

## The Green Book: Digital Edition.

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## **The Green Book: Digital Edition.**

### **Introduction**

Black travel organizations such as Black Travel Movement and Travel Noire strive to encourage more Black people to travel by dispelling the stereotype that Black people do not travel, and increasing accessibility to travel for the Black population (Dillette et al., 2019). The lack of Black representation from the media perpetuates this misconception and the barrier to travel for Black population (Alderman & Modlin Jr, 2013). In a 2019 interview with CNN Travel, a general manager of Travel Noire, expressed concern that there is a lack of people of color (POC) representation in mainstream travel advertisements and campaigns; such limited representation can result in weak interest and demand (Yiga, 2019).

Throughout the years, multiple Black entrepreneurs have founded companies to cater to the needs of Black travelers. Concurrently, the new tech-savvy generation of Black travelers have created social media communities through Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, which allows them to share their travel experiences with like-minded individuals in safe spaces (Sutherland, 2019). These online communities create a sense of belonging, model the benefits of travel, and provide information and sometimes warnings of shared experiences specific to Black people while traveling (Sutherland, 2019). In the travel and tourism industry, this trend has been labeled as “The Black Travel Movement (BTM)”.

Even though Black tourists form a profitable and critical market segment, academic research on their needs, motivations, and behaviors as tourists is scarce (e.g., Alderman & Modlin Jr., 2013; Cater, 2008; Dillette et al., 2018; Lusby & Story, 2013; Philipp, 1994). Much of the existing literature on Black leisure travel focused on the differences between Black and White travel behavior, positing explanations of why those differences exist (Carter, 2008; Philipp, 1994). However, this traditional between-group comparison overlooks the unique motivations behind Black travel. The current study adds to the literature by exploring the behaviors and motivations of Black travelers independent from other demographics.

The recent growth of BTM on social media provides a novel opportunity to investigate what is motivating this growth in Black travel. Twitter is selected as a platform of study since it has functioned as an important communication platform for the Black population in the United States (Brock, 2012). Extensive literature has observed the interactions of Black people on Twitter and has termed the phenomenon as “Black Twitter” (e.g., Brock, 2012; Lee, 2017; Sharma, 2013). Black Twitter users have used the platform to conduct collective behaviors using ‘Blacktags’ such as #BlackLivesMatter (Sharma, 2013; Yang, 2016). A recent study by Dillette et al. (2018) also selected Twitter to explore the experiences of Black travelers and draw insights toward a more just tourism environment.

For the current study, more than 10 hashtags related to BTM, such as ‘#BlackTravelMovement’, ‘#TravelNoire’, ‘#TravelingWhileBlack’, and ‘#BlackTravel’, were considered. To understand the most current motivations of Black travelers, this study focused on tweets posted in the past five years (from years 2015 through 2019). The tweets were analyzed using supervised machine learning approach. First, a sample of randomly selected tweets were coded based on the motivations identified in the existing literature, motivation theories (Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, travel career ladder (TCL), and Push and Pull model), and the results of exploratory topic modeling. Then, the labeled tweets were used as a training set to identify the motivations

expressed in the rest of the tweets. Multiple machine learning methods (Support Vector Machine (SVM), Naïve Bayes, Random Forest, NNET, and Logistic regression) were applied and the best performing algorithm was selected for the final analysis.

In interpreting the results, this study used the framework of critical race theory (CRT) as racism is a central context in exploring both reluctances to travel as well as enthusiasm for travel. There are several tenets of CRT; for the purpose of this study, we focused on a few: intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991), interest convergence (Bell, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 1998), permanence of racism (Bell, 1992; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995), and Counter storytelling (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001). The findings from this study will provide insights on the popular motivations of Black travelers independent from other race and how they have changed over time with the growth of BTM.

## **Literature Review**

### ***Motivations of Black Leisure Travelers***

Only a handful of peer-reviewed journal articles were identified (e.g., Alderman & Modlin Jr, 2013; Carter, 2008; Dillette et al., 2019; Lelo & Jamal, 2013; Lusby & Sotry, 2013; Philipp, 1994), highlighting the need for the current study and future studies on Black tourism. Of the studies identified, Carter (2008) and Lusby and Story (2013) reported three different motivations for Black travel: escape from day-to-day responsibilities, novelty-seeking, and belongingness. These motivations seem to be in line with existing theories, especially with push and pull concept (Dann, 1977). Unlike the escape from daily responsibilities and novelty-seeking, belongingness exhibited Black traveler specific characteristics.

Belongingness was multidimensional including belonging to family and friends, to ancestral heritage, and to a racial group (Brantley, 2006; Carter, 2008; Lusby & Sotry, 2013; Philipp, 1994). The need for belongingness, despite it being another motivator already identified in existing literature and established in Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and TCL theory, exhibited a unique characteristic in the context of Black travelers.

Black individuals, more than other racial groups, tended to travel in groups with other Black people for a sense of safety and community in addition to belongingness (Brantley, 2006; Philipp, 1994). The association of belongingness and safety seem to be rooted in the history of race in the United States. The marginality and discrimination due to systematic racism have inevitably influenced the Black travel pattern (Dillette et al., 2019).

Culture and heritage exploration can be interpreted in the similar context of belongingness. Groups of Black travelers to Africa for example, tend to visit Ghana or the Ivory-Coast, for a "roots-seeking" experience. Roots-seeking allows for travelers across the African Diaspora to develop a connection with an ancestral homeland, cultural identity, and a sense of belonging (Lelo & Jamal, 2013). This type of genealogical tourism may account for some of the growth in Black travel, specifically back to the African continent.

Likewise, Black travelers' desire to share their travel experiences online and be a part of the movement, i.e., Black Travel Movement (BTM), may pertain to feelings of solidarity and sense of community. Moreover, this study argues that social media functions as the *digital Green Book* where Black travelers share destinations and travel experiences where they felt safe and welcomed. Yet, very limited research has been done to extract valuable data from the shared

travel experiences on social media to understand and market to the allures that encourage Black individuals to travel.

Since the existing literature on motivations of Black travelers was significantly limited, the current study also briefly explored existing theories on travel motivations to help build codebook for data labeling.

### ***Travel Motivations Theories***

Studies on travel motivations have mostly utilized three theoretical frameworks: Maslow's hierarchy of needs, travel career ladder (TCL), and Push and Pull model (Jaapar et al., 2017). Maslow's hierarchy of needs classifies human needs into five hierarchies: physiological, safety, love and belonging, esteem, and self-actualization (Maslow, 1943). The hierarchy can vary per circumstance and person; and a behavior may be motivated by multiple needs (Maslow, 1954). Though Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory has received critique from researchers on its limited applicability in the context of tourism (Hsu & Huang, 2012; Jaapar et al., 2017; Witt & Wright, 1992), the theory or its extension has been used to understand the motivations to travel in different contexts (e.g., Jang & Cai, 2002; Šimková & Holzner, 2014; Tikkanen, 2007).

Travel career ladder (TCL) theory was developed based on Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory (Pearce & Caltabiano, 1983; Pearce & Lee, 2005). It adds a need for relaxation at the bottom of the pyramid but retains the other tiers from Maslow's model—safety/security needs, relationship needs, self-esteem and development needs, and fulfilment needs (Pearce & Lee, 2005). TCL theory argues that travelers' motivations change according to their life cycle and travel experience and that such change follows a similar pattern. Based on the TCL framework, Pearce and Lee (2005) surveyed 1,012 travelers and identified escape/relax, novelty, relationship, and self-development as the most important and core motivations.

Another popular approach to study tourist motivations is the push and pull concept (Dann, 1977; Uysal & Jurowski, 1994). The concept explains the travel behavior through push factors, i.e., elements that encourages individuals to travel, and pull factors, i.e., elements that attracts individuals to a certain destination (Kim et al., 2003). The push factors may include intrinsic motives such as enjoyment, novelty, and socialization and can be mediated by travelers' socio-economic and demographic factors (Uysal & Hagan, 1993). On the other hand, attributes such as a destination's attractions, accessibility, and marketed image can pull travelers to visit the destination. The push and pull factors have varied across culture, demographic, and market segments (e.g., Kim et al., 2003; You et al., 2000).

### ***Critical Race Theory***

It is important to frame this study within the context of critical race theory (CRT) because racism is a central context in exploring both reluctances to travel as well as enthusiasm for travel. CRT is defined as academic activism with the aim to understand, change, and transform social situations where racial stratification leads to subordination (Solórzano, 1998). Racism is ordinary under the lens of critical race theory and should not be treated as a peculiar, happenstance outlier (Solórzano, 1998, Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). There are several tenets of CRT, for the purpose of this study we focused on a few: intersectionality of race, identity, travel destinations, etc (Crenshaw, 1991), interest convergence (Bell, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 1998), permanence of racism (Bell, 1992; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995) and Counter storytelling (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001).

Intersectionality is important in travel research because it looks at the interaction of race, travel destinations, and travel experience. Interest convergence explores travel progress of Black individuals as it relates to travel goals of white individuals, which in itself is problematic. Racism is the standard and the permanence of racism should not be ignored in the exploration of Black travel experiences. CRT methodologies allow for participants to be the expert of their lived experience through counter storytelling which in travel decreases interest convergence and increases Black voices as authorities. Within tourism, traveling has the power to be a transformative experience and contribute toward important social aims (Dillette, Benjamin & Carpenter, 2018).

For critical race theory, the starting point is race and that starting point is central and non-negotiable (Hylton & Chakrabarty, 2011). With this in mind, the exploration of racism, anti-racism, and other intersecting forms of oppression are not typically centered within tourism and travel (Rath, 2007), therefore calling for a critical approach to answering our research questions. The Journal of Policy Research in tourism, leisure, and events published a special issue to center race and culture in tourism, travel writing heritage, and other essential areas of relevant study in response to this call to action. This special issue exemplified the need for diverse epistemologies and paradigms, race and culture-specific policy formation, diverse methodologies where lived experience is a validated form of data collection, cultural reflection, dualism in change for the benefactor and receiver, and the denouncement of color blindness (Hylton & Chakrabarty, 2011).

Although this issue pointed out areas for improvement, progress is slow. The research on tourism, race, and culture using CRT is limited, lacking, and disappointing (Dillette et al., 2019). A study conducted in 2019 used counternarrative stories to explore Black travel experiences; counternarrative stories are specific to CRT and use lived experiences through storytelling as validated and powerful data points. These data points give voice to marginalized voices while also eliciting empathy and changing opinions (Delgado & Stefanic 2000; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001). Specific to the tourism industry, CRT methodologies expose dominant narratives that manipulate history and silence culturally diverse voices (Dillette et al., 2018). Specificity in research garners innovative investigation of critical research gaps for important issues. This new decade is dominated by technology and these technological advances have a direct effect on travel experiences, especially for culturally diverse individuals. Taking a step further our study explores the travel experiences of Black Americans traveling both domestically and internationally who tell their stories via Twitter.

## **Methodology**

The analysis process comprised of four steps: data collection, creating codebook based on literature and topic modeling, manual labeling, and machine learning classification. For the exploratory analysis, this study examined tweets posted from years 2015 through 2019 that contained the hashtag *#TravelNoire* (The authors plan to incorporate a list of BTM-related hashtags for full analysis). The initial dataset comprised 106,616 tweets and 23,558 unique users. Any tweets posted by an official account of TravelNoire company were removed. The final dataset included 64,638 tweets posted by 21,966 unique users.

The texts from the tweets were pre-processed to remove non-ASCII characters (Yergeau, 2003), all hyperlinks, mentions of usernames (e.g., @username), punctuations, and stopwords (Manning

& Schütze, 1999). Then, one hundred tweets were randomly selected for manual overview. The authors utilized Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs theory as a guideline but included or removed themes to create a codebook.

In addition to the manual review, topic modeling was conducted on the full dataset to explore common themes. Topic modeling utilizes the correlation between the words and their distributions in documents to identify latent semantic themes (Blei & Lafferty, 2007). Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA), a probabilistic topic modeling method, was selected to cluster the words into a set of topics (Figure 1). LDA has been applied to several disciplines to identify topics from a large number of documents, including tweets (Blei et al., 2003; Koltsova & Koltcov, 2013; Zhao et al., 2011).

The manual review and topic modeling yielded 11 motivators: Wellness, Belongingness, Heritage, Escape, Safety, Self-actualization, Esteem, Natural outdoors/outdoor activities, Information seeking and sharing, and Destination. With the labeled 300 tweets, machine classification will be conducted using Support Vector Machine (SVM), Naïve Bayes, Random Forest, NNET, and Logistic regression with 5-fold validation. The method with the highest values of accuracy, precision, and recall will be selected and applied to the complete dataset.

## **Results**

The preliminary findings indicate that the accuracy and precision of the classification algorithms are very low (< 60%) and requires further training data. Based on the limited information provided by the analysis, destination itself, exploration, and heritage emerged as the main motivators in the last five years. Furthermore, manual evaluation of tweets indicated that the tweets contain rich data on the activities participated and attractions visited by the Black travelers, which could not be detected based on the topic modeling. Hence, the authors intend to subset the dataset based on the most frequently appearing motivations to understand how such motivations correlate with tourist behavior once inside the destination.

## **Conclusion and Discussion**

Though extremely preliminary, this study provides a springboard to initiate future studies to bridge the gap in literature on Black tourism. The new movement around Black travel through The Black Travel Movement on social media allows us to uncover behaviors and motivations for Black travel that were previously unknown.

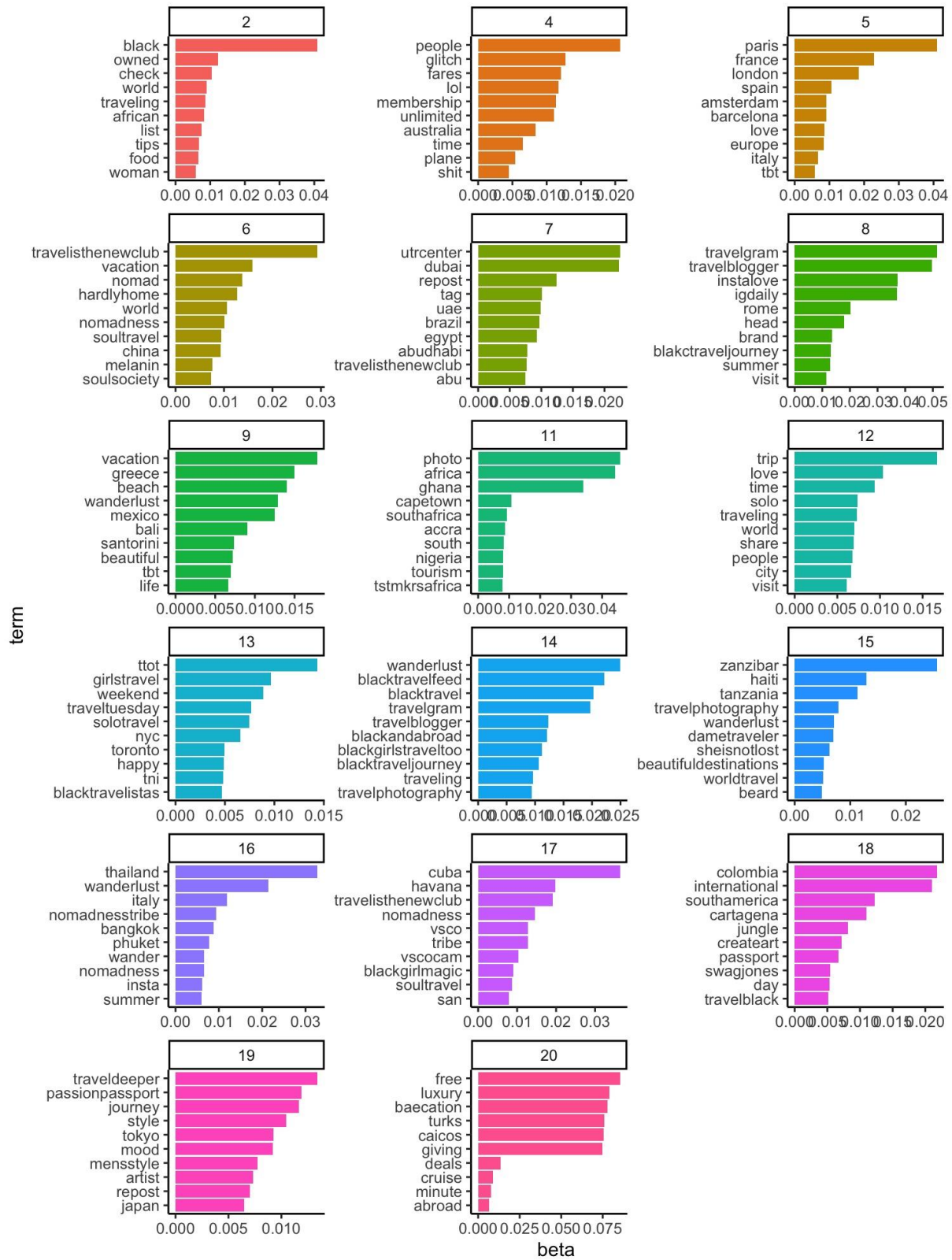


Figure 1. Topic modeling result. Beta refers to per-topic-per-word probability, which calculates how likely the word is to be part of the topic.

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