

# LOCATING SOCIAL MEDIA IN BLACK DIGITAL STUDIES

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Experiences of social media are often associated with an ability to transcend geo-cultural borders to connect and communicate with people in different parts of the world. However, social media encounters are shaped by various complex geographies, including Black geographies. Black digital studies and Black geographies work illuminates the (dis)located nature of Black people's experiences, such as how the histories of places, politics, and violence affect the daily lives of Black people. Engaging with such work is essential to critically understanding and locating social media, including in ways that eschew harmful attempts to quantify, and instead turn to approaches such as those articulated by critical geographer, cultural worker, and practitioner-scholar Naya Jones (2019, p. 1079), who poignantly writes about how “[e]mbodied or somatic inquiry has become integral to my methodology and epistemology as a geographer, with close attention to how testifiers and I mutually feel, sense, and intuit”.

Therefore, this chapter focuses on the burgeoning nature of Black digital studies in Britain, to consider how such scholarship meaningfully locates and unsettles social media, and examines how social media is, at once, both bordered and borderless. This chapter highlights the importance of work that deals with regional, national, and transnational dimensions of Black people's digital and scholarly experiences. Highlighting the research of PhD and early career researchers, this work outlines how Black digital studies in Britain have been developing in ways distinctly affected by this specific geo-cultural context, as well as Black digital diasporic dynamics (e.g., discourse and delight between Black people in the US and Britain) (Sobande, 2018, 2020; Walcott, Figueroa, & Sobande, 2019). In turn, this chapter contributes to ongoing work that explores and establishes the wide range of ways that Black digital studies are being undertaken with an attentiveness to the specifics of geo-cultural and sociopolitical contexts.

## Relationship Between the Internet and Locations

The relationship between social media and geographies is a fraught and, sometimes, actively concealed and contested one. At times, social media is spoken about as though it is rootless, floating free from any clear connection to the parameters of places and the policies and policing practices that are part of them. The notion that social media creates borderless spaces and interactions can be a naïve one that fails to account for how people's access to, and experiences of, social media are impacted by the perceived and enforced borders of places and cultural norms, governments, and legislation contained within them. I write these words days after the distressing news of a Nigerian government directive to indefinitely suspend access to Twitter,

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which has been followed by reporting that “Chief legal officer orders prosecution of anyone who refuses to follow the government’s block on social network” (Al Jazeera, 2021). Such somber news about the Nigerian suspension of “Twitter’s activities, two days after the social media giant removed a post from President Muhammadu Buhari that threatened to punish regional secessionists” (Sotunde, 2021) exemplifies the fact that social media and people’s (in)access to it is linked to geo-cultural locations and their sociopolitical environment.

Media pieces such as “The global internet is disintegrating. What comes next?” (BBC, 2019) and “China’s ‘splinternet’ will create a state-controlled alternative cyberspace” (Kenyon, 2021) signal concerns regarding the ability of countries to police online borders and contribute to the splintering of internet experiences due to diverging national and political interests. In the words of Keith Wright (2019) for *TechCrunch*:

There is no question that the arrival of a fragmented and divided internet is now upon us. The “splinternet”, where cyberspace is controlled and regulated by different countries is no longer just a concept, but now a dangerous reality. With the future of the “World Wide Web” at stake, governments and advocates in support of a free and open internet have an obligation to stem the tide of authoritarian regimes isolating the web to control information and their populations.

Additionally, as is outlined in “Regulating behaviours on the European Union internet, the case of spam versus cookies” (Carmi, 2017, p. 289),

[T]he internet as a new global system of networks mediated by media technologies, has enabled old and new actors to deploy strategies that draw on previous power relations while constructing new ones. The internet stretches beyond state and regional territorial powers and therefore introduced other forms of governing that include private organizations.

As well as being about the powers of the European Union, governments, and nation-states, the relationship between social media and geographies includes online experiences and expressions of identity and the self which are influenced by locations (social, geographical, cultural, political, assumed, imagined). When accounting for this, among the many questions that arise are the following: In what ways are social media experiences located or how do such experiences involve forms of dislocation, and, perhaps, relocation? How do studies of social and digital media attend to matters regarding geography and (dis)locatedness? What are the benefits and limitations of conceptualizing the located nature of Black digital experiences?

Taking such questions into consideration, this chapter reflects on the development of Black digital studies in Britain. Although the term “Black digital studies” is used throughout this chapter, it is used with a degree of uncertainty due to awareness of the interdisciplinary, transdisciplinary, and, sometimes, anti-disciplinary nature (Bruce, 2022) of the work that is referred to as such. In other words, in writing this chapter I recognize that the term “Black digital studies” may not fully capture the different dimensions of studies of Black people’s digital experiences in Britain that are discussed in the writing that follows. Accordingly, I sit with the

uneasy tension between an impulse to name and acknowledge such scholarship and a desire to avoid flattening the nuanced nature of such work when attempting to make it legible to broader fields of study such as social media and digital studies.

Beyond these paragraphs, this chapter involves limited critical consideration of the (in)adequacy of the term “Black digital studies” in relation to related scholarship in Britain. However, before proceeding with this discussion of “Locating Social Media in Black Digital Studies” it seems pertinent to ruminate on both the benefits and limitations of the term “Black digital studies”, including the potential for the term’s use to obscure the wide range of disciplinary conventions, or lack of any disciplinary locus, at the centre of work that is referred to that way. Furthermore, prior to continuing with this writing it is imperative to clarify that despite my use of the term “Black digital studies”, in Britain, currently there are no departments or degree programmes explicitly in this area. Also, there is notably scarce access to adequate supervision of Black digital doctoral studies. Thus, the existence of the scholarship that is discussed throughout this chapter should not be confused for the existence of substantial and sustained institutional support for, or recognition of, such work in academia in Britain.

As US-based practitioner–scholar Jones (2019) acknowledges in a vital article on “Black Food Geographies of Slow Violence and Resilience” which explores “reflexivity through GIF-making and autoethnography” (Jones, 2019, p. 1079), “Black geographies already exist, lived, known, and experienced by Black geographic subjects” (Jones, 2019, p. 1077). Meanings of the words associated with geographies such as “location” and “located” vary. However, typically such terms are linked to a sense of place, rootedness, and position(ing), including specific geo-cultural areas and histories. My attempt to think through “Locating Social Media in Black Digital Studies” involves ruminating on different forms of locating and locatedness, namely: 1) how critical analysis and understandings of social media that are located in Black digital studies in Britain offer valuable insights, 2) how such scholarship involves addressing the influence of geo-cultural locations (e.g., Britain) in the digital experiences discussed, 3) how Black digital studies in Britain is both located in and dislocated from a number of scholarly disciplines and areas of study. Put briefly, the understanding of locatedness that is operationalized in this work is a multidimensional one that oscillates between considerations of the characteristics of places, platforms, and the particularities of disciplines and academic fields.

Are locations and forms of locatedness tangible or imagined? To me, typically, they are both at the same time. My discussion of locatedness in this chapter is guided by an understanding of locations and locatedness as being fluid and constantly in flux. Just as the borders of geographical locations have changed over the decades, so too have the porous parameters of people’s social locations and identities. For these reasons, when writing this chapter, I did so with an acute awareness of the irony of accepting the fluidity of locations and locatedness while attempting to pinpoint a clear connection between the construction and experience of specific locations and social media. I do not view the ever-changing nature of locations and locatedness as being at odds with an ability to grasp and critically analyze the relationship between them and social media, but I do note the consequential need to explore and express such a relationship in a way that does not imply that locations and locatedness are fixed.

Now, I turn to reflecting on and locating the development of Black digital studies in Britain, to concretely ground my consideration of “Locating Social Media in Black Digital Studies” and foreground this vibrant area of research which is particularly propelled by the work of Black feminists.

## Development of Black Digital Studies in Britain

The area of Black digital studies in Britain has rapidly expanded in the years since work such as “Challenging the Whiteness of Britishness: Co-Creating British Social History in the Blogosphere” (Gabriel, 2015) and “ Blogging While Black, British and Female: A Critical Study on Discursive Activism” (Gabriel, 2016). The development of Black digital studies in Britain has been spurred on by the work of many people and because of key events including the “Anticipating Black Futures” (2019) multidisciplinary symposium in Birmingham in 2019. Writing about another critical event on Black digital experiences, keisha bruce (2019) poignantly states:

What does it mean to experience digital cultures or adopt digital mediums as a Black person? How can Black creatives utilize the digital to explore the endless possibilities for Black identity? How can we conceptualize Blackness through the lens of the digital? These questions were the cornerstones of the Afrofutures\_UK’s event “Digital While Black” that was held at Birmingham Open Media on 23 February.

The research of PhD students and early career scholars such as Krys Osei (2018, 2019, 2021), keisha bruce (2019, 2022), Rianna Walcott (2020, 2022), and Kui Kihoro Mackay (2021a, 2021b) has shaped the current dynamic landscape of scholarship in Britain, which focuses on Black digital and diasporic experiences. Such work which includes collaborative writing and collective activities addresses a wide range of questions, including those that account for the specific experiences of Black women and queer people, and the significance of their creative work, visual cultural production, and knowledge creation and sharing via digital terrains.

The variety of topics examined amid Black digital studies in Britain includes Osei’s (2018) unique exploration of “the aestheticisation and stylisation of Black feminist fashion communication, by highlighting the production, distribution and reception of [web-series] *An African City*, across the metropolitan diasporic locales of Accra, London and Washington, DC”. Black digital studies in Britain also include work that involves a critical consideration of how hierarchical global relations and Anglocentrism affect Black people and Black scholarship. Such work includes research that contributes to “dialogue concerning the interrelated hegemony of North America, Eurocentrism, anti-Blackness, sexism and its implications in Black women’s media and aesthetic practices, as well as related scholarship” (Sobande & Osei, 2020, p. 204). My own Black digital studies work in Britain officially commenced in 2015, when embarking on my PhD project “Digital Diaspora and (Re)mediating Black Women in Britain” (2015–2018, University of Dundee). This would eventually form the basis of articles such as “Watching Me Watching You: Black Women in Britain on YouTube” (Sobande, 2017), “Resisting Media Marginalisation: Black Women’s Digital Content and Collectivity” (Sobande, Fearfull, & Brownlie, 2019), and my book *The Digital Lives of Black Women in Britain* (Sobande, 2020).

A key theme that runs throughout much of Black digital studies research in Britain is a focus on both differences and similarities between the contexts of Britain and the US. While Black digital studies in the US have constructively informed elements of Black digital studies in Britain, the generative dialogues between these connected yet different spaces (Black digital studies in Britain and the US) include discussions about the importance of specificity, such as avoiding framing the experiences of Black people in the US and/or Britain as universal. That said, being attentive to the specific qualities of parts of the world such as Britain and the US does not deny the scope for also acknowledging the global existence of anti-Blackness and interconnected forms of oppression which Black people across the globe are faced with.

As the inimitable work of Moya Bailey (2021, p. 1) highlights, misogynoir which “describes the uniquely co-constitutive racialized and sexist violence that befalls Black women as a result of their simultaneous and interlocking oppression at the intersection of racial and gender marginalization” is a global phenomenon rather than one that is confined to one specific location. Thus, while the digital experiences (and studies) of Black women and Black nonbinary, agender, and gender-variant people in Britain are undoubtedly shaped by the particularities of such a place, they are often also impacted by the global nature of misogynoir and intersecting oppressions. In the words of Bailey (2021) in a section on “Misogynoir without Borders” in the brilliant book *Misogynoir Transformed: Black Women’s Digital Resistance*,

I believe that those outside the United States are best positioned to speak about misogynoir – and hopefully its transformation – in their locations. I offer an invitation to readers to see this book as the first of many that address misogynoir in several arenas and locales, where I and other writers take on the unfortunate dynamism of this noxious reality. (p. 25)

How do critical analyses and understandings of social media that are located in Black digital studies in Britain offer valuable insights? Such scholarship includes a wider range of approaches than those that are accounted for in this chapter. However, this piece recognizes some of the key and increasing emergent topics and perspectives within the sphere of Black digital studies in Britain which, at present, does not feel bound to a single academic discipline but is fashioned by ones such as Black studies, sociology, digital humanities, media and cultural studies, and critical studies of marketing and consumer culture.

Among topics and perspectives at the core of Black digital studies in Britain are ones which emphatically explore how the history and contemporary socioeconomic status of Britain and the many regions that constitute it impact Black people’s lives, including the (in)accessible nature of digital technology and the internet. For example, as part of my ongoing work I have attempted to account for how issues concerning “Regionality and Rurality” can distinctly impact the digital and media experiences of Black people in Britain (Sobande & Hill, 2022), including due to lack of access to consistent internet connections and “the prevalence of high-profile media from capital cities and the comparatively constrained visibility and funding available to media outlets, practitioners, creatives and freelancers in small towns and rural areas” (Sobande, 2020, p. 53).

Scholarly efforts to locate social media experiences must be sensitive to how



matters regarding material conditions, as well as regionality and rurality, can mold the details of Black people's social media encounters (or lack of them). After all, "to be Black in a capital city may be to experience life in a way that contrasts with the realities of Black people living in rural settings" (Sobande, 2020, p. 8). Moreover, locatedness in relation to social media and digital culture can be constructed and experienced at regional, national, and transnational levels, all at once. Therefore, when "Locating Social Media in Black Studies" it seems necessary to spend time unpacking how these interconnected layers of locatedness and geographies are made manifest online.

Although it is not considered in detail in this chapter, a question that I often find myself pondering (as a Black Scottish woman) is to what extent Scottish Twitter and Black Twitter connect and overlap, if at all. Scottish Twitter and Black Twitter may be understood as being constructed in ways that involve an undeniable sense of locatedness, or at least, perceived locatedness – 1) being Scottish and/or aware of the idiosyncrasies of Scottish culture, 2) Being Black American and/or part of the Black diaspora. While Black Twitter is particularly associated with the words, work, history, and experiences of Black American people (Brock, 2020; Clark, 2014; Sharma, 2013), Black British Twitter and other location-specific aspects of the broader domain of Black Twitter have also been acknowledged even by Twitter themselves (Sobande, 2020).

The naming and conceptualizing of connections and communities on Twitter in ways that explicitly invoke ideas about nation and notions of nationality (e.g., Scottish Twitter and Black British Twitter) sparks questions such as the following: How are the social media experiences of Black people in predominantly white areas (e.g., Scotland and other parts of Britain) understood and framed in ways that involve invoking or departing from normative notions of nation, nationhood, and nationality? How does a sense of social location as a Black person in predominantly white places shape experiences of social media and/or perceptions of such experiences? What does naming these location-specific facets of Black Twitter (e.g., Black British Twitter) symbolize or suggest about the development of a Black digital diaspora? Why is Black British Twitter conceivable and perceivable, but currently, Black Scottish Twitter is not? How do various diasporic experiences (e.g., being Black and from Britain but now being located elsewhere) complicate how people experience digital spaces, including iterations of Black Twitter? These are just a few of numerous questions that may orient future Black digital studies scholarship which grapples with both the salience and troubling of the relationship between geographies, nations, nationalities, Black diaspora, and social media.

Jones (2019) has impactfully written about being "interested in how felt experiences (re)present Black food geographies as otherwise visible and very much alive – not to prove Black vitality, but to (re)claim it unapologetically" (p. 1077). Such a heartening spirit of reclaiming Black vitality is one that is also present in Black digital studies scholarship that does not seek to prove but instead seeks to sit with, and sometimes, celebrate, the Black vitality, creativity, and joy that are part of Black digital experiences and culture.

The eminent work of Jessica H. Lu and Catherine Knight Steele (2019) on "'Joy is resistance': cross-platform resilience and (re)invention of Black oral culture online" offers an incisive analysis of Black joy and its resistant qualities. Relatedly, Kui Kihoro Mackay's extensive research includes the PhD thesis "'Got on to the plane as white English and landed in London as Black Kenyan': Construction and Performance of Kenyanness Across Online and

Offline Sites” which “centres the lived experiences of Facebook and Twitter users in the UK who identify as Kenyan and uses Black Feminist theory to expand the current language of identification, belonging and performance” (Mackay, 2021b). Mackay’s (2021b) significant work has also addressed the topic of “Digital Black Lives: Performing (Dis)Respect and Joy Online”, which involved posing powerful questions such as “How is Blackness understood in the Kenyan context? Is there room to consider a Black Kenyan Cyberculture or Black African Cyberculture?”. Mackay’s (2021a, 2021b) work, in addition to the scholarship of Osei, Bruce, Walcott, and others such as the forthcoming work of PhD student temi lasade-anderson is carving out the direction of Black digital studies in Britain in enriching ways that deal with the workings of joy, diaspora, global power dynamics, and Black African cyberculture.

As well as being a home for critical enquiry that focuses on experiences and expressions of Black joy, kinship, intimacy, play, and pleasure in digital spaces, Black digital studies in Britain and elsewhere have shed light on the dangers and difficulties that are involved in Black people’s digital experiences. Hence, the last section of this chapter which is based on a blog piece of mine for *The Sociological Review* deals with some of this when considering aspects of the digital experiences of Black women since the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **Politics of Digital Peace, Play, and Privacy During the COVID-19 Pandemic: Between Digital Engagement, Enclaves, and Entitlement<sup>1</sup>**

I have been interested in digital media and people’s experiences of the internet since first finding moments of enjoyment, escapism, and entertainment online at the turn of the 21st century. My memories of digital technology and internet culture back then include the myth of the millennium bug which was predicted to wreak havoc in computers with the anticipated arrival of the year 2000. Arguably, the concept of the millennium bug captures panic that is often sparked by significant digital developments, including legitimate fears regarding a potential loss of agency and autonomy. Still, not all my memories of new millennium digital discourse and dalliances are marked by feelings such as the nervousness and confusion which were invoked by the dreaded bug.

Around that same time, films including Disney Channel’s *Zenon: Girl of the 21st Century* (1999) playfully imagined what digital technology (and outer space!) might be like in the future. The film left me in awe of the idea that people could be beamed into each other’s homes in ways that, in hindsight, resemble many energy-draining present-day video calls. For some people, or at least, a pre-teen and teenage me, the online world of the early 2000s was a source of much excitement for many reasons. However, there was always a sense that despite some digital spaces being sites of peace, play, and personal connections, being online also involved navigating many dangers. As the years rolled on, I found myself thinking about how who people are and others’ perceptions of them impact their digital experiences. Specifically, I

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<sup>1</sup> The section of this article on “The Politics of Digital Peace, Play, and Privacy During the COVID-19 Pandemic: Between Digital Engagement, Enclaves, and Entitlement” was previously published online by *The Sociological Review* on 5 May 2021. Francesca Sobande (the author) is the sole copyright holder.

reflected on and subsequently researched some of the intricacies of the digital lives of Black women in Britain (Sobande, 2020).

In Spring 2020, when working on the concluding chapter of my book, *The Digital Lives of Black Women in Britain*, I was struck by the distinctly different digital and daily experiences that people were dealing with during the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic. Not everyone had access to the internet, a computer, or a digital device that organizations were demanding be used to access essential information and services. Assumptions about people's "home" environments and material conditions abounded, and, at times, political positions seemed to be performed via carefully curated bookshelves which perhaps revealed more about the practice of self-representation and idealized aesthetics than the person whose background they featured in. Since then, sweeping statements about the role of digital media and technology in the daily lives of "everyone" have obscured the realities of many people. Furthermore, such statements seed an unhelpful universalizing framing of life during the COVID-19 pandemic, which denies how structural factors related to race, gender, class, and intersecting oppressions have resulted in the specific circumstances that different individuals have been facing during this time of crisis.

When trying to figure out what the closing thoughts and words shared in my book would be, I ended up reflecting on the politics of digital experiences amid the COVID-19 pandemic. Questions that I sat with included the following: Who is making themselves more visible online right now, without fearing the possibility of online harassment? How will people's personal boundaries be maintained and tested? What will UK universities do to support structurally marginalized and minoritized students and staff whose online experiences may involve encountering racism, sexism, misogyny, homophobia, transphobia, colorism, Islamophobia, and other intersecting oppressions, including while learning and teaching? In the months that have followed, while some people have flippantly referred to the "pivot to online" strategies of institutions (e.g., healthcare, education, political, employers) and participated in such efforts in relatively unscathed ways, others have suddenly been expected to make themselves very visible online, without any indication of how institutions will support them if they encounter online abuse and harms.

Vital scholarship on Black cyberfeminism (Gray, 2015, 2020; McMillan Cottom, 2016), "Black women's digital resistance" (Bailey, 2021), and the oppressive nature of algorithms (Noble, 2018) are central to my understanding of the structural challenges involved in Black women's digital experiences, in addition to their creativity, collaboration, and innovation that are present too. Relatedly, although many institutions express an interest in protecting the privacy of people, including when using and storing their data online, very few institutions express an understanding of privacy that accounts for how it is shaped by inequalities and interlocking oppression such as the anti-Blackness, sexism, and misogyny (misogynoir) that Moya Bailey (2021) has extensively researched and written about. Thus, something that has stayed on my mind over the last year is the invasive expectations of institutions, and sometimes individuals, regarding access to private aspects of people's lives, especially Black women, under the guise of "digital connection and community".

As public discussions of the pandemic have surged since March 2020, so too have conversations concerning Black Lives Matter (BLM). However, few institutions appeared to join the dots between both. Crises do not exist in isolation. Institutions that were quick to issue their summer statements in support of BLM and have continually claimed to recognize that "we're"



experiencing a time of crisis which is far from “business as usual”, were also quick and consistent with the way that they pressured Black women to be hyper-visible online as part of their institutional response to both crises (COVID-19 and structural anti-Black racism). As such, when turning to social media and different digital spaces in pursuit of moments of play and peace in a personal capacity, some Black women have been met with the entitled messages of people who indignantly demand Black women’s engagement and who represent their lack of care for Black women’s boundaries as an alleged mere effort to self-educate by “reaching out”.

The boundaries between public and private lives have always been blurred, but since the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic the encroachment on people’s private lives and personal spaces has been especially pronounced. Examples of this include institutions upping their monitoring of employees’ social media profiles and contacting them directly there in inappropriate ways, as well as individuals instructing others to “turn your camera on” and then making scrutinizing and classist comments about what is or is not in the background of someone who appears on a video call. The personal safety and well-being of people is treated as an afterthought by institutions and individuals who insist on others making themselves visible online in ways that they are not comfortable with. There are a lot of reasons why people are cautious about becoming visible online, particularly if they are survivors of abuse and violence. Yet, I do not know of (m)any organizations that have carefully considered this when calling for people to “pivot to online” overnight, and when, assisted by digital technology, peering into the personal space of someone for whom it may not be safe to make visible.

Although digital culture can offer enriching enclaves and vital moments of connection, which are lifelines for people, such spaces can also home abusive hostility and expressions of entitlement. Digital experiences are raced, gendered, classed, and everything in between (Daniels, Gregory, & McMillan Cottom, 2016). “Zoombombing” and other iterations of online harassment that predominantly involve the targeting of racialized people, particularly Black women, signal that digital peace and digital disruption are molded by white supremacy, anti-Blackness, sexism, and misogyny. Institutions’ expectations of “digital engagement” and “digital presence”, not only over the last year, often necessitate shades of self-disclosure and self-exposure that involve a considerable amount of risk for those who are most marginalized in society. Moreover, interconnected inequalities influence people’s experiences, or lack, of digital peace and privacy during the COVID-19 pandemic. The ascent of institutional messages that promote calls to “amplify Black women” and “listen to Black women”, but without responding to the dangers that Black women face when they are hyper-visible online, reflects the surface-level and self-serving ways that many organizations engage with Black women and their work.

While digital media and spaces can involve meaningful connections and conversations, the formation of transnational solidarity, as well as joyous forms of play and ephemeral feelings of peace, part of what makes that possible is the opportunity for people to explore different ways that they feel comfortable communicating with others and sharing who they are. As institutions continue to both directly and implicitly call for the increased online visibility of people, particularly Black women, there is a need for such institutions to take seriously the extent to which they are (or are not) respecting personal boundaries and tackling online abuse and oppression.

## Conclusion

This chapter's focus on "Locating Social Media in Black Digital Studies" involved an attempt to outline some of the myriad ways that Black digital studies and critical Black geographies studies provide nuanced understandings of the dynamic between locations, social media, and Black digital experiences. With an emphasis on Black digital studies in Britain, and engagement with Black digital studies and related work in the US, this writing unpacked the layered nature of locations and locatedness that affect social media experiences and scholarship on them. In considering such matters, this chapter stresses the unstable nature of the term "Black digital studies in Britain", which although being a useful way to describe and group work related to the digital experiences of Black people in Britain, may mask the details of different disciplines, critical approaches, and positions that are part of the overall fabric of what is referred to as Black digital studies in Britain. Perhaps, to be located in Black digital studies in Britain is to always be both here (situated in Black digital studies in Britain) *and* there (never bound to a single scholarly area, discipline, or field).

Although this chapter affirms the benefits of specificity when researching, writing about, and reflecting on Black digital experiences, this acknowledgement should not be confused for a denial of the global nature of anti-Blackness and interconnected forms of oppression. Furthermore, recognition of the specific digital experiences of Black people in different parts of the world should not be understood as dismissing the digitally mediated transnational nature of transformative forms of solidarity-building and support that exist between Black people across countries and continents. In sum, "Locating Social Media in Black Digital Studies" can mean being attentive to both geographically bound issues that impact the digital experiences of Black people, as well as digital activity that appears to defy borders and boundaries, even if ephemerally. Ongoing Black digital studies and feminist efforts include work that tends to "the creative, collaborative, and conjuring possibilities of digital remix culture which involves the remixing and repurposing of digital media, meanings, and messages" (Sobande & Emejulu, 2022). Related questions that future work may address include how and where do geography and forms of location show up in Black digital remixing activities?

Further still, "Locating Social Media in Black Digital Studies" entails engaging with studies of Black diaspora and diasporicity (Brown, 2009; Hesse, 2000), including those that posit that "[a]ttention to the question of place should prompt the question, where is Black Europe? Black Europe is not locatable; it is a *discourse* on location". As is suggested by the insightful words of Brown (2009) on "Black Europe and the African Diaspora: A Discourse on Location", some notions of location and locatedness that are central to Black diasporic experiences and research on them are discursive constructions that should not be mistaken for tangible spaces and places. As a result, when delineating locations and locatedness in Black digital studies scholarship, it is essential to make space for their felt, imagined, and socially constructed qualities, as well as their physical ones that are attached to certain definable contexts.

Critical analysis and understandings of social media that are located in Black digital studies in Britain offer valuable insights for a wide range of reasons that include elucidating forms of Black creativity and innovation, challenging restrictive notions of what constitutes knowledge, and undertaking the careful scrutiny of how geo-politics and British history (e.g., anti-Blackness and colonialism) contour Black experiences, including online. The future of

Black digital studies in Britain is one that is yet to be determined but is sure to disrupt the often unarticulated and dominant status of whiteness that underpins many digital studies arenas in Britain and beyond. Nevertheless, it would be misguided to perceive Black digital studies in Britain as a mere response to the whiteness that permeates much of digital studies and academia in general. Black digital studies are anything but simply reactionary, nor are they about an aim to pander or prove. To return to and affirm the words of Jones (2019) on Black food geographies, maybe Black digital studies in Britain too involve an aim “to (re)claim it [Black vitality] unapologetically” (p. 1077).

The inherently colonialist, imperialist, elitist, and racist foundations of academia present a multitude of obstacles that challenge, and even attempt to prohibit, the embracement and experience of Black vitality within institutional academic environments. Put differently, the work of Black digital studies, which includes iterations of vitality and joy, is often at odds with the foundations of academia. Thus, even when Black digital studies are somewhat located in, or at least, linked to academic situations, they are never fully *of* the academy, nor should they be. Future research on the relationship between locations, locatedness, social media, and Black digital studies may include a more detailed discussion of how the institutional (dis)location of Black digital studies work (e.g., which institutions and surrounding geographies and histories are associated with it) impacts its direction and reception both within and beyond academia.

The explanation of how location and locatedness is conceptualized in my work is far from a finished one, just as the process of location-making and locating is always ongoing. Further research regarding Black digital studies in Britain may yield fruitful work that expands understandings of “Locating Social Media in Black Digital Studies”. Moreover, instead of just being interpreted as sole-authored work, this chapter is best understood as being in conversation with a rich history and future of Black digital studies that involves more of an interest in provocations, ponderings, and collaborative parsing than any investment in proprietarily foreclosing discussion and debate surrounding how Black digital encounters are conceptualized, theorized, experienced, and located.

“Locating Social Media in Black Digital Studies” is maybe best described as being part of continued efforts to make clear and critically analyze the geocultural embeddedness and elements of many Black social media and digital experiences. Whether you are involved in Black digital studies work or have never engaged with it before, I hope that this chapter has prompted helpful questions and considerations concerning Black digital studies constellations and their connection to different Black geographies.

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