

E-activism: Analysis of black bloggers in the blogosphere

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In the first scholarly research examining the role of black bloggers in the blogosphere, Brown University researcher Antoinette Pole assessed how bloggers of color use their medium for purposes related to politics. She found that black bloggers are, in fact, mobilizing readers to engage in political participation. Additionally, Pole found that black bloggers do not feel discriminated against or excluded by other bloggers. These findings appear in the *International Journal of Technology, Knowledge and Society*.

Among the top political blogs, Pole says blogging has primarily been undertaken by white men, coined by Chris Nolan as the "Big Boys Club." She says blacks comprise approximately less than 1 percent of political bloggers.

"Though they are less numerous, examining the role of minorities in the blogosphere is important if blogs are being used to engage in political discourse and discussion, and more importantly, political action that has real-world implications," Pole said. "Who has influence in the blogosphere and how bloggers are using this new medium to undertake political action merits study."

Based on in-depth interviews with 20 black bloggers conducted in November 2005, Pole's study found that 85 percent of respondents use their blogs to engage in political advocacy and to raise money for charitable causes. A majority of the bloggers said they encouraged their readers to vote or to register to vote; 40 percent of the bloggers asked

their readers to contact elected officials; 35 percent suggested that their readers sign a petition or attend a rally, protest, or march. Several of the bloggers mentioned using their blogs to endorse candidates for office. Compared to other research examining blogging and political participation, black bloggers appear to be engaged in these online advocacy efforts and philanthropic endeavors to a greater degree than their white counterparts, according to the paper.

"I assumed these bloggers were writing about politics and policy issues, but I didn't realize the extent to which the authors mobilize their readers and use blogs as a conduit for political participation," said Pole.

When black bloggers were asked whether they felt discriminated against or left out by other bloggers, a majority of respondents said they do not. "While black bloggers face challenges such as not being linked by more popular bloggers or not receiving as much traffic as other bloggers, they perceive the blogosphere as inclusive."

Pole also found that black political bloggers do not necessarily blog about issues that are unique to minorities, though at times, they emphasize how issues affect blacks in particular. Respondents commonly reported writing about a variety of topics including race and ethnicity, party politics, and campaigns and elections.

"Findings from this research suggest the blogosphere can be an avenue for greater political participation on the part of blacks and other minorities, given the relatively low threshold to entry and what appear to be low levels of discrimination," Pole concludes.

Source: Brown University

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