**  
[Hotels.com](#) Get up to 40% off extra - Lowest price guaranteed!

**The Strand Palace Hotel: Save up to 70%! TravelRepublic.co.uk** Make Your Holiday. For Less. Honest Reviews. Incredible Rates.

[View all 4399 London travel deals](#)

Sponsored links \*

advertisement

Hotels.com

Great Hotel prices Worldwide

Algarve **£36**

Nice **£73**

Cancun **£47**

prices per room per night

### Traveller Photos & Videos



[View all photos](#)

[Add Photos](#)

[Add Videos](#)

### Free London Guide



Get the best picks for where to eat, sleep, and play.





Over 20 million traveller reviews & opinions!

- Home
- Hotels
- Flights
- Restaurants
- Holiday Ideas
- Free Travel Guides

Excellent Hotel!: The Strand Palace Hotel

Search

Write a Review

- Visiting London
- Hotels in London
- The Strand Palace Hotel**
- Holiday Rentals **NEW!**
- London Flights
- London Special Offers
- More On London**
- Before You Go
- Things to Do
- Restaurants
- Map
- Traveller Photos
- Traveller Videos
- Forum
- London Deals**
- Discount Hotels
- Hotel & Air
- All Travel Offers

Home → Europe → United Kingdom (UK) → England → London → Hotels & Accommodations → The Strand Palace Hotel

# The Strand Palace Hotel: Traveller Reviews

BOOK NOW



- Hotel photos
- Map this hotel
- Hotel amenities
- Virtual tour

TripAdvisor Popularity Index #297 of 1,150 hotels in London

Rating Details Photos (141) Map



Hotel class ★★★★★ | Back to The Strand Palace Hotel  
372 Strand, London WC2R 0JJ, England

## Check Rates and Availability

Check-in: 19/6/2009 Check-out: 21/6/2009 Adults: 1 **CHECK RATES!**

- Expedia.co.uk
- Hotels.com
- 1800HOTELS
- LateRooms.com
- Booking.com
- TravelRepublic.co.uk
- lastminute.com

Opens one window for each offer. Please disable pop-up blockers.

"Excellent Hotel!"  
8 Jun 2009 - toffeegirl9

"Good hotel!"  
7 Jun 2009 - KathrynW1

Call now to book: 0871 200 0179 from Hotels.com

## Click here for best prices for The Strand Palace Hotel

- The Strand Palace Hotel:** Save up to 75% on Hotels with Expedia Smart Deal Expedia.co.uk Create your perfect trip. Save with Expedia.co.uk
- The Strand Palace Hotel:** Up to 75% discount Smart Deal Booking.com Low rates, no booking fees! Book online now, pay at the hotel.
- The Strand Palace Hotel:** Hotels.com Summer Sale Smart Deal Hotels.com Get up to 40% off extra - Lowest price guaranteed!
- The Strand Palace Hotel:** Save up to 70%! TravelRepublic.co.uk Make Your Holiday For Less. Honest Reviews. Incredible Rates.

## Free Newsletter

Interested in **The Strand Palace Hotel** and **London**?

We'll send you updates with the latest deals, reviews and articles for **The Strand Palace Hotel** and **London** each week.

**Sign up**

Save The Strand

## Traveller Reviews

1-5 of 775

Sort by [ Friends first ] [ Date ] [ Rating ] English first

“Excellent Hotel!”  
The Strand Palace Hotel

toffeegirl9  
CT  
8 Jun 2009 **NEW**

Save Review



# TripAdvisor Rating Scheme



INFORMATION SYSTEMS  
AND INNOVATION GROUP  
Department of Management

- Uses an algorithm that incorporates traveller reviews, guidebook entries, newspaper articles and other web content
- “Popularity Index”

**Pure:** Completely organic. No paid results influence rankings.

**Fresh:** Constantly incorporates new information.

**Global:** Reflects reviews from around the world.

**Unbiased:** Based on the good and the bad!

*([http://www.tripadvisor.com/help/how\\_does\\_the\\_popularity\\_index\\_work](http://www.tripadvisor.com/help/how_does_the_popularity_index_work))*



# The Manor House and the Pub



INFORMATION SYSTEMS  
AND INNOVATION GROUP  
Department of Management

- On Popularity Index in TripAdvisor
  - PubInn ranked #1 in region
  - ManorHouse ranked #2 in region
- Rendered as similar establishments and direct rivals through the TripAdvisor review platform and proprietary algorithm



# TripAdvisor as Apparatus



INFORMATION SYSTEMS  
AND INNOVATION GROUP  
Department of Management

- Reconfigures the nature of available knowledge about the hotels
- Redraws the boundaries of what counts and what is made to matter
- Has material consequences



Our traffic is so high now that we know, for better or for worse, we have a significant impact on where visitors are choosing to stay. We rate which hotels our travelers like the most. If you're ranked first or you're ranked 20th, the number of reservation calls or bookings you're going to get is going to change. When we changed our algorithm, it dropped [the rankings of] some hotels and raised others. Our phones were ringing, because we had had a material effect on their businesses.

*[Stephen Kaufer, CEO TripAdvisor, 2007]*



# TripAdvisor as Apparatus



INFORMATION SYSTEMS  
AND INNOVATION GROUP  
Department of Management

- **Perceived loss of control by hoteliers**

But those opinions, which I consider to be too subjective, are on that website, for life. Forever, they're going to be on there, for anybody who wishes to see them. ... If a report is contentious, then there should be a way [for] the hotel to speak to it: "Look, I'm sorry, this report is not helpful. Not helpful, not only to me, but also not helpful to other readers of TripAdvisor. Take it off." But no, ... I can place a response. That's all I can do... It is very difficult to get them to take a review off.

*[Hotel Manager, ManorHouse]*



The TripAdvisor problem is very annoying... as you can't actually ring them it is becoming increasingly difficult to solve the situation. It is the link to our page on their website which is incorrect, so this is something which they need to sort out. ... But when you go onto their help section it is very confusing and when you email them you get no reply, etc., etc., etc.

*[Hotel Manager, ManorHouse]*



**NO FEES!**



[Start search over](#)  
[Back to search results](#)

[Expedia.com](#) > [Hotels](#) > United States of America > Tennessee > [Memphis Hotels](#) > [Memphis Plaza Hotel / Airport](#)

**Continue to Booking**  
 (Rates from \$65.00)

## Memphis Plaza Hotel / Airport

*Memphis property with a complimentary airport shuttle*

☆☆½ [Star Rating](#)

**Hotel Information** >

**Pictures**

**Location & Map**

Address,  
Points of Interest

**Hotel Details**

Hotel description,  
Amenities & facilities

**Traveler Opinions**

Hotel Reviews  
and Ratings

**Rooms & Rates**

Room description  
Room rates

### Convenient to flights

This airport hotel is within 5 km of Graceland.

[See this hotel on a map](#)

### Airport shuttle

Memphis Plaza Hotel / Airport provides complimentary breakfast, a complimentary airport shuttle, a fitness center or room, and a business center.

[More hotel information](#)

### Cable/satellite TV

Guestrooms include cable television, free local calls, air conditioning, and cable/satellite TV.

[More room information](#)

[Email this hotel to a friend](#)

### Traveler Opinions: Hotel review summary of Memphis Plaza Hotel / Airport, Memphis Hotel

<b>Overall satisfaction</b>	<b>66% of travelers (4 of 6) recommend this hotel</b>			
<b>4.0</b>	Hotel service	Hotel condition	Room cleanliness	Room comfort
	3.3	4.2	3.8	4.3
Scores are based on a 1 (poor) to 5 (excellent) rating system.				



# TripAdvisor as Apparatus



INFORMATION SYSTEMS  
AND INNOVATION GROUP  
Department of Management

- **Perceived sense of unfairness by hoteliers**

I have a suspicion regarding these user-generated content travel sites ... TripAdvisor's answer is "Well, you know, with hundreds of reviews out there, if someone's putting five or six phony reviews, it's not going to affect things very much." Well, there's a couple flaws in that logic ... three or four could be 10% or 20% of the reviews. ... So all it takes is two or three to rate you poorly. ... I mean I have not done the math, but just a small number of negatives will move you down from 4.8 to a 4.6.

*[Hotel Manager, ManorHouse]*



**Discounted IT Equipment**  
 The ITC Group UK Clearance Company UK's largest Branded IT Stockist  
[www.itcsales.co.uk](http://www.itcsales.co.uk)  
 Ads by Google  
 This is an ad revenue sharing forum Put Your Advertisement H

Search Engine Forums

Digital Point Forums > Business > Buy, Sell or Trade > Services  
**Trip Advisor Poster Needed**

User Name   Remember Me?  
 Password

Forum Jump Register Fun Stuff FAQ/Rules Today's Posts Search Tools

Post Reply

Thread Tools Display Modes

Aug 13th 2008, 5:43 am #1

**CherryV**  
 Grunt

Join Date: Jun 2008  
 Posts: 88  
 iTrader: (1)

**Trip Advisor Poster Needed**

I need 30 good reviews written on Trip advisor for one of my clients hotels.  
 15 for each one of the two listings  
 They will each need to be written from separate accounts and only max one per day.  
 You will need to make the accounts and reviews. Nothing fancy but positive.  
 Let me know who is intrested.

Quote



# Theoretical Implications



INFORMATION SYSTEMS  
AND INNOVATION GROUP  
Department of Management

- Specific arrangement of sociomateriality makes a difference to the nature of knowledge produced
- Insights into boundary-making practices and reconfiguration of phenomena
- Apparatus of AA and TripAdvisor ratings produce subtle differences in nature of knowledge about travel phenomena
  - AA scheme entails long, close relations between hoteliers and inspectors with specific expertise in standardized operational criteria and types of facilities
  - TripAdvisor encompasses multiple situated accounts that entail highly personalized engagements with the experience of travel