

NEW FORMS OF DISCRIMINATION? RE-EXAMINING THE DISCOURSES AND MEANINGS OF RACIAL DISCRIMINATORY COMMENTS ABOUT AIRBNB ON TWITTER

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Key implications

- This research explores how Twitter users frame discourses of racial discrimination on Airbnb and the effects over time.
- This research helps us better understand how racial discrimination discourses are generated, presented, interpreted, and evolved under the advancement of digital technology.
- This research provides a network analysis of the evolving online discriminatory comments by examining users' tweet and retweet structure.



Background

The rapid growth of the peer-to-peer accommodation provider Airbnb has not only created an alternative experience for users but also challenged the theories of racial discrimination that based on other social settings such as school and workplace. With its reciprocal system, Airbnb users are required to provide and disclose their digital footprints on the Airbnb platform to facilitate trust between strangers. This process, however, is increasingly characterized by personalizing each user and completely changes the anonymous feature of the traditional accommodation industry. Such a disclosure process leads to an algorithmic turn which can inadvertently create space for whom to be included and excluded. For example, studies on the sharing economy have revealed that Blacks and Asians are more likely to be rejected by White hosts on Airbnb. To date, most research has focused on the discrimination issues at a relatively superficial level and simply attribute the causes of discrimination to the design of the Airbnb platform. Few have systematically examined the social dynamics of the sharing economy and how racial discrimination discourses are generated, presented, interpreted, evolved, and dealt with under the advancement of digital technology, especially as the sharing economy relates to mutual trust and intergroup perception.

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Focus of study

To extend the depth and range of racial discrimination in the sharing economy, this research aims to unpack the complexity by developing a coherent and more nuanced understanding of discrimination discourses:

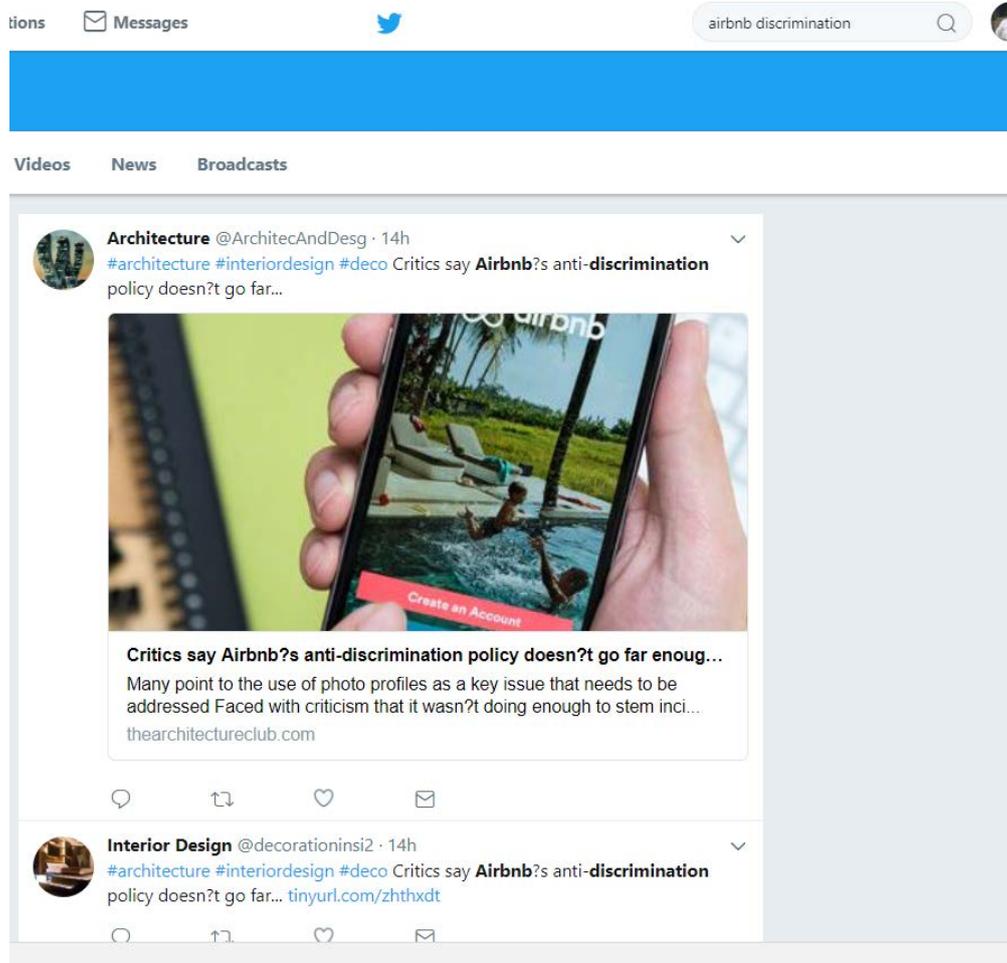
1. Exploring the data from Twitter concerning racial discriminatory comments after the non-discriminatory policy in 2016.
2. Examining how different stakeholders see the racial discrimination experiences on Airbnb, as well as the network of the tweet/retweet structure (regarding racial discriminatory comments on Twitter).
3. Presenting the relationship between users' digital profiles and the contents of their tweets/retweets.
4. Formulating more effective strategies to address ongoing racial discrimination concerns.



Research methods

Twitter data are used for this study. The key advantage of using Twitter data is that tweets are publicly available on a large scale, providing an ideal means to capture the ways people perceive and their public response to a particular topic. "Tweets" and "retweets" from Twitter concerning racial discrimination on Airbnb are crawled using programming python. Key terms and #hashtags are used as the identifiers for relevant tweets.

Tweets after Airbnb implemented the non-discrimination policy in 2016 are collected. Key information are crawled including user tweets, tweet types (tweet or retweet), user's digital profiles, and the key terms of their discourses (such as black, yellow, skin of color, types of discrimination, stigma, descriptions of other groups, etc.). We then analyzed the relationship between users' profiles and the content of their tweet/retweets.



Significance of findings for practice and policy

Nowadays more and more people express and exchange their opinions/attitudes through social media and online platforms. Furthermore, social media like Twitter has the power to shape and even agitate the ongoing discussion of racial discrimination that can potentially influence users' perceptions and behaviors. By crawling the meanings and figuring out the tweet/retweet network regarding users' experiences on Airbnb, as well as the contents of how different stakeholders interpret racial discrimination on Airbnb, this research presents the complexity of racial discrimination in the sharing economy. This research has both theoretical and empirical implications for the fields of race and ethnicity, social networks, big data analytics, and digital discrimination. It provides a longitudinal study of the evolving online discourses on racial discrimination. The findings also provide us with an opportunity to think about the fine-grained way to deal with new forms of racial discrimination in the sharing economy.

REQUEST FOR MORE DETAILS

Please contact Dr. Yao-Tai Li at yaotaili@hkbu.edu.hk for more information about the project.

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