

Why more African Americans turn to Twitter

May 17 2011

It doesn't matter if you're black or white. If you're interested in celebrity and entertainment news, you're more likely to start using Twitter, according to a new Northwestern University study.

But, African Americans in general report more interest in celebrity and entertainment news and were found to be more likely than whites to start using Twitter. The research, which focused on first-year [college students](#) attending the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC), found 37 percent of [black students](#) were using Twitter in 2010 compared to 21 percent of white students. The study was published online by *New Media & Society*, May 2011.

Researchers also found that despite all of the hype around Twitter, less than 20 percent of the college students surveyed were using the website in 2010.

"This is a reality check," said Eszter Hargittai, associate professor of communication studies at Northwestern and lead author of the study.

"While Twitter certainly can be very exciting and can offer a lot of opportunities, we found that the majority of students are not using it and certain types of people are more likely to start using Twitter compared to others."

Hargittai and Eden Litt, a graduate student at Northwestern and second author of the study, surveyed the same group of UIC students in spring 2009 and again in spring 2010.

Both surveys asked students to share their awareness and use of Twitter as well as their gender, race, Internet skill level, interest in topics such as international news, politics, entertainment and celebrity news, sports, science, technology, arts and crafts, and their parents' educational backgrounds. Only 3.6 percent of the students were using Twitter in 2009, but that percentage jumped to 17.8 percent in 2010, as Twitter gained more worldwide popularity.

"Students with higher Internet skills were more likely to start using Twitter and so were [African Americans](#), who we found report more interest in celebrity and entertainment news than their peers of other races," said Hargittai. "Students of all races with an interest in celebrity and entertainment news were more likely to become Twitter users whereas someone with an interest in science and research was less likely to become a Twitter user."

Twitter has become a popular way for government agencies, public officials, businesses, celebrities and teachers to collect and disseminate information, but Hargittai said their tweets may only be reaching certain types of people and an often vulnerable set of non-Twitter users could be missing out.

"Students from underprivileged socioeconomic backgrounds were much less likely to use Twitter," said Hargittai. "This study is a good reminder that just because college students are young, that doesn't mean they've adopted Twitter. And if they do decide to use [Twitter](#), it's likely because they're either very Internet savvy or they're very interested in [celebrity](#) tweets."

Provided by Northwestern University

Citation: Why more African Americans turn to Twitter (2011, May 17) retrieved 28 April 2024

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