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Traveling while Black: Storytelling through Twitter

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Title: Traveling while Black: Storytelling through Twitter

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Abstract:

Domestic and international exploration has long been an area of interest for academicians and industry professionals alike. However, these travel journeys have historically been plagued with significant barriers for blacks in the United States. “No Negros allowed...We serve whites only...No coloreds allowed...Coloreds must sit on the balcony....” These are just a sampling of some of the well-documented captions that blacks had to endure during the segregation-era of Jim Crow. During this time, blacks in the United States faced major roadblocks while traveling, and continued threats of violence induced by the deeply embedded history of racism in the country (Green, 1936). Fast-forwarding 30 years, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 ended legal discrimination against blacks in public spaces, including travel venues. In fact, according to Mandala Research firm, 17% of black people take one or more international trips a year and account for \$48 billion of the US travel market. Although this market continues to experience upward growth, the relationships black people have with travel remain multi-faceted.

Amongst the small archive of research on African American tourism, some important studies to note include that of Phillip (1994), Carter (2008), and most recently Tucker (2015). Both Phillip (1994) and Carter (2008) conducted studies highlighting the differences between black and white travelers using household travel survey data. Unfortunately, both studies found that black travelers continue to participate in many of the travel behaviors established during Jim Crow segregation. For example, both studies found that black travelers are more likely (than white travelers) to visit destinations solely based on recommendations from family and friends (Carter, 2008; Phillip, 1994).

Additionally, Carter (2008) found that blacks travel more frequently in large groups in comparison to whites. Black travelers have also been considered to be less adventurous when it comes to trip itineraries, activities, and accommodation choices (Phillipp, 1994). In 2015, Tucker conducted a qualitative study amongst 12 African American tourists which provided information suggesting that marginality, ethnicity, and issues related to discrimination impact their travel attitudes and behaviors.

The African American travel market is rapidly growing, with much room for future development. Despite this trend in growth, many major hospitality and tourism companies continue to steer clear of specifically targeting the black community. In response to this, many black travelers are taking the initiative to clear their own paths to travel the world. For example, numerous black-owned start-up companies and blogs including “Travel Noir,” “Inclusive,” and “Nomadness Travel Tribe” have been created to fill this gap. Additionally, social media trends such as the popular hashtag *#travelingwhileblack* have brought to light some of the modern-day experiences of black travelers. The presence and growing popularity of networks like these confirm the fact that black American travel experiences are uniquely rooted in the history of race in America, making them vastly different than white travel experiences.

Although the emergence of this trend is evident, research in this area is severely lacking. Therefore, the goal of this study is to gain a deeper understanding of the black American travel

experience from both a traveler's perspective and a marketing perspective. Analyzing over 3000 tweets using the hashtag #travelingwhileblack, qualitative content analysis was used to answer these research questions:

1. In what ways do black travelers use Twitter to express their travel experiences?

- a. In what ways do black tourists express negative traveling experiences through Twitter?
- b. In what ways do black tourists express positive traveling experiences through Twitter?

2. What differences exist, if any, between the lived experiences of black travelers and the marketing materials used to target black travelers?

Results from the qualitative analysis reveal both positive and negative experiences of black travelers specifying emergent themes discovered within the data. During the presentation, results from this study will be discussed within the context of black history, as well as Critical Race Theory and whiteness studies. This work extends previous research on the black travel experience by adding depth and breadth of understanding. It is our goal that the findings from this research will aid in stimulating discussion about this sensitive but critical travel and tourism issue.

References:

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