

# Black Twitter as a Research Site

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Social media has incredible potential for supporting Human-Computer Interaction (HCI) design and research. Each particular platform has affordances and communities which can be read like tea leaves to uncover future design implications or new directions in research. Conducting research within or across social media platforms can also provide important insights into the human condition. Building upon social norm research conducted in the Internet Rules Lab (iRL) here at the University of Colorado at Boulder, I have decided on social media as the subject for my first research project (Dym, 2020). Specifically, I and a team of scholars across several institutions focused on a community within a social media platform, Black Twitter, to discover more about who and what they are as well as how Twitter can support them.

While there are a number of publications about Black Twitter across several disciplines and venues, there are none dedicated in the ACM Digital Library as of the writing of this position paper (February 2021). I and the research team chose to take an exploratory mixed methods approach to establish what Black Twitter is discussing, what people who engage with it use the space for, and what issues with the platform people possess. We analyzed tweets and conducted semi-structured interviews and are in the process of writing up our findings and takeaways. In conjunction with these research aims, our team also brought in a historical element to our inquiry. We wanted to know whether or not there was a connection between Black Twitter and the Negro Motorist Green Book. How are they similar, and where do they diverge? This additional dimension brings a retrospective lens to our project.

From this one set of mixed methods, we also drew another thread of contribution. During the semi-structured interviews, we asked people who were familiar with and who engaged with Black Twitter what their perspective and thoughts were on how researchers should conduct research within and about Black Twitter. Fiesler and Proferes published on what people who used Twitter thought about Twitter research and how it should be conducted (Fiesler, 2018). With our look at Black Twitter, we wanted to extend those questions to this particular community and discover what, if any, differences exist between the guidelines Fiesler and Proferes discovered and what people who use Black Twitter expressed.

There is so much room for innovative and provocative research to be conducted within the realm of social media for the HCI community. Best practices and design implications are also available to be discovered by examining social media platforms. By combining the site of inquiry, social media, with theories, frameworks, research questions, and methods from various disciplines, the combinations, and possibilities for research are nearly limitless.

Brianna Dym and Casey Fiesler. 2020. Social Norm Vulnerability and its Consequences for Privacy and Safety in an Online Community. *Proc. ACM Hum.-Comput. Interact.* 4, CSCW2, Article 155 (October 2020), 24 pages. DOI:<https://doi.org/10.1145/3415226>

Fiesler, C., & Proferes, N. (2018). "Participant" Perceptions of Twitter Research Ethics. *Social Media and Society*, 4(1). <https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305118763366>