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RACING THE PLATFORM/PLATFORMING RACE

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Panel Rationale

Race and racism are enduring structural forces that have a hand in virtually every aspect of society; the internet and its vast array of platforms, applications, devices, and cultures are well within their grasp (Nakamura and Chow-White, 2013; Brock, 2020). The papers on this panel trouble, question, and reorient notions of how race comes to

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matter in our contemporary digital landscape. We build on scholarship that explores how content creators make sense of their relationships to audiences, their contested digital labor, and the centrality of identity to their (im)material work (eg: Baym, 2018; Abidin, 2018; Senft, 2008). Indeed, as critical internet researchers interested in “the lively, animated machines of today’s internet”, we argue that an examination of influencers, microcelebrity, and virality that explicitly attends to race and racism is sorely needed.

This panel brings together a diverse group of interdisciplinary (anthropology, sociology, media and communication, game studies, queer studies, and feminist studies) scholars working in the United States and Australia, who engage in empirical and theoretical research on microcelebrity and influencer cultures. The papers in this panel employ a broad range of methods - including qualitative discourse analysis and digital ethnographic research of YouTubers, OnlyFans creators, TikTok users, and Facebook groups - to offer a multifaceted analysis of how race and racism function across social media platforms and within microcelebrity/influencer cultures.

The first paper takes the broadest approach in their digital ethnographic work and attempts to flesh out the workings of race, gender, and political economies of influencers on YouTube. Particularly, Paper 1 analyzes the Pokémon GO phenomenon and the influencers who came to fame through building relationships with their fans, discarding conversations of race and racism, and engaging in unequal, gendered forms of private work. Key to its argument is an examination of how particular social locations of race and gender and the neoliberal project of entrepreneurship affect the clout, visibility, and well-being of Pokémon GO influencers. The next three papers focus explicitly on how race operates within microcelebrity and influencer circles as well as the effects that racism has on influencers across various social media platforms. Indeed, Paper 2 examines how race and racism mediate the experiences of gay porn microcelebrities in order to flesh out the differing, racialized relational work that occurs on OnlyFans and within its attendant social media subcultures. Most crucially, it destabilizes the often unnamed ‘white default’ of porn studies, while accounting for how race, racism, and sexuality shape online microcelebrity. Paper 3 studies the TikTok platform to think about how young influencers navigate race and racism and pose social justice stances on a burgeoning and ephemeral platform. In particular, engagement with American racial and cultural politics are explicitly linked to notions of platformed citizenship norms on TikTok. Finally, Paper 4 introduces the term “platformed race” to interrogate how Asianness is commodified, circulated, and microcelebrified within Subtle Asian Things (SAT), a private Facebook group. The paper interrogates how dominant narratives on SAT tend to leverage diasporic Asianess in the generation and circulation of memes, which in turn provoke socio-political debate and incite culturally relevant discourse amongst its distributed global community.

To summarize, our analyses explore the intersections of microcelebrity and influencer economies, cultures, and labor demands by looking at how creators and their audiences experience race and racism across several platforms. Our various approaches contribute different examinations of race and racism to existing literature on the everyday experiences and structural hurdles that microcelebrities and influencers must endure in order to sustain their livelihood in a shifting platform(ed) landscape (eg:

Abidin, 2018, Baym, 2018, Duffy, 2017). As internet researchers working with qualitative methods, we can never know in advance what contexts might be most meaningful for our work, and so we remain critical of how we make sense of both our own judgements and those of our participants (Markham and Baym, 2009).

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1. CAPTURING FEELINGS: THE CIRCULATION OF WHITENESS AND PRIVATE PRAISE OF POKÉMON GO INFLUENCERS ON YOUTUBE

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Introduction

On July 6, 2016, Pokémon GO was released and has served many social, economic, and cultural functions to date. On the one hand, Pokémon GO brought people to the streets and parks to foster communication to capture Pokémon (virtual creatures) or partake in raid battles, whereas on the other hand, the app has been used to the police bodies of color and low-income communities from public spaces. Moreover, a plethora of community meet-ups, live streams, and let's plays on YouTube has stemmed from Pokémon GO in a way that has resonated with most gamers and created a community of Pokémon GO influencers. Games, like Pokémon GO, and gamers enact positive and negative emotional resonances that stick with us sentimentally (Anable, 2018; Ahmed, 2012) and aid in illuminating current debates regarding social media celebrityhood (Abidin, 2016), gendered and racialized working conditions online (Abidin, 2018; Duffy,

2017; Ouellette, 2016), and the broadcasting of everyday life (Taylor, 2018; Johnson et al., 2017).

This presentation examines the contours of Pokémon GO influencers relational labor practices and rise to niche, celebrityhood status. Specifically, the focus is on how particular social locations of race and gender and the neoliberal project of entrepreneurship affect the clout, visibility, and well-being of Pokémon GO influencers. Drawing on over two years of digital ethnographic research, this presentation discusses how whiteness and Eurocentric modes of production and content circulation pervades the Pokémon GO community and the disproportionate, yet dynamic relational labor and audience building women influencers experience by analyzing the following Pokémon GO YouTubers: Mystic7, trnrtps, Reversal, PkmmMasterHolly, ZoeTwoDots, and The Trainer Club.

Methods

Employing digital ethnography through participant observation, chatting on uploaded videos, commenting and lurking in live streams, attending the first Pokémon GO festival in 2017, taking copious fieldnotes and creating memos, and data scraping and archiving of YouTube content and comments, the empirical data for this research was collected from July 6, 2016 (Pokémon GO release date) through December 31, 2019. Pokémon GO content producers on YouTube were selected *and* analyzed based on the following criteria: 1) the ability to communicate in English or provide English subtitles, which is one of the researcher's native language, 2) uploaded videos achieved at least 1,000 views, 3) consistency of uploading at least two videos a week related to Pokémon GO, *and* 4) participating in sponsored content with Niantic (the parent company of Pokémon GO) or The Pokémon Company International by December 2018. Although data analysis occurred during 2016 and 2019, content creators who did not meet the fourth criteria by the end of 2018 were not analyzed for this research presentation. For this study, the last criteria served as a marker for influencer status because the content creator's clout with their audience was enough for Niantic to sponsor them to attend Pokémon GO Fest held in July each year.

After the data collection process and meeting the aforesaid criteria, a grounded theory and theoretical sampling approach (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) was used where codes illuminated and refined initial queries, the following codes were developed and analyzed through NVivo 12 (underscores denote similar themes): Emotions, Gendered_Labor, Gendered_Private, Relational, Sponsored, Whiteness_USEuro. The following sections draw from theoretical approaches and empirical results to analyze Pokémon GO influencers.

Catching relationships and releasing whiteness

The most assigned code was relational, which refers to the temporal investments and labor that each Pokémon GO influencer undertook to ensure a loyal audience base. This relational code heavily resonates with Nancy Baym's (2018) watershed work on relational labor. Indeed, relational labor is the ongoing and interactive affective, material, and cognitive work of communicating and developing intimate relationships with people

over time to create structures of feelings that can support continued, freelance or precarious work (Baym, 2018). This ongoing communicative work served as the unpaid, temporal work to build sustained work and audience support. However, this type of relational labor is often packaged in race-neutral language that does not interrogate why most influencers flaunt a certain aesthetic of whiteness (Bishop, 2019).

TrnrTips (TrainerTips) disclosed that he is multi-racial in a 2016 YouTube video, in which some fans responded with racist comments. TrainerTips proceeded not to mention his race in further uploaded content on YouTube. All the other aforesaid influencers are white and rose to popularity during the initial release of Pokémon GO because they were: 1) personable, 2) asked audience for help, and 3) kept the 2016 election out of their videos.

Private praise and women influencers

Although the types of relationships developed with their audience help sustain one's income on YouTube and gain sponsorships from corporate brands, women Pokémon GO influencers experienced a form of private praise. PkmnMasterHolly (Holly) said in one of her 2019 videos that she gets a lot of direct messages on her Instagram or Twitter praising her YouTube content, her skilled Augmented Reality photos, and personality while live streaming or at community meet-ups. Holly continues to mention how several people have mentioned they enjoy her content and she's their favorite YouTubers, but will talk to their friends about Mystic7's or Trainer Tips videos instead. ZoeTwoDots re-affirms Holly's claims saying she's received similar, positive feedback messages as well as verbal harassment that is common among women gamers. The gendered dynamics of YouTube work for women Pokémon GO influencers entail them doing behind-the-scenes relational building via direct messaging on other platforms in order to remain visible and keep a loyal audience base.

Conclusion

Pokémon GO influencers align with the neoliberal project where folks become self-sufficient, passionate, always-on-the-clock workers in order to sustain their income. Bringing feminist media studies theoretical frameworks in conversation with the empirical data of Pokémon GO influencers demonstrates how the relational labor content creators perform to obtain and maintain influencer status is often racialized and packaged in line with neoliberal logics of colorblindness and a leveled-playing field. Furthermore, this analysis examines how women Pokémon GO influencers are often celebrated for their uploaded, live streaming, and community meet-up content via private, direct messages where relational bonding and conversations that ultimately contribute to their income is created and sustained.

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2. RACE, RACISM, AND NETWORKED GAY PORN MICROCELEBRITY

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Love Me, Love Me, Please Retweet

These days if I want to watch gay porn, I can simply navigate to Twitter or Reddit and click through to the profile of an indie gay porn content creator. Beyond a vast array of diverse content, however, audiences increasingly expect gay porn performers to devote substantial time and energy towards building personal connections with them. Nancy Baym (2018) has described this phenomenon as "relational labor"; for popular gay porn performers, who are largely professional amateur queer internet microcelebrities (Senft 2008; Abidin, 2018; Duguay, 2019), these interpersonal connections at scale supposedly lead to revenue and notoriety.

In some queer male adult subcultures, there is a sense that direct subscription-based adult content platforms like OnlyFans (used here as a catch-all for various platforms of this kind) that host and distribute indie gay porn videos are democratizing gay porn in

the social media age (Street, 2018). The means and rewards of gay porn production have been decentralized, redistributed to the hands – or perhaps more accurately the dicks and asses – of the hard-working performers themselves. With this industrial shift in mind, in this paper I explore two intertwined questions: How do digital platforms like OnlyFans and their linked adult content social media subcultures shape relationships between queer male adult content creators and their audiences? How does race and racism mediate the experiences of gay porn microcelebrities and the audiences with whom they are intimately entangled?

Methods

Leveraging data from an on-going project, I draw on digital ethnography through participant observation of racially and geographically diverse queer male social media subcultures (primarily on Twitter and Reddit) of gay porn performers and their fans, in-person participant observation at queer social and nightlife events affiliated with gay porn microcelebrities, and interviews with gay porn performers both physically in the Los Angeles area and globally through digital means. Interview participants and social media subcultural groups were selected through a combination of purposive sampling from my own social networks, referrals from queer men in the Los Angeles night life community, and participant observation in the digital and physical social worlds of OnlyFans performers and their audiences. This presentation draws on preliminary data analysis (coded using Nvivo) from digital participant observation and interviews collected in late 2019 as well as in-progress (and COVID-19 adjusted) data collection in 2020.

Here, I would like to note that I explicitly locate myself as a queer internet subculture researcher whose in-group knowledge and physical body shapes my data collection and mediates relationships with interlocutors (Campbell, 2009; Bromseth and Sundén, 2011). Further, my theoretical interests in race and racism are explicitly tied to my own identity as a Black American queer man and begins from the position that the internet has long been a conduit for meaningful intimate connections and disconnections among queer people (McGlotten, 2013).

Professional Amateur Gay Porn Stars

Enacting a particular kind of calibrated amateurism (Abidin, 2017), OnlyFans content creators lean into the affective pull of the homemade sex tape that itself is, implicitly, always in contrast to traditional studio pornography productions. As my interlocutors describe, part of what makes a video shot, edited, and produced for a direct subscription platform erotically compelling is precisely that it looks like an amateur production. To be sure, this aesthetic amateurism is not simply tied up in the moment of porn production, as audiences sometimes interpret highly produced and stylized amateur porn like much of the content on performers' OnlyFans pages as "real sex" when it is taken out of its original context (Brennan, 2018). I argue that this professionalization of the amateur or indie gay porn star shapes the way that audiences of popular indie gay porn actors seek out and recirculate clips of their favorite performers in queer male social media subcultural contexts. These videos are

simultaneously seen as outside the official production platform of OnlyFans and yet essential to its success. Echoing Dyer (2004), the erotic conceit of the vast majority of these videos is that the fact that they exist in the first place means that they were recorded for some form of monetization and there might never have been any “authentic realness” there in the first place.

The Digital Color Line

Alongside this notion of the professional amateur gay porn performer, some performers of color that I spoke with described a number of racial stereotypes that occasionally map onto their interactions with their audiences and even at times other performers. These digital microaggressions and racist encounters are unsurprising given that queer men of color navigate implicit and explicit forms of racial exclusion in gay community spaces (Han, 2007). Yet, considering that indie gay porn is often an important stream of income for even established studio performers (Berg, 2016), as one Black porn performer put it: “What do you do when someone’s racist fetishization of your body pays your bills? [Laughs] At least I don’t have to actually fuck them.” Despite these negative and stigmatic dimensions, I discuss how for many performers of color, OnlyFans gay porn is not necessarily bound by the normative expectations of studio porn about how particular kinds of bodies should have sex, how racial and gender identities do not neatly fit into prescribed ways of being, and how the “genres” of porn themselves can be harmful to performers and audiences whose desires are mutable and complex (Paasonen, 2010; Mowlabocus and Wood 2015; Ruberg, 2016).

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3. WELCOME TO #MELANINMANSION: REIMAGINING THE COLOR OF INFLUENCE ON TIKTOK

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Introduction

TikTok is a popular short-form video social network. From suppression of political content, to privacy and addiction concerns, the platform has been plagued with controversies worldwide since launching in 2017. In the U.S., race has been a recurring

issue as the Chinese-owned company seems particularly challenged in understanding the American racial context. Two large controversies around TikTok influencers and race emerged in late 2019 and early 2020. In this paper we use CTDA, or Critical Technocultural Discourse Analysis (Brock, 2018), to examine TikTok user-generated content that refers to these two controversies to understand how users think about how race and influence operate on a young but rapidly growing platform. Our study found a (quite young) online community deeply invested in the evolving platform. The data revealed a community wrestling with the place of the platform, and of social media concepts like 'influencer,' 'creator,' and 'original content,' in larger (digital) American racial and cultural politics. Analyzing the videos as active commentary, interventions, and sites of digital information sharing, activism, and solidarity in the face of a racially hostile platform, we discuss major themes of the content and argue for their important role in countering deficit models of race and technology use.

Race and TikTok: The cases of the The Hype House and The Renegade

TikTok had approximately 37.2 million U.S. users in 2019. *The New York Times* explained the platform's popularity thus:

"To many users, what's special is TikTok's goofiness and sense of genuine fun...You don't have to friend anyone or search for anything to watch...you'll (be) likely to encounter a barrage of funny, meme-y videos from total strangers that TikTok spools up for you, personalizing the feed as you go...Some users say TikTok is more authentic than the self-consciously pretty and polished Instagram."

The platform has propelled many creators to fame. Some of TikTok's most followed influencers are dancers. TikTok Creators often create, revise, and repeat various choreographies matched to audio tracks. "The Renegade" dance, a viral TikTok sensation, became a cultural phenomenon on- and offline. Charli D'Amelio, a 15-year-old white TikTok dancer from Connecticut, became inextricably linked to the dance, gaining 30.6 million followers by February 2020 (Lorenz, 2020a). That February, *The New York Times* published an article discussing the creator of The Renegade, a Black 14-year-old girl from Atlanta, and how she had been erased from The Renegade craze, missing financial and career opportunities that instead found their way to D'Amelio. Immediately, the TikTok community launched into discussions of race, influence, original content, appropriation, and attribution.

D'Amelio is at the center of another TikTok influencer race controversy as a member of the Hype House. "Hype House was formed in December by some of TikTok's most talked-about stars...videos including the hashtag #hypehouse have accrued nearly 100 million views on TikTok" (Lorenz, 2020b). Lorenz (2020b) explained: "since the arrival of Hype House...Some TikTokers began discussing a Melanin Mansion for black creators, noting that Hype House is predominately white." Indeed, the group of white creators became an object of both fascination and critique on TikTok as community members often paired group pictures of the Hype House influencers with a popular TikTok audio clip of someone asking, "Where's the flavor?!"

Social media “influence” is often associated with white, thin women in contemporary understandings of mainstream digital microcelebrity (Duffy & Hund, 2015). This is true despite that Black culture has provided major innovative contributions to larger digital culture (Brock, 2020; Florini, 2020). “Black digital practice has become very much a mainstream phenomenon, even if its expert practitioners rarely receive economic compensation for their brilliance or political compensation for their activism” (Brock, 2020, p. 1). These issues were central to emerging conversations on TikTok around Hype House and The Renegade. Black Tiktok creators, other creators of color, and a number of white creators, began lip syncing, performing skits, and performing other TikTok trends to wade into the incredibly difficult racial politics the controversies surfaced.

Method and Findings

We used TikTok’s Application Programming Interface (API) to scrape the platform for all videos using primary hashtags related to the cases of Hype House and Jalaiah Harmon, collecting a sample of 500 highly relevant TikTok videos for analysis (250 for each controversy). Brock (2020) explains that CTDA “decenters the Western deficit perspective on minority technology use to instead prioritize the epistemological standpoint of underrepresented groups of technology users.” Thus, analytically we prioritized understanding the videos as digital commentary, interventions, and other sites of information sharing, activism, and solidarity. We identified the following three theoretically-informed themes of content.

“Let me in! I be the I-G-G-Y”: Performing (Digital) Racial Literacy

For most of the creators in the sample, Hype House and The Renegade became stand-ins for the whiteness of “influence” on TikTok, and how the lack of representation is undergirded by more overt and violent acts of racism on-platform and in larger society. Many creators performed their lack of surprise with the whiteness of the Hype House or Harmon’s invisibility. For example, one creator looked solemnly in the camera, stating he was shocked white people took a Black girl’s creation, especially in Christopher Columbus’s America. Others delivered lessons on the history of cultural appropriation. And some tied history and contemporary TikTok culture in shocking ways, one boy explaining that of course the Hype House only accepts white people, but he has good news: the influencers decided to let him in since he is light-skinned - as their house slave. We discuss these and other similar content as performances of (digital) racial literacy.

“TikTok, I’m disappointed in you”: (Re)defining Platform Citizenship

Much of the content showed creators looking for accountability. Creators targeted the platform itself, TikTok’s most famous influencers, and the community of regular users. Content focused on what are, or should be, norms of TikTok platform citizenship. Creators focused on norms of crediting original creators of memes and dances as a courtesy rarely extended to creators of color. We discuss this theme in relation to narratives of race and technological literacy, using the content to interrogate what are

often deficit approaches to digital literacy and people of color. We also tie it to theoretical understandings of the labor of racial activism.

“The Flavor is Immaculate”: Radical Reimaginings of Influence

One of the most widespread responses to the Hype House and race was the hashtag #MelaninMansion, usually tied to content suggesting complete withdrawal from white influence; opting instead for celebratory and utopian imaginings of Black and/or non-white (online) community. Descriptions and skits of how a mansion for influencers of color might look ranged from wry descriptions of all of the spices used on chicken to sincere suggestions about which influencers of color should occupy the house along with urgings to support their accounts. We discuss this theme in relation to Black and queer utopianism.

Discussion

Florini (2020) explains about people of color’s use of digital technologies to counter racism:

“...despite digital media’s potential to provide a space for the experiences of people of color, such media are still shaped by the same logics that silence and erase those experiences. Consequently, using them to construct counter-discourses around race is not an uncomplicated endeavor.”

This paper studies such complicated endeavors from TikTok creators. We discuss their labor and discursive and technological practices as central digital experiences of race and social media influence. Further, we argue racialized forms of digital citizenship often go unexamined and uncredited, and call for further work on such labor and its impact on young digital citizens.

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4. ‘SUBTLE ASIAN TRAITS’: PLATFORMED RACE ON FACEBOOK

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'Subtle Asian Traits'

'Subtle Asian Traits' is a private Facebook group that was started by 8 Asian-Australian teenagers in September 2018 "as a joke", but amassed over 1 million members under 3 months. Users share 'Asian positive' stories, resources, and memes. Prolific members include actors/musicians of Asian descent who praise SAT for championing Asian representation. SAT is a leader and advocate by organizing meet-ups with members offline, speaking at Facebook HQ Menlo Park about race issues, partnering with Asian microcelebrities to generate content, and fundraising for calamities like the Australian bushfires (Lejano, 2019). As of February 2020, SAT boasts over 1.7 million members and 1,200 new posts daily.

In this paper, we study how Asianness is commodified, circulated, and microcelebrified on SAT. Through content analyses and participant observation (Apr 2019–Feb 2020) we identify SAT's group norms, post genres, and cultures to offer the concept of 'platformed race' microcelebrity. These are preliminary findings from an ongoing project (–Oct 2020), and research will progress to engage with diasporic studies (i.e. Ang, 2003). Drawing on Matamoros-Fernández's 'platformed racism' (2017) and theories of platformisation (Nieborg & Poell, 2018), we introduce 'platformed race' to interrogate how 'being Asian' is co-shaped by the group's collective identification construction and Facebook's architecture and governance.

Facebook group norms and 'platformed race'

In SAT, members can contribute posts, but much of the identity negotiations and camaraderie are fostered in the comments section, where Facebook rewards activity by allocating 'Conversation starter' (n=116), 'Visual storyteller' (n=106), and 'Rising star' (n=10) badges next to a user's handle. There are also badges that distinguish membership recency like 'New members' (n=9983), and membership hierarchy like 'Admins' (n=11) and 'Moderators' (n=38). Admins and moderators gatekeep platformed race on SAT. They approve "Asian related content", "Original Asian related memes", "Memes which have good captions relating to Asians", but censor "Political, racial or any controversial content" such as comparisons between Asians and Whites, derogatory commentary, and negative stereotypes.

However, the inclusivity of the label 'Asian' is questionable. Like its founders, SAT's 30 moderators are Asian diaspora/immigrants in predominantly Anglo-Saxon countries including Australia (2 cities), the US (5), Canada (2), and the UK (1). Further, 27 appear to be of East Asian descent. This governance is reflected in our observations that posts tend to favour East Asian customs (i.e. language, food, festivals) and cultural displacement discourses (i.e. migration, diaspora, adoption, international student living). SAT's hand in dichotomizing (East/South or Yellow/Brown) Asian identity on Facebook

is critical, judging from our larger survey of a large network of ‘Subtle X’ spin-offs groups.

Enduring meme elements

Coding from our data reveal that SAT is comprised of five main enduring meme elements (Table 1):

Categories	Examples
1) Origin stories	Migrants, diaspora, international students
	Family photographs
	Family history
2) Family culture	Parental discipline, e.g. belts, feather dusters
	Lifestyle expectations, e.g. education, career, romantic partners (Figures 1 & 2)
	Familial affection, e.g. text messages, love notes
3) Food preferences & traditions	Exotic Asian foods: e.g. balut (Philippines), Lao Gan Ma (China), Kaya Toast (Singapore) (Figure 4)
	Trends, e.g. Bubble Tea/Boba, Big White Rabbit, Fusion brunch (Figure 3)
4) Physical attributes	Lactose intolerance
	Asian flush
	Being short (Figure 6)
	Wearing Glasses, Having small/slit eyes (Figure 5)
5) Entertainment	Games, toys
	Celebrities, Kpop
	Handicraft and cooking tutorials
	Chore hacks/Menial labour made easy

Table 1: Enduring meme element categories and examples.



Figures 1 & 2: Memes depicting typical Asian parental expectations.



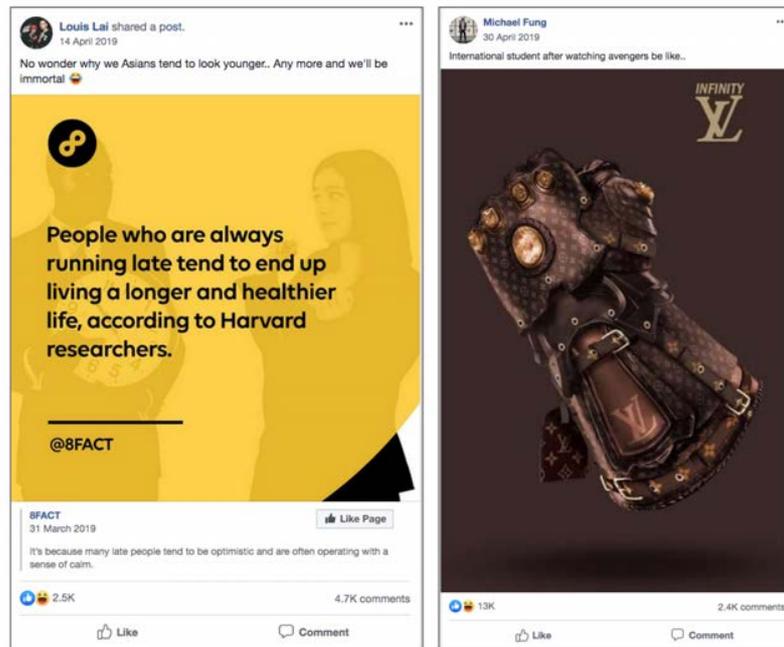
Figures 3 & 4: Memes depicting Asian food trends & cultures.



Figures 5 & 6: Memes depicting stereotypical Asian physical attributes.

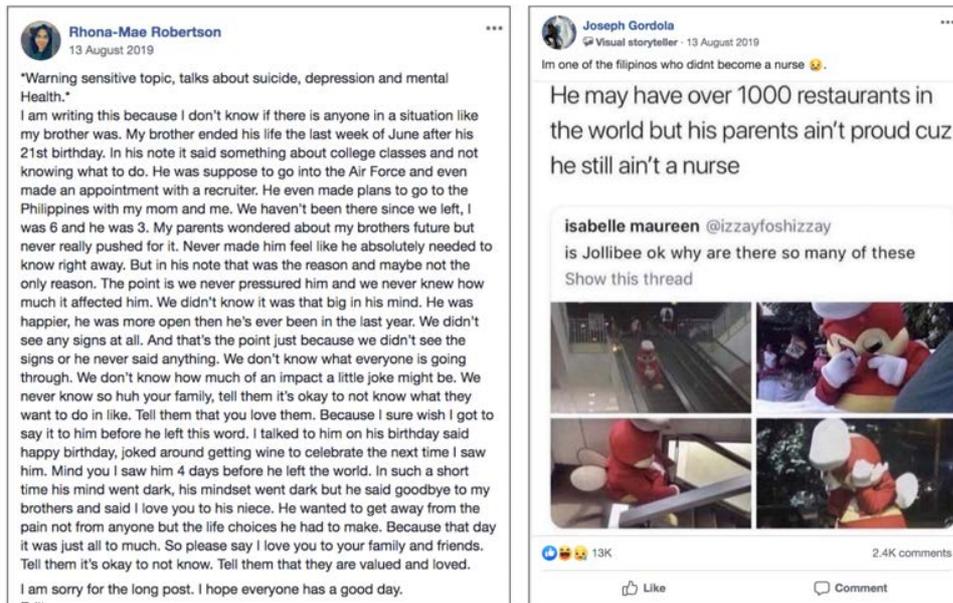
To understand how Asianess is constructed, circulated, and commodified on SAT, we conducted a qualitative analysis of 793 most popular posts (Sep 2018–Feb 2020). Five cornerstone features that register virality and high engagement on SAT are:

1) Shared stereotypes: Asian stereotypes are presented in a self-deprecatory way, such as joking about their one's accent or being lactose-intolerant (Figure 7). But occasionally, memes target an 'out-group' (e.g. 'white people' and 'international students') (Figure 8).



Figures 7 & 8: Memes about sharing stereotypes.

2) Agony aunt: Emotional personal stories about parental conflicts, academic struggle, or employment pressure stimulate agony aunt-like advice columns, arousing empathy and attracting engagement. While some posts coat personal struggles with funny memes (Figure 9), others seek advice and emotional release (Figure 10).



Figures 9 & 10: Memes provoking agony aunt discussions.

3) Calling out: As the vast majority of members are diaspora, call-outs focus on racism and xenophobia to denounce ignorance and discrimination (Figure 12), but can also be loaded with humour (Figure 11).



Figures 11 & 12: Memes addressing call-out cultures.

4) Asian role models: Given the scarcity of Asian role models in Western media, some public figures of Asian descent are widely celebrated and discussed, including comedian Ali Wang (Figure 13), and actor-rapper Awkwafina (Figure 14).



Figures 13 & 14: Memes depicting Asian role models.

5) Asian media events: Current issues relating to Asian communities are discussed, including milestones like Korean film *Parasites*' Academy Award for Best Picture (Figure 15), and the outbreak of Covid-19 (Figure 16). Such time-specific media events disrupt the tempo of group discussions, attract a spike in engagement, and eventually blend into the enduring meme elements.



Figures 15 & 16: Memes depicting Asian media events.

A matrix for cultivating 'platformed race'

SAT exemplarily demonstrates how Asianess is co-constructed on and shaped by social media platforms. This process includes two primary features:

1) **Facebook's technological affordances** directly influence how Asianess is imagined and manifested. For instance, since Facebook is blocked in some countries like China, there is little direct input from Mainland China users to SAT. However, Chinese diaspora serve as the 'brokers' who curate Chinese media content (especially from short video platforms like Douyin and Kuaishou) to SAT. The 'private group' model sustains SAT as a walled community where new membership is gatekept by existing members. This snowballing method of recruitment reinforces and exacerbates the lack of diversity/underrepresentation within SAT.

2) Moreover, the **two-layer governance from Facebook and SAT administrators/moderators** determine how 'Asianness' is defined. For example, the moderation and approved memes on have to meet Facebook's Community Standards, and satisfy the group's vetting and quality control. Given the huge volume of submissions in queue and the Anglo-centric distribution of moderators, contents that receive priority tend to reflect trends or issues deemed important by the diasporic gatekeepers. The Asian media events that have attained virality and whose creators have become microcelebrity reflect mostly Asian issues that have 'made waves' in the Anglo-centric Global South, such as *Parasite's* unprecedented win, xenophobia arising from Corvid-19, and the rise of East Asian pop culture in the US through Korean boyband BTS.

Conclusion

From our preliminary analyses, SAT's platformed race has shaped 'Asianness' to be a placeholder for East Asians exclusively. Specifically, the dominant narratives tend to focus on diasporic Asianess involving some extent of geographical displacement or cultural exoticism. While many memes reflect Asian 'inside jokes', they are also utilised to provoke socio-political discussions and surface issues on a global scale. These memes tend to situate 'Asianness' in opposition to a presumed 'Whiteness', initially by phenotypical homophily, and later by socio-cultural affinity. This identity gatekeeping is evident through a handful of posts from self-declared 'White lurkers' who admit to feeling embarrassment over their lack of Asian heritage (e.g. never lived in Asia) or affiliation (e.g. dating an Asian partner). As we pondered if a 'Subtle White Traits' group will be allowed to exist on Facebook, we posit that SAT is permissible as it celebrates an 'underdog' or minority race/culture in a positive light. Despite dabbling in stereotypes, these are self-deprecating humours and confessions intended to foster in-group relatability (Ask & Abidin, 2018). This is also reflected in the wider network of 'Subtle X' Facebook groups that we have surveyed, which excludes any semblance of a 'Subtle White Traits' spin-off.

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