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The Psychological Empowerment Impact of Twitter Microblogging: The Case of #stopasianhate During Covid-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been a surge in anti-Asian hate incidents across the US (Misra et al., 2020). As a response to the alarming escalation in xenophobia and racism resulting from the pandemic, #StopAsianHate and #StopAAPIHate have been employed to shed light on the issues. Twitter can effectively assist protestors to participate in the movement by facilitating collective effort, efficiently disseminating the information, and encouraging the discussion about a topic (Chon & Park, 2020). Social media has been recognized for its contribution to one's empowerment in various domains, allowing the marginalized group to regain their sense of power (Mehra et al., 2004; Perkins, 1995). Drawing on the association between Twitter microblogging and empowerment (Hermida & Hernández-Santaolalla, 2018), this study examines how the use of Twitter microblogging for anti-Asian hate crimes advocacy can affect users' psychological empowerment. More importantly, this study aims to raise awareness of the violence against Asian communities and to combat prejudice toward Asians in the COVID-19 pandemic. With the mediating role of self-efficacy and sense of community, we analyzed the use of Twitter microblogging to advocate against Asian hate and users' psychological empowerment level using Social Cognitive Theory. This study recruited 474 Asian Twitter users whose age between 18-29 years old and live in the United States by voluntary based convenience sampling to participate in the online survey administered by Qualtrics.

Keywords: Twitter microblogging, self-efficacy, sense of community, psychological empowerment, #StopAsianHate, online activism

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Social networking sites have been integrated into our lives in a variety of ways, ranging from exchanging interpersonal conversations to serving as a tool for advocacy campaigns (Jenkins-Guarnieri et al., 2013; Ross et al., 2009; Tremayne, 2014). Twitter is one of the major online social networking services that has grown in popularity since its launch in 2006 (Johnson & Yang, 2009). With approximately two hundred million active users daily around the world and over 500M tweets each day (Sayce, 2020; Tankovska, 2021; Twitter Usage Statistics, 2020), Twitter has shown its potential to be a platform that connects users (Chen, 2011). Twitter is commonly known for its ability to enable users to interact with one another by sending, receiving, sharing short messages, and creating conversation threads which can be called microblogging (Java et al., 2007; Johnson & Yang, 2009). Microbloggers share their daily activities, have discussions with other users, seek information about current events, or engage in online activism (Gleason, 2013; Java et al., 2007).

Research suggests that Twitter has become a popular site for social movements due to the user-generated content and decentralized approach for spreading one's ideas (Ince et al., 2017). Twitter has been utilized to plan, organize, record, or discuss on collective action, such as demonstrations, protests, or strikes (Jungherr & Jürgens, 2014). According to the extensive scholarly work from multiple perspectives, Twitter has been recognized for its ability to assist protestors in more effectively managing the challenges of mass demonstration (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013; Earl et al., 2013; Theocharis et al., 2015). Twitter facilitates a user's opportunities to interact with a movement through utilizing the functions of this online network in simple ways, such as retweeting content, to more complicated manners, such as engaging in full discussions about a movement (Gleason, 2013; Ince et al., 2017). It is also an online forum

for participants, supporters, critics, political elites, and observers to negotiate the significance of topics, movements, or events (Jungherr & Jürgens, 2014).

As a result, Twitter microblogging helps citizens to discover a new way to uncover corruption, express their views, mobilize movements, monitor elections, and enhance participation (Diamond, 2010; Hermida & Hernández-Santaolalla, 2018). Through these participations, the users are exposed to multiple perspectives that help them gain a better understanding of a particular subject and become well-informed individuals (Gleason, 2013).

The COVID-19 pandemic has been related to an increase in Asian stigma and prejudice against Asians (Gover et al., 2020; Tessler et al., 2020). Experiences of racial stigma and discrimination are likely to have a detrimental influence on mental health (Misra et al., 2020). However, research on the role of social media in empowering the users during the COVID-19 pandemic is lacking, particularly in the context of the #StopAsianHate and #StopAAPIHate movements.

This quantitative study examined how the use of Twitter microblogging for online activism in a particular case of anti-Asian hate crime protest can affect the psychological empowerment of users. More specifically, this study explored the relationship between online advocacy on Twitter and psychological empowerment with the mediating role of self-efficacy and sense of community. Ultimately, this research has sought to shed light on the rise of race-based violence against Asian community in the United States, as well as provide support to ethnic minorities who are subjected to hate crimes by demonstrating how Twitter microblogging can be utilized as an empowering resource.

In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, anti-Asian hate crimes in the United States had increased by nearly 340 percent (Yam, 2022). The report revealed that hate crimes against

Asians in New York City had risen 833 percent in 2020 (Center for the Study of Hate and Extremism, 2020). Since the beginning of the pandemic, approximately 10,900 hate incidents targeting Asian-Americans nationwide had been self-reported to Stop Asian American Pacific Islander Hate Group (Stop AAPI Hate) (Horse et al., 2021). The United Nations Human Rights released a report in late 2020 that highlighted an "alarming level" of racist attacks and other hate crimes, including physical and verbal harassment against Asian communities nationally (Achiume et al., 2020).

The first spike in anti-Asian hate crimes happened in March and April 2020, coinciding with a surge in COVID-19 cases and negative attitudes towards Asians about the pandemic (Center for the Study of Hate and Extremism, 2020). One of the first race-based violent acts linked to the coronavirus that received widespread media attention was the physical assault on a 16-year-old Asian American boy in the San Fernando Valley in California. The media reported that the attacker allegedly accused him of having COVID-19 (Capatides, 2020). In addition, the analysis revealed that during the COVID-19 pandemic, more than eight out of ten of Asian youth aged between 12 to 20 years old in the United States reported experiencing bullying or verbal harassment (Jeung et al., 2020). While walking down the street in Brooklyn, an 89-year-old Asian woman was physically assaulted, and her shirt was set on fire by two strangers ("89-year-old woman was attacked in Brooklyn", 2020). These are only few cases of recent racially targeted violence on Asian populations in the United States after the virus's spread. Since the COVID-19 outbreak started, 45 percent of Asian adults nationally have reported experiencing incidents based on their race or ethnicity such as being subjected to racial slurs (Ruiz et al., 2021).

Anticipating and facing racial discrimination and bigotry during the COVID-19 outbreak is likely to have a major impact on the mental health of the Asian populations (Misra et al., 2020). Asian Americans who experience race-based discrimination are at greater risk to suffer from negative mental health outcomes, such as general distress, depression, and anxiety (Gee et al., 2009; Vines et al., 2017). The fear of being stigmatized caused by COVID-19 may also lead to increased anxiety and uncertainty during and after the pandemic, including re-entering the job market or returning to school (Misra et al., 2020).

In March 2021, six Asian women were killed in the Atlanta spa shootings in Atlanta, Georgia on March 16, 2021 (Cost, 2021). As a result, demonstrators gathered in major cities nationwide to protest the significant spike in hate crimes against Asians and Asian Americans during the COVID-19 pandemic (Iyer, 2021; Juarez & Powell; 2021). In an attempt to raise awareness about the AAPI experience, #StopAsianHate, #StopAAPIHate, #PROTECTASIANLIVES, #theycantburnusall and #StandWithAsians hashtags have been used in raising awareness about the rise in racism, bias, and discrimination targeting Asian communities (Robert, 2021). These hashtags aim to call for news coverage from US mainstream media, to provide educational resources on racism, and to show solidarity with Asian communities (Choi, 2021).

Asian Americans had experienced the greatest increase in severe hate incidents online in 2021 (Anti-Defamation League, 2021). These incidents and violence against Asian communities during the COVID-19 pandemic were fueled by xenophobia rhetoric by politicians and media representations (Takasaki, 2020). According to a study on anti-Asian American rhetoric related to the COVID-19 pandemic, the key finding showed that over 1 in 10 tweets by Republican

politicians contained or endorsed the use of discriminatory or stigmatizing language (Borja et al., 2020).

Previous studies suggested that positive media portrayals is an effective prevention in combating prejudice and breaking stereotype (Clement et al., 2013; Misra et al., 2020) and promoting positive media campaigns on social media may help counter the misinformation that is circulated online (Iwai, 2020; Misra et al., 2020). Twitter is an excellent tool to disseminate these messages via mass media platforms due to its potential to reach a vast number of people (Clement et al., 2013).

Through participation in microblogging platforms, individuals may feel empowered. (Han, 2015; Hermida & Hernández-Santaolalla, 2018). Empowerment in the particular case of social media is demonstrated by the users' ability to contribute digitally, seek change, and exert their influence (Smith, & Taylor, 2017; Smith et al., 2015). It is believed that social media users gain power as a result of the connectivity and visibility of online networks (Smith et al., 2015). That is, the use of social media enables users to develop confidence and create the ability to plan and carry out the activities necessary to achieve their goals (Riquelme et al., 2018). Additionally, digital platforms allow users to access virtual communities where they can participate in collective efforts (Riquelme et al., 2018). These aspects of social media use, in turn, foster a sense of psychological empowerment for users (Riquelme et al., 2018). According to a study on the effect of blogging on psychological empowerment, the members of underrepresented communities can be empowered by blogging using social media technology (Fieseler & Fleck, 2013; Stavrositu & Sundar, 2012). The users are likely to feel empowered due to the repetitive self-expression, which produces a distinctive voice that can be heard by others (Lampa, 2004; Stavrositu & Sundar, 2012).

Research demonstrates that when people are empowered, it can yield both individual and societal benefits (Cuthill, 2002; Mustakova-Possardt, 1998). For example, at the societal level, the empowered citizen is willing to collaborate with civil organizations and public institutions for the common interest (Cuthill, 2002; Le Compte & Marrais, 1992). According to Pretty et al. (1995), at the individual level, the empowerment process enables citizens to improve their capability based on knowledge and skills acquisition relevant to community needs. In addition, promoting individual and collective empowerment by educational means would help establish an understanding of their rights as well as their responsibilities for the greater good (Higgins, 1999).

Although some researchers have identified a connection between Twitter usage for advocacy and user empowerment (Smith et al., 2015), little is known about the mechanism of how online activism on Twitter enhances users' psychological empowerment. For example, an analysis of digital empowerment in Kenya conducted qualitative discourse analysis adopted empowerment as a lens to analyze Twitter campaign strategies (Nothias & Cheruiyot, 2019). The study found that digital media creates space for historically silenced voice to challenge the unfair distribution of power in global media narratives (Nothias & Cheruiyot, 2019). Similarly, empowerment theory was applied as a theoretical lens to discuss how non-profit organizations utilized Twitter to advocate for immigrants during the 2016 U.S. presidential election (Li et al., 2018). The research discovered key strategies utilized by nonprofits' social media to support and empower immigrants, including asking why and problem analysis, calls for participation, and reaching out to outside agents (Li et al., 2018). A qualitative content analysis was conducted to investigate users' sense of empowerment and Twitter usage in #Burkini activism (Mazid & Zaher, 2020). The study revealed that Twitter has become an essential platform for individuals to exercise their sense of agency on social problems (Mazid & Zaher, 2020).

While scholars are particularly interested in how digital platforms promote protest activities (Boulianne, 2015; Chon & Park, 2020; Harlow, 2012; Ida et al., 2020). The majority of past literature has focused on the strategic aspects of the use of social media in demonstrations (Li et al., 2020; Park & Rim, 2020; Theocharis, 2013). An idea that social media empowers users by allowing them to connect and be visible, on the other hand, has received less attention (Smith et al., 2015). Even though researchers adopted empowerment theory as theoretical framework examining tweets (Li et al., 2018; Nothias & Cheruiyot, 2019; Smith et al., 2015) or studied empowerment as a result of Twitter movements (Mazid & Zaher, 2020). Few studies have discussed how participation in Twitter advocacy could contribute to the user's empowerment at individual level. In addition, research on anti-Asian hate crimes during COVID-19 pandemic has focused on discriminatory rhetoric and mental impacts of racialized stress on individuals (Chinna et al., 2021; Misra et al., 2020; Wu et al., 2021). However, there has not been much research on how Asian community may use social media assistance to increase their psychological well-being. Therefore, this thesis fills the gap by examining theoretical routes, and analyzing the role of Twitter in psychological empowerment in the context of #StopAsianHate and #StopAAPIHate activism.

Chapter 2 discusses the literature relevant to the hypotheses of this thesis. The literature will provide an overview of online activism and the #StopAsianHate and #StopAAPIHate movements. Then, this chapter will explore how the use of Twitter for microblogging for online activism affects psychological empowerment through the Social Cognitive Theory framework. Additionally, this chapter will address the mechanism of self-efficacy and sense of community which empowerment operates through. Chapter 3 outlines the methodology for this correlational research design. The sample, research model, questionnaire instrument, and the method to

analyze the data will be discussed. In Chapter 4, the findings of this study including descriptive statistics will be reported. Then, discussion and implications will be explained. Chapter 5 contains the conclusion, limitations, and future research of this study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter explores the theoretical framework and previous literature relevant to this study. First, activism and social media activism are explained, including the phenomenon of interest, the #StopAsianHate and #StopAAPIHate movements. Next, the keys variables including the use of Twitter microblogging for online activism, self-efficacy, sense of community, and psychological empowerment are defined and conceptualized. Following, the way psychological empowerment operates through self-efficacy and sense of community is explored. Then, hypotheses are posited to address how participation in #StopAsainHate on Twitter microblogging can contribute to psychological empowerment of the users.

Social Media Activism

Activism

Activism is generally defined as a sequence of contentious events through which citizens attempt to solve societal problems by collective action (Chon, & Park, 2020; Tilly, 2004). Similarly, Tarrow (2011) has defined activism as collective challenges from ordinary citizens towards power holders (e.g., elites, opponents, and authorities). Previous literature emphasizes the importance of knowledge exchange between individuals and groups that it can turn a collection of views and belief systems into collective action (Chon, & Park, 2020; Diani, 1992; McCarthy & Zald, 1977). According to previous study, activism in democratic systems usually focuses on specific topics and political issues, using collective action to communicate political injustice, inequality, and corruption of political and economic institutions (Meyer, 2015; Norris, 2004). Based on the above definition of activism, Cammaerts (2015) reported that activism as a social phenomenon usually involves these following components: (a) including contentious topics with identified opponents, (b) organized via dense informal networks, (c) sharing of collective

identities. Thus, this thesis conceptualized activism as collective action of like-minded individuals to improve a society, a legislation, or an organization in response to controversial topics.

Online Activism

The emergence of online social movements has become prevalent due to digital networked technology – including social media (Cammaerts, 2015). Online activism can be defined as a politically driven movement that is supported by the internet (Vegh et al., 2003). The advocates employ the internet technology and techniques to accomplish the movement's goals (Vegh et al., 2003). There are two strategies for internet-assisted activism: internet-enhanced and internet-based techniques (Vegh et al., 2003). For the internet-enhanced technique, the internet is only used to reinforce existing social movement strategies, such as by using as an alternative communication platform, by increasing awareness, or by effectively organizing action (Vegh et al., 2003). Internet-based, on the other hand, the internet was used to perform tasks that are only available online, for example, a virtual conference (Vegh et al., 2003). Vegh et al., (2003) has divided types of online activism into three different categories: awareness/advocacy; organization/mobilization; and action/reaction. This thesis centers on the awareness and organization aspects of online activism.

Firstly, having access to information about the particular events will raise public awareness and understanding of the issues (Vegh et al., 2003). Previous literature stated that social networks may be used as an alternate source of news and information, contributing to awareness of general public towards the issues (Vegh et al., 2003). It is due to the fact that news and information produced by individuals and independent organizations may concentrate on the topics that have received little coverage or been misreported in the mass media. It allows

advocates to overcome the gatekeeper of mass media and have control over their own messages (Postmes & Brunsting, 2002). Also, it helps spreading movement goals independently of the mainstream media (Cammaerts, 2015).

The internet has raised general consciousness about several issues as a result of faster and easier distribution of movement information that it offers (Vegh et al., 2003). Due to the assistance of the internet, information can be disseminated quicky and inexpensively to a large number of users at the same time, regardless of their locations (Juris, 2005). The simplicity with which a Twitter post can be immediately retweeted by another Twitter account and thereby viewed by a large number of people implies that information can be distributed quickly (Kwak et al., 2010). This rapid dissemination of information on Twitter creates a distribution network that allow users to connect with others people and communities outside of their immediate environment (Theocharis et al., 2015).

Secondly, the internet plays an important role in organizing the movement and carrying out action for online advocacy. Chon & Park (2020) that individual in the social network who share similar belief can easily unite and promote collaborative effort to improve social issues. By overcoming space-time constraints, social media helps facilitate the online activism in recruiting members, coordinating direct action, and organizing participation in protest activities (Cammaerts, 2015; Norris, 2004; Theocharis et al., 2015; Van de Donk et al., 2004). According to the prior research, social media provides an infrastructure for communities and facilitate their coordination by connecting like-minded people (Fieseler & Fleck, 2013; Wilson & Peterson 2002). Additionally, Social Network Sites enable individuals to build profiles and establish a social network comprised of other user who share a mutual connection (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). Due to the simplicity of protest information/resource distribution, "weak ties" between users has

been formed, allowing advocates to expand their social network as well as connect with other groups outside their circle of contacts (Gil de Zúñiga & Valenzuela, 2011; Theocharis, 2015). This might lead to more effective social movement mobilization and a greater sense of belonging to communities of people who hold a common concern (Della Porta & Mosca, 2005; Theocharis, 2015). According to the previous research, Twitter use create an essential dynamic in online activism by providing varied functions for communication, discourse, and information distribution during the movements (Earl et al., 2013; Theocharis et al., 2015).

Online Activism on Twitter

Twitter enables diverse participants to engage in decentralized conversations during protest activities which are deemed critical for movement communication (Meraz & Papacharissi, 2013). Through hashtags, Twitter users are able to participate in the discussion around particular themes or topics (Theocharis, 2015). Hashtags (e.g. #nature, #IceBucketChallenge, #OscarsSoWhite) were created as an indexing function to organize the tweets' topic (Gleason, 2013; Gruzd et al., 2011). The use of hashtags draws together diverse users worldwide who share similar interests (Tremayne, 2014), while allowing faster interaction and better categorization of posted content (Theocharis, 2013). The studies show that hashtags facilitate a raising of awareness in, and encourage a discussion about, a wide variety of issues accessible on social media (Tombleson & Wolf, 2017). For example, #BlackLivesMatter first appeared on Twitter in July 2013 in response to the acquittal of George Zimmerman in the murder of Trayvon Martin (Anderson et al., 2020; Yang, 2016). The hashtag has sparked conversations and raised questions on police brutality, racial justice, and other issues impacting Black Americans' lives (Ince et al., 2017). In May 2020, after the death of George Floyd, the

highest number of daily uses of #BlackLivesMatter reached 8.8 million tweets as the online and offline protest took place (Anderson et al., 2020).

#MeToo, for example, is a movement that aims to reveal the magnitude of sexual harassment and gendered violence existing in society (Kunst et al., 2019). Through the hashtag #MeToo movement, women are encouraged to share their experiences and engage in the conversation around feminist activism; besides, using the hashtag #MeToo promotes a sense of solidarity among those who have experienced sexual abuse (Zarkov & Davis, 2018).

#StopAsianHate and #StopAAPIHate Movements

The COVID-19 global pandemic has caused enormous disruption on people's personal and socioeconomic lives such as job loss, health concerns, or loneliness (Montemurro, 2020; Ziems et al., 2020). It has also increased hateful incidents targeting Asian communities, including racial microaggression, physical and verbal assault, as well as online bullying (Joubin, 2020; Ziems et al., 2020). On social media, anti-Asian COVID-19 hate tweets have been circulated, leading to emotional distress and anxiety among the Asian population (Saha et al., 2019; Ziems et al., 2020). On the other hand, pro-Asian COVID-19 counter-hate tweets were developed through social media campaigns aiming to counteract the surge of hateful content on social media (Ziems et al., 2020).

According to past study on the spread of anti-Asian hate and counter-hate speech related to COVID-19 on Twitter, pro-Asian COVID-19 counter-hate tweets can be distinguished by two characteristics. First, the tweets identify and oppose racism targeting Asian communities such as online hate speech or slurs, and/or second, the tweets demonstrate the support towards the Asian population (Ziems et al., 2020). #StopAsianHate and #StopAAPIHate are two of the most prominent hashtags used to highlight the current effort to eliminate the hate crimes against the

Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (Lyu et al., 2021). Most of the tweets containing these hashtags directly support the movements to show solidarity with Asian and Pacific Islander communities (Lyu et al., 2021).

The Effects of Online Activism

Online activism has the ability to empower oppressed voices and promote social change (Newsom & Lengel, 2012). Via virtual collaboration, networking, and co-creation, social media has shifted power to the public, empowering those who were historically underrepresented. (Fieseler & Fleck, 2013; Pires et al., 2006; Smith et al., 2015). Previous research about student activism in South Africa showed that the use of social media among youth to engage in political participation leads to a feeling of personal empowerment (Bosch, 2017). Another study demonstrated that users may be empowered by social media because they utilize it to increase the number of people receiving messages, thus enhancing their ability to exert influence and challenge the organizations (Coombs & Holladay, 2007; Valentini et al., 2012). Earlier study on public engagement indicated that participating in sending and receiving messages on social media often suggest a sense of empowerment among the users (Kang, 2014). By participating in online blogging, a sense of agency and a sense of community will be developed, which could contribute to the psychological empowerment of the users (Riquelme et al., 2018; Stavrositu & Sundar, 2012).

Empowerment

Empowerment refers to the process through which individuals gain the control over their own lives and increase personal, interpersonal, or political power to begin improving their situations (Gutierrez, 1995; Zimmerman & Rappaport, 1988). The term empowerment has been widely used since the late 1970s and evolved its meaning and conceptual approach into multiple

areas (Luttrell et al., 2009). The idea of empowerment has been altered over time from its origins in progressive social movements and activism to community engagement and organization (Labonte, 1994), and the desire to fight inequality, exploitation, and injustice (Laverack, 2006) since it shifted from the larger (e.g., community level) to the smaller scale (e.g., individual level) (Fortunati, 2014; Woodall et al., 2012).

Empowerment has been widely discussed in the psychology, mental health, and social work fields as a tool which shed the light on the difficulties of powerless communities (Gutiérrez, 1989; Gutiérrez, 1995; Rappaport, 1987; Solomon, 1976; Swift & Levin, 1987). Úcar Martínez et al. (2017) studied conceptualization of empowerment in the domain of youth, reporting that there are three frequent concepts usually associate with empowerment: power, participation, and education. In the notion of power, empowerment can be seen as an opposing force to challenge the institutional power (Castells, 2007; Fortunati, 2014;). Additionally, prior research suggests that empowerment is most recognizable when it is missing as in a powerless situation (Kieffer, 1984; Rappaport, 1984). In terms of education, empowerment has been discussed in numerous aspects such as education and learning, the acquisition of knowledge and skill, and awareness. (Lemmer, 2009; Úcar Martínez et al., 2017). From a participation perspective, empowerment is the process focusing on collective action in the local community in which people experiencing an unequal share of resources can obtain access to the resources and exercise the sense of control (Cornell University Empowerment Group, 1989; Lawrencejacobson, 2006). Another study focusing on individual empowerment found that active participation of a person in the societal development process can contribute to an improvement of the society (Alkire, 2005).

While the term empowerment is a multilevel construct and empowerment can have various types such as organizational, educational, or political empowerment (Halliday & Brown, 2018; Salimi & Saaedi Asl, 2021; Sapkota, 2021; Zhang, 2019), this thesis emphasizes psychological empowerment. Zimmerman and Rappaport (1988, p.725) described psychological empowerment as "the connection between a sense of personal competence, a desire for, and a willingness to take action in the public domain." Psychological empowerment focuses on empowerment at the individual level; however, it does not only include the perceptions of one's ability but also addresses active participation of individuals in the community and an understanding of sociopolitical context (Zimmerman, 1995). The conceptualization of psychological empowerment is commonly associated with a social action framework e.g., community change, capacity building, and collectivity (Keiffer, 1984; Rappaport, 1981; Zimmerman, 2000).

Such research explains that psychological empowerment is comprised of three interrelated components: intrapersonal, interactional, and behavioral (Zimmerman, 1995; Zimmerman, 2000; Zimmerman et al., 1992). The intrapersonal component relates to the way people perceive their ability to impact aspects of the society and political contexts that they deem important (Paulhus, 1983; Zimmerman & Rapport, 1988). To elaborate, these beliefs are essential for individuals to engage in the actions required to reach their personal goals (Peterson, 2014). This can also include how one perceives the level of difficulty when attempting to have control over societal problems. (Zimmerman & Rappaport, 1988; Zimmerman et al., 1992). Past research related to empowerment and community participation found that three elements of perceived sociopolitical control are the sub-dimensions of the intrapersonal component which include personal control, self-efficacy, and perceived competence (Kieffer, 1984; Paulhus, 1983;

Peterson, 2014; Zimmerman, 1995; Zimmerman et al., 1992). These control aspects refer to one's beliefs regarding their capability to exert influence in different situations, individual's perception of their abilities to perform particular actions, and how one perceives their ability to execute tasks that are deemed/considered significant on one's life, respectively (Hur, 2006; Petrovčič & Petrič, 2014; Zimmerman, 1995; Li, 2016).

The interactional component of psychological empowerment refers to the individual's understanding of their surroundings, sociopolitical-related issues, and the tools/resources needed to promote changes (Zimmerman, 1995). It demonstrates that to exercise influence on their social environment, persons must have an awareness about their available choices and the values in a given setting (Speer, 2000; Zimmerman, 1995). It also addresses critical awareness of agency, as well as understanding causal agents to impact decisions and bring about changes in the socio-political systems. To elaborate, critical awareness refers to the knowledge about the essential resources required to accomplish goals and how to obtain and manage them (Freire, 1970; Kieffer, 1984; Peterson, 2014; Zimmerman & Rappaport, 1988). This resource mobilization is considered an important part of the psychological empowerment interactional aspect because it indicates the ability to gain mastery over one's surroundings. Further, understanding causal agents suggests an understanding of the forces affecting someone or something that have been shown to either hinder or strengthen one's attempt to exercise influence in the social and political context (Sue & Zane, 1980). Additionally, the interactional dimension involves the abilities to make a decision, solve problems, and work well together. Such abilities can be formed when the citizen has opportunities to participate in the decision-making process which would contribute to personal autonomy (Zimmerman, 1995).

The last component of psychological empowerment is the behavioral component. It was defined as individual acts that are expected to have a direct impact on outcomes (Zimmerman, 1995). The behavioral aspect of psychological empowerment involves the action a person has taken to exert influence on the socio-political landscape through community participation and taking leadership roles in community-based organizations (Zimmerman & Rappaport, 1988). For example, community service activities, fundraisings, voluntary organizations, support groups, or religious activities. The research demonstrates that the behavioral component represents the distinct feature of psychological empowerment in which individuals purposefully act to affect the larger structure of the society that they are part of (Peterson, 2014).

In sum, the intrapersonal dimension is usually regarded as an emotional aspect (Opara et al., 2020). The intrapersonal aspect of psychological empowerment involves the ideas that concern how individuals perceive themselves and their potential to exert influence in the social and political domain (Speer & Peterson, 2000; Christens, 2012). On the other hand, the shared concept among interactional psychological empowerment is people's cognition relating to their perception about their communities (Christens, 2012; Peterson, 2014; Peterson et al., 2002). For behavioral psychological empowerment, it refers to actions taken to exert an impact in the community, particularly in the process of democratic decision-making (Christens, 2012; Peterson, 2014).

Peterson (2014) explained that the three dimensions of psychological empowerment can be used interchangeably as the concept overlaps. The previous study explains that while operational meanings of psychological empowerment are unique to context, each operationalization may obtain characteristics of the intrapersonal, interactional, and behavioral aspects of the concept in ways that are relevant to that topic (Peterson, 2014). As a result, the

overall meaning of psychological empowerment would not change substantially due to the exclusion of one or more components. However, other research argues that to adequately capture the whole spectrum of psychological empowerment, the three elements of psychological empowerment must be assessed. That is because these components create an image of individuals who believe they are capable of affecting the situation, understanding the mechanism of that context, and exercising their influence on the environment (Zimmerman,1995).

This thesis conceptualized psychological empowerment as multi-faceted constructs that include a sense of being psychologically enabled, an understanding of the socio-political environment, and a desire to take action in the public sphere. All three aspects of psychological empowerment will be included in this study as Zimmerman (1995) states that psychological empowerment is not only related to one's perceived competence but also require an individual's active participation in their environment and an awareness of their socio-political environment. The majority of research on psychological empowerment has centered on the intrapersonal aspect to analyze the perceived influence over one's socio-political setting (Chang, 2022; Christens, 2012; Jeong et al., 2021; Lardier, 2019; Opara et al., 2020; Peterson et al., 2005). It has been suggested that intrapersonal element is a significant indicator of psychological empowerment construct (Christens & Peterson, 2012; Opara et al., 2020). Additionally, the results from the longitudinal study suggest that the intrapersonal component of empowerment is likely to emerge as individuals engage in the community that has empowering environments (Christens et al., 2011). Thus, it is necessary to include the intrapersonal aspect in this study since it focuses on the empowering outcome of online activism participation.

On the other hand, the interactional element of psychological empowerment has been discussed in fewer studies. This research focusing on online activism will incorporate the

interactional aspect to take into account the social injustices and power dynamics which is the

core concept of interactional component (Christens & Dolan, 2011; Gutierrez 1995; Speer 2000).

Zimmerman (1995) and Speer (2000) explained the importance of the interactional component

that psychological empowerment involves not only personal level of beliefs such as

individual abilities, personal autonomy, and self-efficacy but also a person's critical awareness of

one's environment which is needed to bring about a shift in greater social systems

that shape the lives of people. In other words, the interactional aspect includes individuals'

views of how they may develop psychological abilities as a member of a

group to deal with their circumstances and ultimately improve their status.

Based on previous empirical research, the behavioral dimension has been excluded from

the conceptualization of many studies (Peterson, 2014). It is because of the weak correlation

between the behavioral measurement and the other psychological empowerment measurements

(Peterson, 2014). However, in this study, the behavioral component is central, as the study aims

to explore how participating in Twitter activism can impact one's psychological status. The

behavioral component captures a particular aspect of the psychological empowerment

construction that includes individuals' wills to impact the larger structures of which they are a

member (Peterson, 2014). As a result, a conceptualization of psychological empowerment that

removes the behavioral component would dramatically change and undermine the overall

meaning of psychological empowerment (Peterson, 2014). The behavioral component of

psychological empowerment can be considered as community participation, especially in the

democratic decision-making process (Christens, 2011; Speer & Peterson 2000; Zimmerman &

Zahniser 1991). Accordingly, the inclusion of the behavioral element of psychological

empowerment could enhance the social change results that empowerment is expected to create (Peterson, 2014).

Self-efficacy

Self-efficacy is the belief in one's ability to plan and execute the courses of action required to accomplish expected results (Bandura, 1977; Bandura, 1997). It represents individuals' perceptions and expectations of what they can achieve with talents and abilities they have in particular circumstances (Bong & Skaalvik, 2003).

According to Bandura (1997), Social Cognitive Theory postulates that efficacy beliefs diversely operate according to the specific context (Bandura, 1997; Velasquez & LaRose, 2015). A study on political behavior found that when analyzing the specific forms of political participation, the most accurate way to predict the behavior is to measure efficacy beliefs regarding that particular mode of political engagement (Velasquez & LaRose, 2015; Wollman & Stouder, 1991). Consequently, it is recommended to measure self-efficacy specific to the context of the study (Bandura, 1986, 1991, 1997; Velasquez & LaRose, 2015). Therefore, this research specifically studies the self-efficacy of Twitter users while engaging in Twitter activism.

Previous studies have explored the efficacy in the online platforms from various perspectives. For example, prior study on self-efficacy in social media explains the definition of social media self-efficacy as the views of a person regarding his or her ability to execute intended tasks in the social media setting (Hocevar et al., 2014). Drawing from sources of information theory (Bandura, 1997), an individual's skill of production, utilization of social media content, and perceived competence in digital platforms can influence one's self-efficacy on social media. (Hocevar et al., 2014). Another study related to online political participation has introduced online political self-efficacy (OPSE) which refers to the belief that one can utilize

social media to accomplish political goals (Velasquez & LaRose, 2015). A similar study by the

same authors has proposed SMPE, illustrating personal assessment of efficacy on social media

activism (Golan & Lim, 2016; Velasquez & LaRose, 2015).

Kenski & Stroud (2006) examined the impact of online exposure to information about the

presidential race on political efficacy and found that there was a positive relationship between

Internet use and beliefs of political efficacy. Another study confirmed that internet use increases

the political efficacy among college students (Lee, 2006; Velasquez & LaRose, 2015).

Self-efficacy is embedded in a triadic reciprocal determinism framework in which

personal factors (i.e., beliefs of self-efficacy), behavior, and environmental factors are

continuously interacting (Gallagher, 2012). Triadic reciprocal determinism deems the essential

part of Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) (Gallagher, 2012). Bandura proposes three components of

social cognitive theory which are environmental influences, cognitive dispositions, and

behaviors. To elaborate, environmental influences affect cognitive dispositions, causing

behavioral change and create a causal "triadic reciprocity" model (Bandura, 1977, 1986).

A previous study shows that Social Cognitive Theory is the underlying mechanism

between political participation and self-efficacy (Velasquez & LaRose, 2015). Social cognitive

theory provides an understanding of how cognition is affected by environmental variables that

encourage political participation (Heger & Hoffmann, 2019).

A study on digital divides explains that having access to an online platform to participate

in political participation is a socio-economic factor that indicates environmental influence

(Hoffmann & Lutz, 2019). These influences have been shown to improve self-efficacy (Bandura,

2005). In this study, participating in online activism on Twitter is the indicator of environmental

factors that may increase the self-efficacy of the users. Adopted from Bandura (1977) and

Bandura (1997) self-efficacy theory, in this thesis, self-efficacy was conceptualized as the perceived capacity of Twitter users to successfully utilize Twitter microblogging to reach their activism objectives. Thus, it is hypothesized that the engagement in #StopAsianHate and #StopAAPIHate movements on Twitter should be positively related to the users' perceived capacity to successfully utilize Twitter microblogging to reach their activism goals.

> H1. Participation in #StopAsianHate and #StopAAPIHate movements via Twitter microblogging is positively related to Twitter users' perceptions that they are capable of using Twitter microblogging to attain the movement goals.

> This sense of belief in their capacity creates the perception of psychological

empowerment (Riquelme et al., 2018; Shank & Cotten, 2014).

> H2. A higher level of Twitter users' perceptions that they are capable of via Twitter microblogging to attain the #StopAsianHate and #StopAAPIHate movements goals will lead to a greater level of their psychological empowerment.

> Our research model suggests that Twitter has provided a platform for users to assert their

voice through Twitter microblogging to reach their advocacy goals. This mechanism may influence the level of perceived self-efficacy and lead to the development of psychological empowerment.

> H3. Participation in #StopAsianHate and #StopAAPIHate movements via Twitter microblogging is positively related to psychological empowerment through the mediating role of self-efficacy.

Sense of community on Twitter

Twitter allows users to create and manage online connections with other users (Ahn & Park, 2015). However, the ability to connect and communicate does not ensure the presence of

community (Gruzd et al., 2011). According to Blight et al. (2017), the emerging of online

community requires a sense of community among the members. The perceived Sense of

Community (SOC) among its members is the core measure of any group or community

(Stavrositu & Sundar, 2012). Sense of Community is defined as "a feeling that members have of

belonging, a feeling that members matter to one another and to the group, and a shared faith that

a member's needs will be met through their commitment to be together" (McMillan & Chavis,

1986, p. 9). Similarly, other research explains a sense of community as the bonds created by

mutual purpose, values/beliefs, and identification (Fernback, 1999; Blight et al., 2017). Sense of

Community consists of four distinct dimensions: (a) membership, (b) influence, (c) integration

and fulfillment of needs, and (d) shared emotional connection (McMillan & Chavis, 1986).

Membership implies a feeling of belonging to a community or of being a part of a society, as

defined by enforced boundaries (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). Although the accessibility of

Twitter microblogging is usually unrestricted, the borders are often defined by the characteristic

of the blog (Stavrositu & Sundar, 2012). Influence refers to the perception of how one can exert

influence in the community and the perception of how the community can impact the individual

simultaneously (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). Via the Twitter features, the users have full control

over what they choose to tweet or retweet. At the same time, the interaction from other users

may impact one's tweeting activity (Dumbrell & Steele, 2012). Next is integration and

fulfillment of needs. This is the sense that members' interests will be fulfilled by the resources

they obtained through their membership in the community. Also, it refers to having common

beliefs that result in the perception of affirmation and support (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). The

final aspect is shared emotional connection. It relates to the commitment of the members in the

community that they have shared history, mutual events, similar places, and time together

(McMillan & Chavis, 1986). In this thesis, a sense of community was conceptualized as Twitter user's perception of connectedness to the group and the significance of community members (Aiyer et al., 2015; McMillan & Chavis, 1986).

Blogging can encourage community building in an online setting (Jackson et al., 2007) because it allows users to participate in the conversation and connect with others, contributing to the emergence of communities (Stavrositu & Sundar, 2012). Thus, according to previous research, we hypothesize:

H4. Participation in the #StopAsianHate and #StopAAPIHate movements via Twitter microblogging is positively related to a sense of community of the users.

Earlier research proposed that SOC may contribute to higher-order outcomes, such as empowerment (Bess et al., 2002). Prior research on the effects of blogging on empowerment suggests the possible association between motivation for blogging and psychological empowerment (Stavrositu & Sundar, 2012). Therefore, we propose the following hypothesis:

H5. Higher level of users' sense of community will lead to greater levels of their psychological empowerment.

Our conceptual model indicates that the functions of Twitter microblogging that allow users to interact and engage in the conversation could create a sense of community, leading to psychological empowerment. Therefore, we propose:

H6. Participation in #StopAsianHate and #StopAAPIHate movements via Twitter microblogging is positively related to psychological empowerment through the mediating role of a sense of community.

This chapter explained the theoretical framework and existing literature to address the use of Twitter microblogging for activism, psychological empowerment, and its mechanisms – self-

efficacy and sense of community. It examined the role of internet and social media in the

activism including #StopAsianHate and #StopAAPIHate movements. Social Cognitive Theory

highlights the reciprocal interaction of the users who participate in #StopAsianHate and

#StopAAPIHate via Twitter microblogging. Engagement will promote self-efficacy, which,

combined with a sense of community, is an essential mechanism of psychological empowerment.

In addition, the section details three facets of psychological empowerment and how they

correlate with self-efficacy and sense of community. Lastly, the hypotheses were developed

based on previous research. Following this chapter, Chapter 3 includes a detailed explanation of

the research methodology.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Chapter 3 provides the procedures of the research methods in detail. First, the justification for the methodological decision is explained. Then, this chapter discusses the sample selection which includes the targeted respondents, the sampling technique, sample size, and the recruitment procedures. Next, the survey construction including the measurement of key variables, and its operationalization are clarified. Finally, the plan for analyzing the data to test the proposed hypotheses are covered at the end of this chapter.

Procedure

The online questionnaire was created and administered on Qualtrics. The data was collected through a self-administered online survey using the samples recruited from https://prolific.co, an online research participant recruitment platform. Prolific workers were invited to participate in this study with the criteria of being an English-speaker between 18 to 29 years old who previously participated in the #StopAsianHate and #StopAAPIHate movements on Twitter. At the beginning of the survey, the participants were informed about the purpose of this research, given the informed consent that their participation is completely voluntary, and informed that they have the right to quit the survey at any time. The survey took approximately seven minutes to complete. The survey consists of three parts and included four variables. The first section asked participants about their use of Twitter microblogging for #StopAsianHate and #StopAAPIHate campaigns. Then, they were given the questions related to their perceptions towards empowerment including degree of self-efficacy and sense of community. Lastly, the questions regarding participants' demographic details, such as age, education level, and location were addressed. After the participants complete the survey, compensation was given. Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was obtained before conducting the study.

Method Justification

A correlational research design refers to the measurement of two or more attributes to determine the degree to which the factors are related (Privitera, 2014). Survey is one of the most common methods for correlational research design (McCombes, 2020). Self-report surveys have established as the preferred approach for gathering data on attitudes and behaviors (Fowler Jr., 2013; Schwarz et al., 1998). A number of studies have employed survey questionnaires to measure people's behaviors and perceptions regarding online activism (Fileborn, 2017; Kopacheva, 2021; Moitra et al., 2020; Tufekci & Wilson, 2012). This current study examines the relationship between the use of microblogging on Twitter for #StopAsianHate and #StopAAPIHate activism and users' psychological empowerment. Thus, the correlational research design is appropriate for this study, which attempts to discover the connections between variables and as well as to evaluate the research model. Participants were asked to complete a survey assessing their level of engagement in #StopAsianHate and #StopAAPIHate movements using Twitter microblogging, psychological empowerment, self-efficacy, and sense of community.

Sampling and sample size

We conducted an online survey from 17 to 19 December 2021. We recruited our sample via Prolific.co, an online crowdworking platform for research participants recruitment (Palan & Schitter, 2018; Prolific.co). It provides access to a broad population in terms of geography and ethnicity, and it may potentially be representative of the internet population (Paolacci & Chandler, 2014; Peer et al., 2017). Prolific has been successfully utilized to recruit a subject pool in various areas, including economics (e.g., Marreiros et al., 2017), and psychology (e.g., Callan et al., 2016). The participants in this survey research were Asian Twitter users living in the

United States, ranging in age from 18 to 29 years old, which is the age range of the majority of Twitter users (Hutchinson, 2017; London School of Economics and Political Science, 2017; Statista, 2022). The respondents must have previously participated in the #StopAsianHate and #StopAAPIHate movements on Twitter. We compensated the participants with $1.11 in cash paid through the Prolific system. A total of 500 individuals responded. The manipulation check was conducted to remove missing data and invalid cases. As a result, we removed 20 invalid responses who failed the manipulation test and 6 non-Asian participants. Thus, there were 474 responses to test the hypotheses. The demographic information of the participants is presented in Table 1. The average age of the participants was 22.9 ($SD = 3.1$); 57% of them were female, 40.1% were male, 1.9% were non-binary and 0.2% preferred not to answer; 100% of participants reported being Asian. The majority of the participants held a bachelor's degree in college (43%), about 27.8% attended some college, while 12.2% is a high school graduates, followed by 7.2% had a master's degree, 5.9% has an association degree in college. 2.1% held a professional degree (e.g., JD, MD), 1.3% has a doctorate degree, 0.2% has a degree lower than high school, and 0.2% preferred not to respond. On average, the participants spent 1 hour and 42 minutes on Twitter per day ($SD = 1.16$).

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

The Institutional Review Boards (IRB) has given permission for this research to be conducted and have ensured that it complies with federal and state regulations, university policy, and the highest ethical standards. The IRB is an institute established to protect the rights and welfare of human research subjects who were recruited to participate in research activities (Oakes, 2002). The present study was granted to collect and analyze data reported from

individuals aged 18 and above. The IRB decided that the research project complies with the IRB's ethical guidelines.

Key Variables

Based on previous literature, several scales have been adopted to measure the use of Twitter microblogging for activism goals and level of psychological empowerment with the mediating role of self-efficacy and sense of community (Miguel et al., 2015; Milošević-Đorđević, & Žeželj, 2017; Lardier, 2018; Peterson et al., 2008; Speer & Peterson, 2000; Velasquez & LaRose, 2015)

The use of Twitter microblogging for activism purposes was measured using six-modified items adapted from the activism scale to assess participants' engagement (Milošević-Đorđević, & Žeželj, 2017). On the 7-point scale ranging from 1 to 7, where 1 = "*Very unlikely*" and 7 = "*Very likely*", participants were asked to mark all activities they ever engaged in using Twitter microblogging in hashtags #StopAsianHate and #StopAAPIHate hashtags. The questions include (a) I openly expressed my opinion about #StopAsianHate and #StopAAPIHate movements through tweets, retweet, or comments, (b) I tried to persuade other people to agree with my opinion during conversation on Twitter, (c) I changed a profile picture, biography or profile on Twitter in order to support #StopAsianHate and #StopAAPIHate movements, (d) I retweet an online petition and sign the petition related to #StopAsianHate and #StopAAPIHate movements I saw on Twitter, (e) I used #StopAsianHate and #StopAAPIHate hashtags to support #StopAsianHate and #StopAAPIHate movements. ($M = 2.61$, $SD = 1.65$, Cronbach's $\alpha = .90$).

Self-efficacy was measured using six-modified items adapted from Online Political Self-Efficacy scale (OPSE) which was derived from Bandura (2006) to assess a person's perceived ability to reach desired activism outcomes using Twitter microblogging (Velasquez & LaRose,

2015). On the seven-point scale ranging from 1 to 7, where 1 = "*Very uncertain*" and 7 = "*Very*

certain", participants were asked "How certain are you that you can accomplish the following

activism-related activities using Twitter?" The questions consist of (a) Use social Twitter

microblogging to express your opinions regarding #StopAsianHate and #StopAAPIHate

movements, (b) Influence others on Twitter regarding #StopAsianHate and #StopAAPIHate

issues, (c) Use Twitter microblogging to obtain a civic objective of #StopAsianHate and

#StopAAPIHate movements, (d) Gather relevant online resources to express opinions about

#StopAsianHate and #StopAAPIHate movements, (e) Keep informed about #StopAsianHate and

#StopAAPIHate movements using Twitter, and (f) Argue effectively with others using Twitter

microblogging about #StopAsianHate and #StopAAPIHate movements. ($M = 3.75$, $SD = 1.60$,

Cronbach's $\alpha = .91$).

     Sense of community (SOC) was measured using five-modified items adapted from the

Brief Sense of Community Scale (BSCS) (Peterson et al., 2008) which is based on McMillan and

Chavis (1986). On a seven-point scale ranging from 1 = "*Strongly disagree*" to 7 = "*Strongly*

agree", participants were assessed membership, influence, integration and fulfillment of needs,

and shared emotional connection on the Twitter community. Membership was measured using a

two-modified item (a) I belong in this #StopAsianHate and #StopAAPIHate Twitter community

and (b) I feel like a member of this #StopAsianHate and #StopAAPIHate Twitter community.

Influence was measured by a two-modified item (a) I have a say about what goes on in

#StopAsianHate and #StopAAPIHate Twitter community and (b) In this #StopAsianHate and

#StopAAPIHate Twitter community, users are good at influencing each another. Integration and

fulfillment of needs was measured by a two-modified item (a) Twitter community helps me

fulfill my #StopAsianHate and #StopAAPIHate movement objectives and (b) I can get what I

need in this #StopAsianHate and #StopAAPIHate Twitter community. Shared emotional connection was assessed by a two-modified item (a) I feel connected to this #StopAsianHate and #StopAAPIHate Twitter community and (b) I have a good bond with other users in this #StopAsianHate and #StopAAPIHate Twitter community. ($M = 3.45$, $SD = 1.51$, Cronbach's α = .95).

Psychological Empowerment (PE) was operationalized based on three dimensions of psychological empowerment which are intrapersonal, interactional, and behavioral aspects. On a seven-point scale ranging from 1= "*Strongly disagree*" to 7 = "*Strongly agree*", intrapersonal and interactional psychological empowerment of the participants were measured. The scale for the intrapersonal element was adopted from Abbreviated Sociopolitical Control Scale for Youth (SPCS-Y) to measure one's perceived control of the socio-political environment (Lardier, 2018; Opara et al., 2020). The intrapersonal component of psychological empowerment was measured using a six-modified item with two subscales addressing leadership competence such as (a) I like trying new things that are challenging to me and (b) I would prefer to be a leader rather than a follower and policy control for example (a) I participate in my school or community because I want my views to be heard and (b) It is important to me that I actively participate in local issues.

The scale for the interactional component was adopted from the Cognitive Empowerment Scale (CES) to measure ones' perceptions of how power operate in community settings (Lardier et al., 2020). The interactional component of psychological empowerment was be measured using a six-modified item with three subscales including power through relationships (a) Only by working together can we make changes in the society and (b) If people are making changes in society, sooner or later, they will face difficulties, nature of problem/political functioning (a) Those with power try to stop people who challenge them too much and (b) Adults with power

such as politicians reward community members that work for changes that these adults want to have happened, and shaping ideologies (a) When community members raise issues, communities ignore the issues they don't agree with and (b) The only way I can affect community issues is by working with others in my community.

The scale for the behavioral component was adopted from the Participatory Behaviors Scale (PBS) to measure engagement in the community participation, especially in democratic decision-making processes (Miguel et al., 2015). On a seven-point scale ranging from 1= "*not at all*" to 7 = "*about weekly*", the behavioral component of psychological empowerment was measured using nine items (e.g., "signed a petition, participated in a protest march or rally, or had an in-depth conversation about an issue affecting your community"). ($M = 4.08$, $SD = .90$, Cronbach's $\alpha = .87$).

Demographic variables According to Lardier et al. (2020), items measured demographic includes age, gender, ethnicity, and educational level. They were assessed through multiple-choice questions. Additionally, locations of the participants were asked using a single-choice approach.

Pilot test

Before distributing the questionnaire, a pilot test was conducted to ensure that the questionnaire could capture the entire range of responses and to identify any potential issues in research instruments. Through Prolific.co, ten respondents were invited to take part in the online survey. The participants were recruited using purposive sampling. The desired criteria were added to the prescreen questions so that the participants' characteristics match the targeted sample. The participants in the pilot test were Asian Twitter users between the ages of 18 to 29, living in the United States. Following the completion of the survey, the clarity of the

questionnaire items and instructions were evaluated. In the actual study, the researcher applied Prolific's options to exclude the respondents from the pilot study ensuring that the participants were not drawn from the same pool and had never been exposed to the survey questions. Participants in the pilot study were given monetary compensation of $1.11 upon completing tasks. The results of the analyses revealed that the questionnaire items and instructions were clear, and the items were capable of capturing the whole range of responses.

Data Analysis

Cronbach's alpha was tested to measure the reliability of each scale. To test the hypotheses, two analyses were conducted. As a preliminary analysis to test the direction and strength of the relationship between variables, Pearson's correlation coefficient analysis was performed using RStudio (RStudio, Inc., Boston, MA). Next, to confirm the fit of the proposed research model and the relationships among a set of variables, path analysis was conducted. Finally, the results including scale reliability, Pearson's Correlation, model fit index, R-squared values, and the significance level were reported.

Chapter 3 has detailed this study's procedures. First, it described how the survey research was conducted. Next, this chapter explained why correlational research design is appropriate for this study. Then, it introduced the sampling techniques by explaining the recruitment procedures and sample size. What followed was Institutional Review Board approval. The questionnaire design, including the measurement of each variable and its operationalization, were outlined. Lastly, the data analysis strategy for testing proposed hypotheses was discussed. Chapter 4 reports the results of this study.

Chapter 4: Results

Chapter 4 reports the results of this study. First, the descriptive statistics and assumptions for path analysis are reported. Following that, it presents the test of research model using path analysis technique. Then, it restates the hypotheses and interprets the results based on the statistical tests. Supportive tables and figures are presented in the appendices at the end of this paper.

Descriptive Statistics

The inter-items correlations are presented in Table 3. Pearson's correlation coefficient was measured to find inter-items correlations using RStudio (RStudio, Inc., Boston, MA). It has been measured prior to analyzing the linear regression to test the correlation between predictor variables and psychological empowerment. Table 3 shows that the independent variable was positively related to psychological empowerment with a significant p-value at the 0.001 level. The results showed that the use of Twitter microblogging for activism and online self-efficacy (H1) were significantly and positively associated. As expected, the relationship between self-efficacy and psychological empowerment were significantly and positively correlated (H2). The use of Twitter microblogging for activism and sense of community showed a significant and positive association (H4). The relationship between sense of community and psychological empowerment were significantly and positively correlated (H5) as shown in Figure 1.

Assumptions for Path Analysis

To ensure the validity of the results, there are six assumptions required prior to conducting path analysis (Edwards & Lambert, 2007). The first assumption is that the outcome variables should be continuous (e.g., interval or ratio variables) (Casson & Farmer, 2014). In this

study, the attitude and perception variables that were measured in 7-point Likert scale were treated as interval variables (Wu & Leung, 2017).

The second assumption is linear relationship between the independent and dependent variable (Osborne & Waters, 2002). Scatterplots were performed to visually inspect the plots of standardized residuals by standardized predicted values for hypotheses 1, 2, 4 and 5 (Osborne & Waters, 2002). Every scatterplot showed a linear relationship between the two, therefore, linearity assumption was met.

The third assumption is that there should be no significant outliers (Casson & Farmer, 2014). Using RStudio, the Outliers package was adopted to identify the presence of outliers in the dataset (Soetewey, 2020). In the psychological empowerment variable, there was a total of 3 responses that had the lowest value of 1. According to an outlier analysis, RStudio detected these three data points as outliers. However, the researcher determined that such outliers should not be removed as the researcher decided to keep a wide range of responses as possible.

The fourth assumption is the independence of observation (Casson & Farmer, 2014). A Durbin-Watson test, which detects the presence of autocorrelation in the residuals of a regression, is one approach for determining whether this assumption is satisfied (Chen, 2016). RStudio was utilized to perform a Durbin-Watson test from the car package (Statology, 2020). The following hypotheses were used in this test: null hypothesis: there is no relationship among the residuals. Alternative hypothesis: the residuals are autocorrelated. According to the test statistic, the p-values of null hypothesis of H 1,2,4, and 5 were not less than 0.05, hence, we failed to reject the null hypothesis. Thus, we concluded that residuals in the regression models were not autocorrelated.

The fifth assumption is homoscedasticity of the data, which refers to the equal scatter of residual across a range of a dependent variable values (Goldfeld & Quandt, 1965; Osborne & Waters, 2002). On RStudio, a Goldfeld-Quandt test was performed using the lmtest package to determine whether heteroscedasticity, non-constant variance of error terms, existed in the given data (Statology, 2020). As heteroscedasticity is present, it violates one of the key assumptions of linear regression, leading to increased Type I error or decreased statistical power (Rosopa et al., 2013). The following hypotheses were used in this test: null hypothesis: heteroscedasticity is not present. Alternative Hypothesis: heteroscedasticity is present. According to the test statistic, the p-values of null hypothesis of H1, 2, 4 and 5 were not less than 0.05, hence, we failed to reject the null hypothesis. It indicated that heteroscedasticity was not present in the regression models. Therefore, homoscedasticity of the data could be assumed.

The last assumption is normal distribution of the residuals of a statistical model (Casson & Farmer, 2014). We adopted the Normal probability quantile-quantile (Q-Q) plot to investigate the distribution of the data against the expected normal distribution (Ben & Yohai, 2004). The statistical analysis of H2, 4, 5 revealed that the sample quantiles of residuals appeared to fall along a straight line of the theoretical quantiles. Based on the analysis, we might assume that H 2, 4, and 5 had a normal distribution. However, there was evidence of slight deviations in normality for the regression residuals in the H1 model. The light tail was detected at the low end, resulting in a slightly curved pattern. We could interpret that the sample had a right-skewed distribution which was the characteristic of the sample quantiles being less negative than the expected normal quantiles (Ben & Yohai, 2004). Nevertheless, the sample size in this study reduced the risk of the non-normality affecting regression results (McCarthy et al., 2021; Pek et al., 2018). Pek et al. (2018) revealed that violation of the normality assumption is only a

concern with small sample sizes. Because of the Central Limit Theorem, the assumption is less significant for large sample sizes (Pek et al., 2018). As a result, every assumption was plausible, and the further analysis could be conducted.

Research Model Test

A series of preliminary descriptive analyses and correlation among key variables were analyzed using RStudio (RStudio, Inc., Boston, MA). We then used RStudio to conduct a path analysis to test the hypothesized relationships (RStudio, Inc., Boston, MA). This approach allows one to examine the effects of hypothesized associations between sets of variables by taking all the variables into account simultaneously (Lee & Nie, 2016). When one or more variables are assumed to mediate the relationship between two others, path analysis could be an appropriate analytical technique since it able to investigate both direct and indirect impacts of variables (Kline, 2015; Tackett et al., 2016). The use of Twitter microbloggine for #StopAsianHate and #StopAAPIHate movements was treated as an exogenous variable. The endogenous variables were self-efficacy, sense of community and psychological empowerment. Finally, we used a bootstrapping approach to test the moderated mediation effect. We generated bootstrapped confidence intervals using 5,000 bootstrap samples. The bootstrap is a statistical inference method that draws repeated samples from the population of interest (Fox & Weisberg, 2012). It is a useful approach to tackling the non-normality distributions of the data (Pek et al., 2018).

This study used the following criteria to evaluate the model fit: a comparative fit index (CFI) $\geq$ .90, a Tucker-Lewis index (TLI) $\geq$ .90, a root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) $\leq$ .08, standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) $\leq$ .08 (Kline, 2005). According to the model fit criteria, the proposed model demonstrated a poor fit; $\chi^2(1) = 115.85$;

p = .00, RMSEA = 0.49 (90% CI: .42 to .57), CFI = .88, TLI = .27, SRMR = .08. Table 4, 5, and

Figure 2 show results of the model.

Result hypothesis 1. H1 predicted the positive association between participation in

#StopAsianHate and #StopAAPIHate movements via Twitter microblogging and users'

perceptions that they are capable of using Twitter microblogging to attain the movement goals.

The results indicated that the use of Twitter microblogging showed a positive relationship with

self-efficacy (β = .54, *p* = .00). Therefore, H1 was supported.

Result hypothesis 2. H2 predicted that a higher level of users' perceptions that they are

capable of achieving the #StopAsianHate and #StopAAPIHate movement goals via Twitter

microblogging led to a greater level of psychological empowerment. Results identified that self-

efficacy significantly predicted psychological empowerment (β = .10, *p* = .00). Therefore, H2

was supported.

Result hypothesis 3. H3 predicted that participation in #StopAsianHate and

#StopAAPIHate movements via Twitter microblogging is positively related to psychological

empowerment of the users through the mediating role of self-efficacy. The results revealed that

self-efficacy significantly mediated the effects of the use of Twitter microblogging on

psychological empowerment (*b* = .05, SE = .02, 95% Cis = [.03, .08]). Therefore, the results

were in support of H3.

Result hypothesis 4. H4 predicted the positive relationship between the use of Twitter

microblogging for #StopAsianHate and #StopAAPIHate movements on users' SOC. Results

demonstrated that the use of Twitter microblogging contributed to an increase of SOC of the

users (β = .62, *p* = .00). As a result, H4 was supported.

Result hypothesis 5. H5 predicted that a higher level of the users' SOC lead to a greater level of their psychological empowerment. The results showed that SOC significantly predicted psychological empowerment (β = .30, p = .00). Therefore, H5 was supported.

Result hypothesis 6. H6 predicted the positive relationship between participation in #StopAsianHate and #StopAAPIHate movements via Twitter microblogging and psychological empowerment through the mediating role of a SOC. The results indicated that users' SOC significantly mediated the effects of the use of Twitter microblogging on psychological empowerment (b = .18, SE = .02, 95% Cis = [.15, .23]). Therefore, the results were in support of H6. The results were presented in Figure 2.

This chapter detailed the results of this correlational research analysis. First, descriptive statistics were reported. Next, the path analysis assumptions were presented. Then, this chapter reported research model testing which showed the relationship among variables, as well as statistical hypothesis testing. Chapter 5 discusses the interpretation of the results and presents the limitations of the current study.

Chapter 5: Discussion

This current chapter outlines the theoretical and practical implications of the statistical results. It begins by discussing the interpretations of the statistical results. Then, it explains how this study contributes to the Social Cognitive Theory and psychological empowerment framework. It is followed by the practical implications of this study, including how the findings can benefit individuals experiencing race-based hate crimes. Then, it presents limitations of the current study and suggestions for future studies, which provides a direction for researchers to develop relevant research in the future. Finally, this chapter discusses the importance of this study's results and draws conclusions and recommendations for the individuals, society, and government to support the underrepresented people who face discrimination and racism.

Discussion of Findings

The aim of this research was to examine how the use of Twitter microblogging for online advocacy in a particular case of anti-Asian hate crime protest may affect the psychological empowerment of the users. Our findings indicated that Twitter use for online protest activities positively related to the psychological empowerment of the users, and that self-efficacy and sense of community mediated this relationship. That means the higher the use of Twitter for #StopAsianHate and #StopAAPIHate activism (e.g., tweet, retweet, comment), the more empowered users felt.

Guided by Social Cognitive Theory, we hypothesized that the more one engages on Twitter to express their opinions and support the #StopAsianHate and #StopAAPIHate movements, the higher they believe in their capability. The findings from H1 confirmed the positive correlation between online activism participation on Twitter and the user's self-efficacy. It seems likely that social media allows users to generate content and perform the courses of

action to achieve desired outcomes, making them feel confident, competent, and assertive in their voice (Smith et al., 2015; Stavrositu & Sundar, 2012). In addition, Bandura et al. (1999) offer a relevant explanation for examining self-efficacy in social media that creating content on a public platform requires confidence in one's capability to implement effective and efficient communication (Smith et al., 2015). This might be the reason why participating in online advocacy about the social issue that has a substantial impact on Asian people's lives could lead to an increase in the belief in one's ability to execute the task.

Furthermore, we predicted that the higher degree of the user's belief in their ability to accomplish the goals, the stronger a sense of personal competence, a desire for, and an eagerness to act in the public space (Zimmerman & Rappaport, 1988). The results from H2 suggested that self-efficacy increased the level of one's psychological empowerment. Psychological empowerment is a multidimensional concept consisting of intrapersonal, interactional, and behavioral aspects (Zimmerman, 1995). Control, self-efficacy, and perceived competence are three subdimensions of the intrapersonal component (Li, 2016; Zimmerman, 1995). Conceptually, self-efficacy itself is one of the components of the intrapersonal component (Leung, 2009; Zimmerman, 1995). Moreover, the users who are confident in their capability to perform the actions required to achieve the #StopAsianHate and #StopAAPIHate activism goals are more likely to believe in their ability to exert influence in the #StopAsianHate and #StopAAPIHate community on Twitter. As a result, their intrapersonal aspect of psychological empowerment would develop. The intellectual understanding of one's social surroundings, as well as the resources and information needed to promote changes, is referred to as the interactional component (Zimmerman, 1995). The users could have a strong belief in their ability to plan and achieve their movement goals as a result of obtaining more information about the

#StopAsianHate and #StopAAPIHate campaigns, learning the root causes of racial discrimination, and being well-equipped with knowledge about how to tackle the problems. For example, they may understand more about microaggressions that occur in daily life or the racist rhetoric in the media, and how these factors contribute to the surge of anti-Asian American violence during the COVID-19 pandemic. This knowledge may increase users' interactional component of psychological empowerment. Finally, the behavioral component refers to the empowered behaviors that have the potential to impact outcomes (Zimmerman, 1995). When the users feel confident in their ability to accomplish their #StopAsianHate and #StopAAPIHate activism goals, they are more likely to take action to combat systemic racism and xenophobia, enhancing the behavioral component of psychological empowerment.

Taken together, we anticipated that the use of Twitter for online protest has an indirect impact on psychological empowerment through self-efficacy. Even though the use of Twitter microblogging for activism is quite strongly associated with psychological empowerment, we found that self-efficacy mediated the effect of the use of Twitter microblogging regarding #StopAsianHate and #StopAAPIHate on psychological empowerment. A study on social media and empowerment proposed that self-efficacy is one of the key mechanisms underlying the association between blogging and psychological empowerment (Riquelme et al., 2018; Stavrositu & Sundar, 2012). Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (1977) may be utilized as an alternative explanation for how psychological empowerment could develop in the contexts of online activism participation. Social Cognitive Theory addresses the triangular interactions between individual factors including cognitive, behavioral, and environmental elements (Bandura, 1977; Chin & Mansori, 2018). It can be explained that the psychological empowerment of Twitter users which is considered an outcome expectation (behavioral) can be

achieved through participation in #StopAsianHate and #StopAAPIHate movements on Twitter (environmental), with the support of one's self-efficacy (cognitive).

We expected that users who frequently take part in #StopAsianHate and #StopAAPIHate activism on Twitter would perceive that they belong to and connect with the #StopAsianHate and #StopAAPIHate communities. A previous study suggested a positive correlation between blogging and a sense of community (Riquelme et al., 2018; Stavrositu & Sundar, 2012). In accordance with previous literature, the results from H4 indicated that Twitter users who reported greater use of Twitter for the #StopAsianHate and #StopAAPIHate movements also showed a stronger sense of community. Blanchard (2004) explained that the amount of time and frequency of blog reading are important indicators of a sense of community. Another explanation comes from the four subdimensions of a sense of community – feelings of membership, feelings of influence, integration, and fulfillment of needs, and shared emotional connection (McMillan & Chavis,1986). Features of Twitter microblogging encourage users to engage in dialogues with other users in a variety of ways such as tweeting their opinions, retweeting to share the information with followers, and replying to threads, which could foster the formation of virtual communities (Stavrositu & Sundar, 2012). Previous literature described that the ability to interact with other users provided by Twitter enhances users' sense of community (Blanchard, 2004). Twitter allows Asian users who face stigma and discrimination or have mutual interests in racial equity to exchange conversations and share resources regarding #StopAsianHate and #StopAAPIHate activism. For these reasons, the feeling of influence and integration, and fulfillment of needs may be increased as a result of interactions, exchanges of conversation, and the community's support. The users joining #StopAsianHate and #StopAAPIHate activism on Twitter are able to relate and empathize with other users who encounter racial prejudice,

discrimination, and violence. These common experiences and the identification with the group may then lead to feelings of membership and shared emotional connection. Finally, in a socially cohesive environment where citizens are willing to engage in activities that improve their neighborhood and reduce crime, a sense of community is more likely to develop (Aiyer et al., 2015). Our result could explain why participating in #StopAsianHate and #StopAAPIHate movements on the Twitter community to protest against the surge of xenophobic hate crime and anti-Asian American violence could increase users' perceptions of belonging and being a part of the larger community.

Next, we hypothesized that the sense of community would positively affect users' psychological empowerment status. Our results from H5 indicated that sense of community significantly predicted the psychological empowerment of the users. The findings were consistent with prior research that the person who possesses a stronger sense of belonging and connection with a certain group or community would be more likely to feel psychologically empowered (Riquelme et al., 2018; Stavrositu & Sundar, 2012). Existing literature explained that the capability of the internet community to connect groups of oppressed individuals seeking social support has been described as an example of structural empowerment, one of the three main pillars of the empowerment process (Ammari & Schoenebeck, 2015; Tye et al., 2018). Furthermore, organizations that actively function as bridges, connecting individuals to interplay with institutions in their communities, could be successful in promoting empowerment (Hughey et al., 2008). Based on our study, the #StopAsianHate and #StopAAPIHate movements are the advocacy organization that represents and connects groups of people who want to end the violence against Asian communities, hence, joining it could effectively enhance the sense of empowerment of the participants.

Lastly, the researcher expected that Twitter use for #StopAsianHate and #StopAAPIHate movements would correlate with psychological empowerment indirectly through the sense of community. The results from the mediation analysis confirmed that with the mediating role of the sense of community, participation in #StopAsianHate and #StopAAPIHate movements via Twitter microblogging increased one's psychological empowerment. It has been proposed that participation is an important mechanism for promoting social change, improving the community's social, economic, political, and environmental conditions, strengthening social relationships among members and their sense of belonging to the community, and stimulating individual and collective well-being. (Cicognani et al., 2015; Wandersman & Florin, 2000). In accordance with a prior study, the social media platform allows users to create and access virtual communities where they can interact and engage in collective action. As a result of their engagement, users develop a sense of community, which leads to psychological empowerment as well as the ability to create new possibilities (Riquelme et al., 2018; Samman & Santos, 2009).

We saw the evidence of mediating effect of self-efficacy and sense of community on the relationship between Twitter microblogging and psychological empowerment. That is, Twitter microblogging increased the user's level of psychological empowerment through self-efficacy in H3 and Twitter microblogging led to a higher level of psychological empowerment via sense of community in H6. However, based on the path analysis, we could not conclude that self-efficacy and sense of community worked together to create the mediating effect between Twitter and psychological empowerment since the research model was poorly fit. One explanation might be that the empowering effect through self-efficacy does not suit very well in the context of activism against Asian racism, which is a multifaceted and deeply rooted structural problem involving several factors (Evans, 2021). Therefore, the users might feel uncertain about their

capacity as an individual to challenge the long history of anti-Asian American discrimination and deep-seated racism in the U.S. On the other hand, through the sense of community route, the empowering has shown a better fit. It could be because the users feel that collective actions and collaborative efforts with others in the community could affect societal changes.

Theoretical Implications

Our finding adds to the body of research that active participation in the racial justice movement makes the participants feel psychologically empowered. The findings yield theoretical contribution in three ways: (a) expanding the scope of the Social Cognitive Theory to social movements in the realm of user-generated social media; (b) elucidating the mediating effects of self-efficacy and sense of community as key mediators between psychological empowerment and the use of Twitter microblogging for online activism; and (c) confirming three focal aspects of psychological empowerment in the specific context of online protest. Firstly, we extend the usage of Social Cognitive Theory to explain how social media engagement can be utilized to promote psychological empowerment. The Social Cognitive Theory framework is based on the premise that individual learning is part of a triadic reciprocal structure in which behavior, personal and environmental factors continually impact each other. In this study, the Twitter hashtags #StopAsianHate and #StopAAPIHate serve as environmental factors that informs, enables, and provides social support to Asian users who experience racial prejudice or who wish to show solidarity with the Asian community. Next, this study confirms the clear articulation of two parallel theoretical paths towards psychological empowerment drawn from the use of Twitter microblogging for online movement. The first way that psychological empowerment can be developed is through self-efficacy. It suggests that participation in social media movements increases the belief in one's capacity to affect change. Therefore, empowerment at the individual

level can be achieved. Another mechanism is through the sense of community. This suggests that the movement participation in a virtual community could help ones gain a sense of community, and as a result, increase users' psychological empowerment. Finally, we advanced knowledge about the crucial elements of psychological empowerment in the field of digital activism. There are various debates on whether to include the behavioral aspect only when measuring empowerment as an outcome (Li, 2016; Speer et al., 2013) or to incorporate all three facets in both empowering processes and empowered outcomes (Stavrositu & Sundar, 2012; Zimmerman, 1995). This study demonstrated that empowered outcomes at the individual level in the cyberactivism context should comprise all three components: intrapersonal, interactional, and behavioral empowerment. The behavioral aspect is an important factor that helps researchers understand the engagement patterns and participatory behaviors of community members (Pinkett & O'Bryant, 2003). As this study focuses on empowerment as an outcome, integrating the behavioral element allows researchers to assess the actions taken to exert influence and measures community involvement (Pinkett & O'Bryant, 2003; Zimmerman, 1995).

Practical Implications

By demonstrating the psychological empowerment impact on Asian users through Twitter activism participation, our findings have direct practical implications for members of underrepresented groups. Individuals who need support, seek external validation, and/or feel powerless and threaten from the discriminatory acts can utilize microblogging to express their voice or connect with groups of like-minded people in virtual communities to become empowered (Stavrositu & Sundar, 2012).

Given that empowerment develops via two means: self-efficacy and sense of community, it implies that the local communities can encourage empowerment for their members by

improving their perceptions of self-efficacy and participating in virtual space, as well as increasing their sense of community by facilitating online collective actions. For example, a school may suggest microblogging platforms for students to discuss their concerns, share their experiences, and reach out and assist others who are coping with similar situations. Additionally, online communities can be created on purpose to be a safe space for people impacted by racism (Riquelme et al., 2018).

During a pandemic, misleading and biased media coverage can exacerbate fear and misperceptions, leading to an increase in race-based crimes and discrimination (Misra et al., 2020; Wen et al., 2020). To tackle this stigmatization, media practitioners could challenge stereotypes by actively presenting positive media campaigns to combat negative media portrayal, counter misinformation, and decrease prejudice (Clement et al., 2013; Knifton & Quinn, 2008).

At the federal level, rapid response from the appropriate entities is required. For example, national leaders and public officials should denounce and condemn all forms of anti-Asian racism linked to COVID-19 to express the solidarity with Asian Americans (Misra et al., 2020). Policymakers should strengthen civil rights legislation that address discrimination in public venues so that Asian people could safely reside and live in the city without fear of being harmed (Braun, 2021). Furthermore, proper fund for community-based organizations, which are frequently the first responders to the hate incidents, should be provided to build a strong civil rights infrastructure at the local scale (Braun, 2021).

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Directions

Although significant findings were obtained, a few limitations of this study should be acknowledged. First, it is important to consider the time frame of data collection. The #StopAsianHate and #StopAAPIHate hashtags were created in March 2021 and reached its peak

on March 19, 2021 (Lyu et al., 2021). However, the questionnaire was launched on Prolific.co on 17 December 2021, and data was completely collected on 19 December 2021. In the survey, some of the questions required participants to answer the frequency of their engagement in the hashtags which might affect people's perception towards the severity of the situation and how well they recalled their past memories. Nevertheless, this study aims to understand users' general perception of how their participation in #StopAsianHate and #StopAAPIHate movements impacts their psychological empowerment status, therefore, this issue is somewhat less of a concern.

Secondly, Twitter is a text-based social medium. This research can only examine the empowering effects on literate populations while neglecting the empowerment impact on communities with less literacy. Future research could conduct an in-depth interview to include illiterate groups and learn more about how their personal experiences contribute to Twitter using habit, self-efficacy, sense of community, and psychological empowerment. A focus group might allow the researcher to observe the interaction between members within the group to study the sense of community through a qualitative lens and gain a better understanding of some aspects that could not be obtained through survey research.

Next, the findings do not allow the generalization to the broader Asian American population. This is due to the self-selection bias that certain people are more inclined than others to complete an online survey (Wright, 2005). Even though previous studies discovered that data from crowdworking platforms (e.g., MTurk or Prolific) could potentially be representative of the internet population (Palan & Schitter, 2018; Paolacci & Chandler, 2014), workers from online panels are likely to be younger and more educated than average Americans (Smith et al., 2016). Therefore, the responses from online survey pools might not accurately reflect the general views

of Asian Americans on race-motivated hate crimes. Researchers might consider employing a more diverse and representative sample to investigate similar mechanisms.

Lastly, the empowering effect of online activism may differ for different demographics (e.g., Black, Hispanic groups) and platforms (e.g., Tiktok, Facebook). Various factors such as their social circumstances, psychological status, and social and economic backgrounds could influence how individuals use Twitter for activism and how they perceive their ability to create change in one's environments. In a future study, scholars could include demographic variables as control variables when analyzing the data, recruit the participants from other locations (e.g., Asian countries), or use a different social media platform to widely test the potential of social media to empower users.

Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic is connected to an increase in stigma and prejudice against Asians (Misra et al., 2020). Racism has a detrimental influence on a person's mental health (e.g., stress, depression, anxiety, low self-esteem) (Jun et al., 2021) and these mental well-being factors are likely to have a negative impact on perceived control over a difficult life circumstances among minorities (Frost et al., 2019; Jun et al., 2021). Our research delves into the premise that social media's connectivity, visibility, and virtual cooperation grant power to marginalized populations (Fieseler & Fleck, 2013; Smith et al., 2015). We hypothesized that using Twitter for #StopAsianHate and #StopAAPIHate advocacy would positively promote empowerment for Asian users at the individual level through self-efficacy and a sense of community.

Overall, our findings support the assumption that Asian users can become psychologically empowered by engagement in Twitter activism. Participation in #StopAsianHate

and #StopAAPIHate movements allows Asian users to gain self-efficacy as they take action to tackle the issues that have a direct effect on themselves and their community. Users could gain psychological empowerment through an increase in their belief that the actions they accomplish will have an impact on their environment. However, sense of community plays a greater role in fostering the perception of being psychologically empowered than does self-efficacy.

The alarming number of hate crimes against Asian Americans is not only the result of COVID-19 blame attribution and racist rhetoric but part of the structural roots of racial hierarchy, deeply ingrained systemic racism, model minority myth, and a long-standing "yellow peril" stereotype (Cao et al., 2022; Chen & Wu, 2021). This thesis hopes to be another attempt in combating xenophobia by providing a tool to Asian communities and individuals who feel powerless to strengthen their mental well-being. However, to achieve racial equity, collaborative actions and effort from every sector are required for major systemic changes (USCDornsife, 2021).

Appendices

Appendix A. Tables and Figures

Table 1

Demographic information (N= 474)

Demographics		Frequency	Percent (%)
Gender	1. Female	274	57.8
	2. Male	190	40.1
	3. Non-Binary	9	1.9
	4. Prefer not to respond	1	0.2
Age	$M = 22.9$ ($SD = 3.1$)		
Ethnicity	1. Asian	474	100
Income	1. Less than $20,000	58	12.2
	2. $20,000 to $34,999	57	12.0
	3. $35,000 to $49,999	55	11.6
	4. $50,000 to $74,999	85	17.9
	5. $75,000 to $99,999	75	15.8
	6. Over $100,000	113	23.8
	7. Prefer not to respond	31	6.5
Education Level	1. Less than high school degree	1	0.2
	2. High school graduate (high school diploma or equivalent including GED)	58	12.2
	3. Some college (without a degree)	132	27.8

4. Associate's Degree in college (2-year)	28	5.9
5. Bachelor's Degree in college (4-year)	204	43.0
6. Master's Degree	34	7.2
7. Doctorate Degree	6	1.3
8. Professional Degree (JD, MD)	10	2.1
9. Prefer not to respond	1	0.2

Table 2

Mean, Standard Deviation, and Reliability of The Use of Twitter Microblogging for Activism

Purposes (N=474)

Variables	Measures	M (SD)	Cronbach's Alpha
The Use of Twitter Microblogging for Activism Purposes (TA): 2.61 (1.65)			
TA 1	I openly expressed my opinion about the #StopAsianHate and #StopAAPIHate movements through tweets, retweets, or comments.	2.80 (2.00)	.90
TA 2	I tried to persuade other people to agree with my opinion during conversation on Twitter.	2.25 (1.77)	
TA 3	I changed a profile picture, biography, or profile on Twitter in order to support the #StopAsianHate and #StopAAPIHate movements.	1.92 (1.67)	
TA 4	I signed online petitions related to the #StopAsianHate and #StopAAPIHate movements I saw on Twitter.	3.43 (2.26)	
TA 5	I used #StopAsianHate and/or #StopAAPIHate hashtags to support the #StopAsianHate and #StopAAPIHate movements.	2.64 (2.06)	

Table 3

Mean, Standard Deviation, and Reliability of Self-efficacy (N=474)

Variables	Measures	M (SD)	Cronbach's Alpha
Self-Efficacy (SE): 3.75 (1.60)			
SE 1	Use Twitter to express your opinions regarding the #StopAsianHate and #StopAAPIHate movements.	3.90 (2.12)	.91
SE 2	Influence others on Twitter regarding the #StopAsianHate and #StopAAPIHate issues.	3.28 (1.85)	
SE 3	Use Twitter to obtain a civic objective of #StopAsianHate and #StopAAPIHate movements.	3.37 (1.89)	
SE 4	Gather relevant online resources to express opinions about the #StopAsianHate and #StopAAPIHate movements.	4.26 (1.92)	
SE 5	Keep informed about the #StopAsianHate and #StopAAPIHate movements using Twitter.	4.74 (1.91)	
SE 6	Argue effectively with others using Twitter about #StopAsianHate and #StopAAPIHate movements.	2.96 (1.81)	

Table 4

Mean, Standard Deviation, and Reliability of Sense of Community (N=474)

Variables	Measures	M (SD)	Cronbach's Alpha
Sense of Community (SOC): 3.45 (1.51)			
SOC 1	I can get what I need in this #StopAsianHate and #StopAAPIHate Twitter community.	3.41 (1.58)	.95
SOC 2	Twitter community helps me fulfill my #StopAsianHate and #StopAAPIHate movement objectives.	3.26 (1.66)	
SOC 3	I feel like a member of this #StopAsianHate and #StopAAPIHate Twitter community.	3.40 (1.88)	
SOC 4	I belong in this #StopAsianHate and #StopAAPIHate Twitter community.	3.74 (1.83)	
SOC 5	I have a say about what goes on in #StopAsianHate and #StopAAPIHate Twitter community.	3.24 (1.81)	
SOC 6	In this #StopAsianHate and #StopAAPIHate Twitter community, users are good at influencing each another.	3.79 (1.65)	
SOC 7	I feel connected to this #StopAsianHate and #StopAAPIHate Twitter community.	3.53 (1.85)	
SOC 8	I have a good bond with other users in this #StopAsianHate and #StopAAPIHate Twitter community.	3.20 (1.77)	

Table 5

Mean, Standard Deviation, and Reliability of Psychological Empowerment (N=474)

Variables	Measures	M (SD)	Cronbach's Alpha
Psychological Empowerment (PE): 4.08 (.90)			
PE 1	I like trying new things that are challenging to me.	4.72 (1.50)	.87
PE 2	I would prefer to be a leader rather than a follower.	3.81 (1.70)	
PE 3	I like to work on solving a problem myself instead of letting someone else do it.	4.93 (1.44)	
PE 4	I participate in my school or community because I want my views to be heard.	3.75 (1.64)	
PE 5	I understand the important issues affecting my community or school.	4.61 (1.45)	
PE 6	It is important to me that I actively participate in local issues.	4.04 (1.58)	
PE 7	Only by working together can we make changes in the society.	5.66 (1.25)	
PE 8	Those with power try to stop people who challenge them too much.	5.49 (1.32)	
PE 9	When community members raise issues, communities ignore the issues they don't agree with.	4.93 (1.31)	
PE 10	If people are making changes in society, sooner or later, they will face difficulties.	5.15 (1.38)	
PE 11	Adults with power such as politicians reward community members that work for changes that these adults want to have happened.	4.14 (1.51)	
PE 12	The only way I can affect community issues is by working with others in my community.	5.11 (1.29)	
PE 13	Signed a petition related to the #StopAsianHate and #StopAAPIHate movements.	3.44 (2.22)	
PE 14	Participated in a #StopAsianHate and #StopAAPIHate protest march or rally.	1.96 (1.65)	
PE 15	Attended an online and/or offline public meeting about the #StopAsianHate and #StopAAPIHate movements to pressure for a policy change.	2.20 (1.83)	
PE 16	Had an in-depth conversation about the #StopAsianHate and #StopAAPIHate movements that affecting your community.	3.28 (2.05)	
PE 17	Attended a #StopAsianHate and #StopAAPIHate meeting to gather information about the issues.	2.12 (1.74)	

Table 6

Pearson's Correlations between Variables (N=474)

Construct	The Use of Twitter Microblogging for Activism Purposes	Self-Efficacy	Sense of Community	Psychological Empowerment
The Use of Twitter Microblogging for Activism Purposes	1.00			
Self-Efficacy	.56***	1.00		
Sense of Community	.68***	.68***	1.00	
Psychological Empowerment	.69***	.51***	.61***	1.00
Means	2.61	3.75	3.45	4.08
SD	1.65	1.60	1.51	.90

Note. *** $p < .001$.

Table 7

Results of Path Analysis between Variables

Paths	Estimated β	SE	p
The Use of Twitter Microblogging for Activism Purposes → Self Efficacy	.54	.03	. 00****
The Use of Twitter Microblogging for Activism Purposes → Sense of Community	.62	.03	. 00****
Self Efficacy → Psychological Empowerment	.10	.03	. 00***
Sense of Community → Psychological Empowerment	.30	.03	. 00****

* *p* < .05, ** *p* < .01, *** *p* < .001

Table 8

Indirect Effects between Variables

Mediation Path	*b*	SE	95% Confidence Interval	
			Lower CI	Upper CI
TA → Self-Efficacy → Psychological Empowerment	.05	.02	.03	.08
TA → Sense of Community → Psychological Empowerment	.18	.02	.15	.23

Note. TA = The use of Twitter Microblogging for Activism purposes
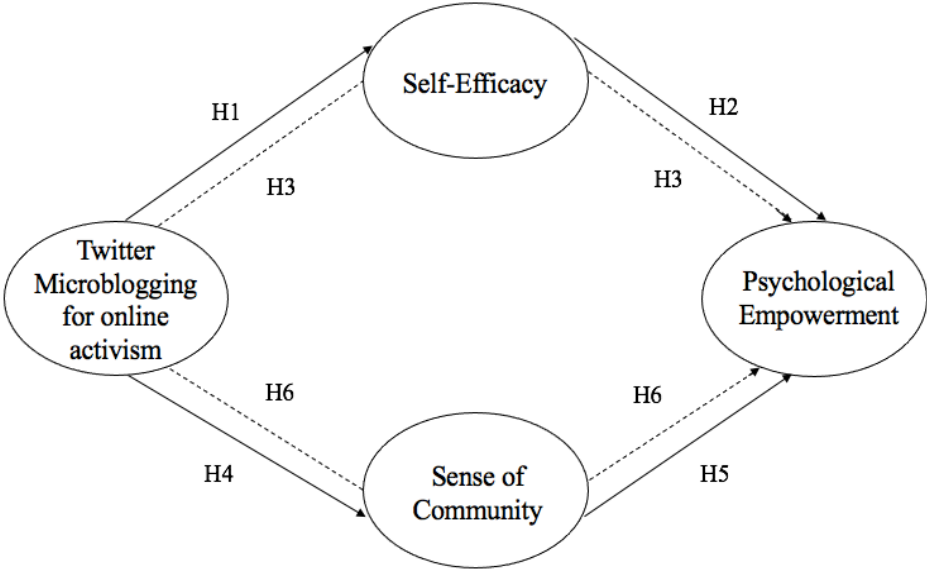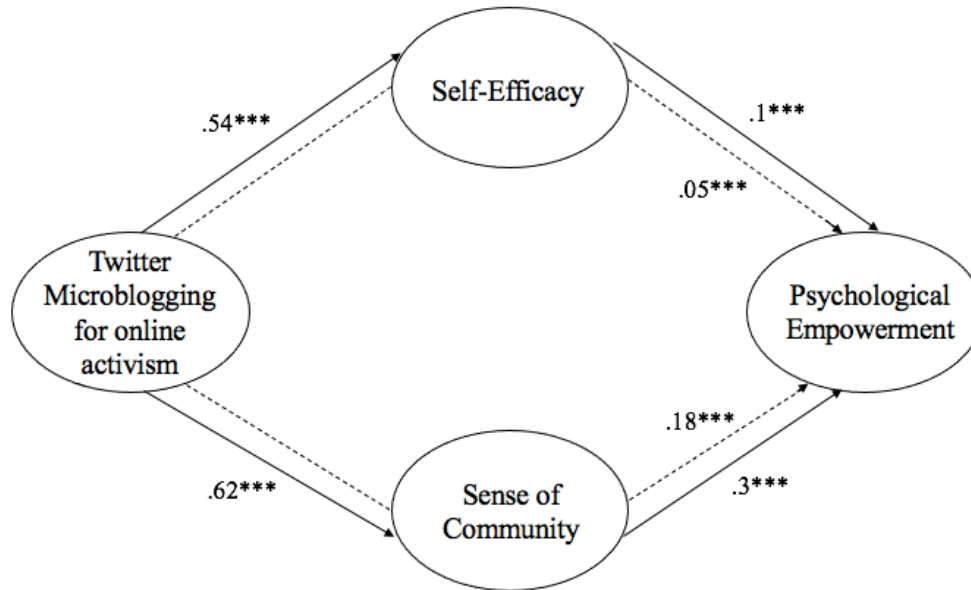
Figure 1

Research Model

Figure 2

Standardized Path Coefficients for Analyzed Model

Note. All the numbers are standardized beta coefficients. *** *p* < .001.

Appendix B. Institutional Review Board Memorandum

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
MEMORANDUM

TO: Carol Liebler
DATE: December 14, 2021
SUBJECT: **Determination of Exemption from Regulations**
IRB #: 21-349
TITLE: *The Psychological Empowerment Impact of Twitter Microblogging: The Case of #StopAsianHate During COVID-19 Pandemic*

The above referenced application, submitted for consideration as exempt from federal regulations as defined in 45 C.F.R. 46, has been evaluated by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the following:

1. determination that it falls within one or more of the eight exempt categories allowed by the organization;
2. determination that the research meets the organization's ethical standards.

It has been determined by the IRB this protocol qualifies for exemption and has been assigned to category **2**. This authorization will remain active for a period of five years from **December 14, 2021** until **December 13, 2026**.

CHANGES TO PROTOCOL: Proposed changes to this protocol during the period for which IRB authorization has already been given, cannot be initiated without additional IRB review. If there is a change in your research, you should notify the IRB immediately to determine whether your research protocol continues to qualify for exemption or if submission of an expedited or full board IRB protocol is required. Information about the University's human participants protection program can be found at: http://researchintegrity.syr.edu/human-research/. Protocol changes are requested on an amendment application available on the IRB web site; please reference your IRB number and attach any documents that are being amended.

STUDY COMPLETION: Study completion is when all research activities are complete or when a study is closed to enrollment and only data analysis remains on data that have been de-identified. A Study Closure Form should be completed and submitted to the IRB for review (Study Closure Form).

Thank you for your cooperation in our shared efforts to assure that the rights and welfare of people participating in research are protected.

Tracy J. Cromp
Tracy Cromp, M.S.W.
Director

Natnaree Wongmith

DEPT: Mass Communications, Newhouse II - 352   **STUDENT:** Natnaree Wongmith

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Appendix C. Informed Consent

Informed Consent Form

A study of #StopAsianHate and #StopAAPIHate in Twitter microblogging

My name is Natnaree Wongmith. I am a graduate student at S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications, working under the guidance of Professor Carol Liebler.

We are interested in learning more about your experience on #StopAsianHate and #StopAAPIHate using Twitter microblogging. You will be asked to complete a survey about your Twitter using habits and your sense of empowerment. You will be asked to tell us about your Twitter engagement and perceptions of empowerment related to #StopAsianHate and #StopAAPIHate movements. You will also be asked to answer some demographic questions. This survey will not involve any deception. You will not be given inaccurate or misleading information about the study throughout your participation. Completing the survey should take approximately 7 minutes of your time.

You are invited to participate in a research study. Involvement in the study is voluntary. It means you can choose whether to participate and that you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. Participants in this study are entitled to earn monetary compensation of $1.11 upon completing tasks. In case of withdrawal, only participants who complete at least 50 percent of the questionnaire will earn full amount of compensation.

Whenever one works with email or the internet, there is always the risk of compromising privacy, confidentiality, and/or anonymity. Your confidentiality will be maintained to the degree permitted by the technology being used. It is important for you to understand that no guarantees can be made regarding the interception of data sent via the internet by third parties.

If you have any questions, concerns or complaints about the research please contact Natnaree Wongmith (nwongmit@syr.edu), or Dr. Carol Liebler (cmlieble@syr.edu).

By Clicking "Yes," I acknowledge the following statements:

I am at least 18 years old, and I wish to participate in this research study.

(1) Yes, I have read this and agree to continue.

(2) No, I want to quit this study.

Appendix D. Survey Questionnaire Items

<u>**Survey Instructions:**</u>

Please read all instructions and questions carefully, and **CHOOSE** the most appropriate answer.

Section A (The use of Twitter for activism purposes)

Please CHOOSE the most appropriate answer that best describes your experience in using Twitter in the #StopAsianHate and #StopAAPIHate movements. (A 7-point scale ranging from "*Never*" to "*Very Frequently*")

1. I openly expressed my opinion about the #StopAsianHate and #StopAAPIHate movements through tweets, retweets, or comments.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2. I tried to persuade other people to agree with my opinion during conversation on Twitter.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3. I changed a profile picture, biography, or profile on Twitter in order to support the #StopAsianHate and #StopAAPIHate movements.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4. I signed online petitions related to the #StopAsianHate and #StopAAPIHate movements I saw on Twitter.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
5. I used #StopAsianHate and #StopAAPIHate hashtag to support the #StopAsianHate and #StopAAPIHate movements on Twitter.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Section B (Self-efficacy)

Please CHOOSE the most appropriate answer that best describes your experience "How certain are you that you can accomplish the following #StopAsianHate and #StopAAPIHate movements related activities using Twitter?". (A 7-point scale ranging from "Very uncertain" to "Very certain")

1. Use social Twitter to express your opinions regarding the #StopAsianHate and #StopAAPIHate movements.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

2. Influence others on Twitter regarding the #StopAsianHate and #StopAAPIHate issues.

   1   2   3   4   5   6   7

3. Use Twitter to obtain a civic objective of the #StopAsianHate and #StopAAPIHate movements.

   1   2   3   4   5   6   7

4. Gather relevant online resources to express opinions about the #StopAsianHate and #StopAAPIHate movements.

   1   2   3   4   5   6   7

5. Keep informed about the #StopAsianHate and #StopAAPIHate movements using Twitter.

   1   2   3   4   5   6   7

6. Argue effectively with others using Twitter about the #StopAsianHate and #StopAAPIHate movements.

   1   2   3   4   5   6   7

Section C (Sense of community)

Please CHOOSE the most appropriate answer that best describes your experience in using Twitter about the #StopAsianHate and #StopAAPIHate movements. (A 7-point Likert scale ranging from "Strongly disagree" to "Strongly agree")

1. I can get what I need in this #StopAsianHate and #StopAAPIHate Twitter community.

   1   2   3   4   5   6   7

2. Twitter community helps me fulfill my #StopAsianHate and #StopAAPIHate movement objectives.

   1   2   3   4   5   6   7

3. I feel like a member of this #StopAsianHate and #StopAAPIHate Twitter community.

   1   2   3   4   5   6   7

4. I belong in this #StopAsianHate and #StopAAPIHate Twitter community.

   1   2   3   4   5   6   7

5. I have a say about what goes on in #StopAsianHate and #StopAAPIHate Twitter community.

   1   2   3   4   5   6   7

6. In this #StopAsianHate and #StopAAPIHate Twitter community, users are good at influencing each another.

   1   2   3   4   5   6   7

7. I feel connected to this #StopAsianHate and #StopAAPIHate Twitter community.

   1   2   3   4   5   6   7

| 8. I have a good bond with other users in this #StopAsianHate and #StopAAPIHate Twitter community. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |

Section D (Psychological Empowerment: Intrapersonal and Interactional component)

Please CHOOSE the most appropriate answer that best describes your experience in using Twitter about the #StopAsianHate and #StopAAPIHate movements. (A 7-point Likert scale ranging from "Strongly disagree" to "Strongly agree")

1. I like trying new things that are challenging to me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2. I would prefer to be a leader rather than a follower.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3. I like to work on solving a problem myself instead of letting someone else do it.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4. I participate in my school or community because I want my views to be heard.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
5. I understand the important issues affecting my community or school.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
6. It is important to me that I actively participate in local issues.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
7. Only by working together can we make changes in the society.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8. Those with power try to stop people who challenge them too much.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
9. When community members raise issues, communities ignore the issues they don't agree with.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
10. If people are making changes in society, sooner or later, they will face difficulties.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
11. Adults with power such as politicians reward community members that work for changes that these adults want to have happened.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
12. The only way I can affect community issues is by working with others in my community.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Section E (Psychological Empowerment: Behavioral component)

Please RATE your frequency of involvement in using Twitter about the #StopAsianHate and #StopAAPIHate movements. (A 7-point scale ranging from "*Never*" to "*Very Frequently*")

1. Signed a petition related to the #StopAsianHate and #StopAAPIHate movements.   1   2   3   4   5   6   7

2. Participated in a #StopAsianHate and #StopAAPIHate protest march or rally.   1   2   3   4   5   6   7

3. Attended an online and/or offline public meeting about the #StopAsianHate and #StopAAPIHate movements to pressure for a policy change.   1   2   3   4   5   6   7

4. Had an in-depth conversation about the #StopAsianHate and #StopAAPIHate movements that affecting your community.   1   2   3   4   5   6   7

5. Attended a #StopAsianHate and #StopAAPIHate meetings to gather information about the issues.   1   2   3   4   5   6   7

Section F (Demographic)

1. Approximately, how much time do you spend on Twitter per day?

Hours of Twitter use: _____ (Select from slider)

2. What is your age? (Please enter your age. For example, "25" means you are 25 years old.)

Age: _____ (Short answer space)

3. What gender do you identify as?

A. Male

B. Female

C. Non-binary

D. Prefer to self describe (please specify) _____

E. Prefer not to answer.

4. Please specify your ethnicity.

A. Caucasian

B. African-American

C. Latino or Hispanic

D. Asian

E. Native American/ Alaska Native

F. Native Hawaiian/ Pacific Islander

G. Multiracial (please specify) _____

H. Other (please specify) _____

I. Prefer not to answer.

5. What is your nationality?: _____ (Short answer space)

6. What is the highest degree or level of education you have completed?

A. Less than high school degree

B. High school graduate (high school diploma or equivalent including GED)

C. Some college but no degree

D. Associate degree in college (2-year)

E. Bachelor's degree in college (4-year)

F. Master's degree

G. Doctoral degree

H. Professional degree (JD, MD)

G. Prefer not to answer.

7. Which of the following best describes your annual household income last year?

A. Less than $20,000

B. $20,000 to $34,999

C. $35,000 to $49,999

D. $50,000 to $74,999

E. $75,000 to $99,999

F. Over $100,000

G. Prefer not to answer.

8. In which state or U.S. territory do you currently reside?

State: _____ (Select from drop-down)

THANK YOU FOR PARTICIPATING IN THIS STUDY.

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Education
M.A. in Media Studies (Expected in Summer, 2022)
> S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications, *Syracuse University*
> Thesis Topic: *The Psychological Empowerment Impact of Twitter Microblogging: The Case of #StopAsianHate during COVID-19 Pandemic*
> Advisor: Prof. Carol M. Liebler

B.A. in Communication Arts (2016)
> *Chulalongkorn University*. Area of Study: Journalism, Television and Radio

Research Interests
My research interests are in racial and gender equality. I study the psychological implications of social media use. My research focuses on discovering the function of social media in supporting users in developing their psychological empowerment.

Refereed Conference Papers
Wongmith, N., & Lee, H. (2022). *The Effects of Psychological Empowerment in Twitter Microblogging: The Case of #StopAsianHate During the COVID-19 Pandemic*. Presented to the Activism, Communication and Social Justice Interest Group of the annual conference of the ICA, Paris, France.

Lee, H., Kim, S. J., Lee, S., Wongmith, N., & Chock, T. M. (2021). *Confusion about the Coronavirus: The effects of uncertainty on information seeking behaviors*. Presented to the CT&M Division of the annual conference of the AEJMC, Virtual Conference.

Lee, H., Kim, S. J., Yao, S., Lee, S., Wongmith, N., & Chock, T. M. (2021). *The Harder the Battle, the More We Talk: The Effects of Perceived Risk of Player-death on Game Enjoyment in a Mobile FPS Game*. Presented to the Game Studies Division of the annual conference of the ICA, Virtual Conference.

Experience
Syracuse University, S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications
2018-2019   Research Assistant; Prof. Carolyn D. Hedges
> Assisted Prof. Hedges with the #MeToo in reality TV research project
> Reviewing related literature on the #MeToo in reality TV research project
> Digitizing and organizing data into charts and tables
> Collecting data from social media platforms (e.g., Twitter, Reddit) and articles
> Analyzing data using both qualitative and quantitative methods