UNITED WE TWEET?: A QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS OF RACIAL DIFFERENCES IN TWITTER USE


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This study is grounded in the perspective that individuals who use Twitter exist within a racialized social structure, and that if handed a flexible platform for communication they may establish different patterns of use. It acknowledges Twitter as a novel social context in which users co-create meaning and structure, and is informed by theory addressing the role of race and racial identity within both online and offline spaces. Chapters analyze black-white racial variation in self-presentation, site use, and network formation using digital traces from two datasets of Twitter of users in the United States. Results indicate that while Twitter is in many ways a race-neutral context, black users are less likely to disclose personal identity indicators, tend to communicate with a smaller volume of users, and often have higher levels of racial homophily within their networks than white users. White users are more outwardly vocal, more likely to disclose personal identity indicators, and more likely to engage with Twitter as an information space. Overall, Twitter appears not to be immune to the influence of offline biases and identities, and there are some black users for whom the narrative of Black Twitter – or Twitter as a community building space – may hold true.