

Using AsianCrit Theory to Assess Asian Prejudice in Policymakers' Statements on Twitter

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When the COVID-19 coronavirus spread worldwide, the World Health Organization (WHO) advised against using terms like “Wuhan virus” or “Chinese virus” to avoid a backlash against Asian Americans. Former U.S. President Donald Trump rejected such a notion and tweeted more than 20 times from March 16 to March 30, 2020, calling COVID-19 a “Chinese Virus.” After his first tweet, #chinesevirus tweets climbed more than 10 times, causing backlash against the communities. This study employed AsianCrit Theory to examine messages sent by 116th U.S. Congress members who tweeted about the pandemic using stereotypical terminology such as “China Virus,” “Kung Flu,” “Foreign Virus,” “Wuhan

Virus,” and “Chinese Virus.” Trump and Congress members who used derogatory words or had blaming-China sentiments contributed to Asianization, one of the seven tenets of AsianCrit Theory. Additionally, Asian American members of U.S. Congress shared their experiences, perspectives, and policy initiatives in a way that aligned with the AsianCrit tenet of (re)constructive history, where marginalized voices shape historical narratives and perspectives of the Asian community for future generations. Additional tenets are also discussed in the findings.

Keywords: Asian Critical Race Theory, China Virus, 116th U.S. Congress, X

C OVID-19 was the deadliest epidemic in recent history, posing economic, environmental, social, and public health threats. For Asian American communities, they face more bigotry, discrimination, and violence as COVID-19 spreads (Borja & Gibson, 2020). According to Borja and Gibson (2020), 1,023 hate incidents occurred in 2020, including physical harassment and violence, verbal harassment, avoidance and non-verbal harassment, vandalism, and stigmatizing statements. In a Pew Research Center survey, more than 50% of Asian American adults reported racial discrimination or unfair treatment based on their ethnicity or race, with 53% reporting occasional discrimination and 5% reporting regular discrimination (Ruiz et al., 2023). Outside of the United States, the pandemic also significantly impacted the bilateral relationship between China and the United States regarding public sentiment, economic ties, and trust strategies (Yuan, 2020).

When the coronavirus spread worldwide, the World Health Organization (WHO) advised against using terms like “Wuhan virus” or “Chinese virus” to avoid a backlash against Asian Americans (2020). Former US President Donald Trump rejected this notion and tweeted more than 20 times from March 16 to March 30, 2020, referring to COVID-19 as a “Chinese Virus” (Viala-Gaudafroy & Lindaman, 2020). After his first tweet, #chinesevirus tweets climbed more than 10 times, causing a backlash against the communities. Trump’s actions prompted criticism from other politicians, including 116th Congress members. Several Congressmen advised their followers to avoid xenophobia. At the same time, most members of Congress use it to endorse Trump and promote Asian American prejudice on Twitter (now X), causing a political division.

Recently, some studies have been done related to anti-Asian discrimination. Liu (2023) conducted an experimental study investigating how discrete factors mediate and how racial prejudice moderate specific effects on audiences about anti-Asian hate crimes stories, while Zheng and Zompetti (2023) assess the topics discussed in Trump’s tweets that pertain to COVID-19. While studies have addressed this issue, none have used Asian Critical Race Theory (AsianCrit).

Using AsianCrit, this particular study examines the messages sent by the 116th U.S. Congress members who tweeted about the pandemic using stereotypical terminology such as “China Virus,” “Kung Flu,” “Foreign Virus,” “Wuhan Virus,” and “Chinese Virus.” Based on Borja and Gibson (2020), who argue that most online racism offenders on Twitter are male, white, and Republican Party members, this research also aims to examine the relationship between stereotypical terms and demographic information about the 116th U.S. Congress members, such as gender and race.

As a branch of Critical Race Theory (CRT) that studies Asian Americans’ experiences (Museus & Iftikar, 2014), AsianCrit is used in this research for several reasons. First, the creators of AsianCrit use it to explain the racial oppression affecting Asian Americans and the history and experiences of Asian Americans (Museus & Iftikar, 2014). Second, Asian Americans have always been stereotyped as a model minority and yellow peril (Kawai, 2005); however, new racial stereotypes occurred during the pandemic, where they are being perceived as the cause of the pandemic (Borja & Gibson, 2020; Ruiz

et al., 2023). Third, they are recorded as having the fastest population growth compared to other racial and ethnic groups in the United States, growing 8% between 2000 and 2019 (Budiman & Ruiz, 2021). Lastly, there is a knowledge gap in understanding the application of this theory in communication and media studies, although AsianCrit research has been done in the education field (e.g., An, 2016; Iftikar & Museus, 2018). The current study is among the pioneering research in this field that wants to fill the existing knowledge gap.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Asian Critical Race Theory (AsianCrit)

Critical race theory (CRT) focuses on the intersection between racial ideologies and racism in the dominant culture (Crenshaw, 1995). Although theory began in legal studies, scholars have applied it to examine racial discrimination and marginalization in other domains, including education systems (An, 2016; Buenavista et al., 2009; Iftikar & Museus, 2018). As a branch of CRT, Museus and Iftikar (2013) offer the AsianCrit framework as “a perspective that outlines a unique set of tenets that are designed to provide a useful analytic framework for examining and understanding the ways that racism affects Asian Americans in the United States” (p. 23).

There are seven tenets in the AsianCrit, which are based on how white supremacy and systemic racism shape the experiences of Asian Americans. The first four principles are extensions of the original CRT core tenets that incorporate an understanding of Asian American racial reality, while the last three tenets are combinations of original CRT tenets that critically examine Asian American challenges and experiences (Museus & Iftikar, 2014; Iftikar & Museus, 2018). Based on Museus and Iftikar (2014), the tenets are:

- Asianization occurs in U.S. society due to white supremacy and the racialization processes it creates. White supremacy and systemic racism in the U.S. led to Asian Americans being categorized as perpetual foreigners, posing yellow peril threats, and being viewed as model minorities, as well as sexually deviant emasculated men and hypersexualized women (Sakamoto et al., 2012; Kawai, 2005; Ono & Pham, 2009). These stereotypes act as mediums through which White Supremacy

influences laws, policies, programs, and viewpoints that degrade and marginalize Asian Americans.

- Transnational contexts are related to historical, national, and international contexts that shape Asian Americans' experiences, such as imperialism, global economics, international war, and migration.
- (Re)constructive history emphasizes the importance of re-analyzing or re-constructing the history of Asian Americans to be more accurate since Asian Americans' experiences are often voiceless and invisible in U.S. history.
- Strategic (anti)essentialism acknowledges and addresses how White supremacy categorizes Asian Americans as a single group in the U.S. while simultaneously highlighting that Asian Americans can disrupt this racialization. This principle emphasizes that race is a social construct influenced by economic, political, and social factors of oppression in society.
- Intersectionality is a concept that White supremacy and many systems of oppression and exploitation intersect to influence the experiences and identities of Asian Americans, including sexism, ableism, and classism.
- Story, theory, and praxis call attention to marginalized people's experiences by giving them a place to deconstruct and reconstruct the discourse.
- Commitment to social justice is related to advocacy to eliminate racism and oppression.

Asian American Stereotypes

Asian stereotypes began in the twentieth century, generally with negative overtones such as inaccuracy and overgeneralization of all Asian races (Blum, 2004). Hilton and von Hippel (1996) state that stereotypes are "beliefs about the characteristics, attributes, and behaviors of members of certain groups... they are also theories about how and why certain attributes go together" (p. 240). Blum (2004) asserts that stereotypes are part of the psychological process and cultural entities. Stereotyping as an individual psychological process implies that stereotyping may be utilized to develop specific personal stereotypes unrelated to their society; however, cultural entities hold cultural values from specific cultures (Blum, 2004).

Asian Americans are frequently referred to as a model minority since they are clever, intelligent, competitive, and dedicated (Blum, 2004). During the 1960s and 1970s civil rights movement in the United States, this image became particularly prevalent (Martin & Nakayama, 2018). During this time, Asian Americans were seen as “good” because African Americans were often “confrontative and even militant in their fight for equality” (p. 208). Several scholars have found that Asian Americans feel that minority image is a treasure of pride (Kiang et al., 2016; Blum, 2004). Unfavorably, Kawai (2005) argues that the model minority stereotype is inseparable from the yellow peril since these are two connected opposing sides: “people of Asian descent become the model minority when they are depicted to do better than other racial minority groups, whereas they become the yellow peril when they are described to outdo White Americans” (p. 115).

Liu (2023) asserts that this pandemic has given rise to new stereotypes, with Asian Americans being unfairly blamed, discriminated against, harassed, and subjected to bigotry and violence. The author stated that media depictions of anti-Asian racism did not directly engage with either news outlets or racial bias to impact views of prejudice; instead, discrete emotions have a role in how framing influences biased perceptions, and this influence depends on people’s attributes, such as racial prejudice. In addition to being shown in mainstream media (Ono & Pham, 2009), Asian American stereotypes are also portrayed in social media (Azhar et al., 2021; Croucher et al., 2020).

Scholars have conducted research on Asian American stereotypes on social media before the pandemic. Charmaraman et al. (2018) emphasize that cyberdependency and cyberbullying happen to Asian American women, which encompass offensive and harmful remarks on Facebook. They found that Asian American women still have control over their social media usage, but they also acknowledge a certain degree of dependency. Asian American women also would prefer not to excessively disclose their negative experiences on social media to prevent cyberbullying. Azhar et al. (2021) also examined the stereotypes of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (APIs) on Twitter by employing the CRT concept of intersectionality. They found that Asian American males are perceived as weak and asexual, while Asian American women are perceived as outwardly asexual, exotic, obedient, and the victim of sexual harassment.

During the pandemic, research on Asian American stereotypes also occurs due to the use of social media to seek and communicate COVID-19 information (Chong et al., 2022). In their study, Chong et al. (2022) found that Asian American subgroups used different types of social media to communicate and share information. For instance, Chinese Americans prefer to use WeChat or Line, while Vietnamese Americans prefer to use Facebook and YouTube. The authors also argue that misinformation negatively impacts the community. For example, Korean Americans have been regarded as the source of the virus, decreasing the number of consumers and sales at Korean restaurants. Croucher et al. (2020) discovered that using social media increases sentiments of intergroup threat, which can lead to prejudice. In particular, the dominant cultural group, which consisted of White individuals, utilized social media to express anxiety and hostility toward Asian Americans (the minority group), as well as concerns about contracting the virus. Given the fact that social media has become a source of racial discrimination, the next part will analyze the use of Twitter in the context of the pandemic.

The Use of Twitter during COVID-19

Social media has become overwhelmed with content associated with the virus as the world was in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic (Rosenberg et al., 2020). A study has found that Twitter has become one of the most used social media platforms for rapidly sharing and gaining information about COVID-19; it also poses a risk of distributing misleading or invalid information through Twitter (Dalili Shoaee & Dastani, 2020). During the COVID-19 pandemic, misleading information like fake news, conspiracy theories, and rumors occurred on social media (Apuke & Omar, 2021; Depoux et al., 2020; Rosenberg et al., 2020). For example, misinformation varies in the origin, symptoms, and treatment of COVID-19.

Scholars have argued that social media significantly distributes racism agendas (e.g., Borja & Gibson, 2020; Chong & Chen, 2021; Matamoros-Fernandez & Farkas, 2021; Yang et al., 2020). Online or social media harassment is the second largest type of verbal harassment that happens to Asian Americans (Borja and Gibson, 2020). Compared to other social media, Twitter has become the most important and prominent place where hate speech circulates (Matamoros-Fernandez & Farkas, 2021). Donald Trump became the

most influential account to spread anti-Asian racism through his Twitter account (@realdonaldtrump and @potus) by using the hashtags #Chinavirus and #Chinesevirus (Chong & Chen, 2021). Besides these two terms, the others referenced the coronavirus used by Republican politicians, conservative media figures, and White House staff (Chiu, 2020). As a result of using such terminology, some argue that it promotes anti-Asian bias, racism, and xenophobia, leading to hate crimes (Cabanatuan, 2020; Chiu, 2020).

On the other hand, social media platforms such as Twitter have been utilized during the pandemic for activism. Zheng and Zompetti (2023) advocate for the cessation of the use of anti-Asian hashtags on Twitter since they have the potential to sway public opinion and amplify anti-Asian sentiment and violence. Before the pandemic, Twitter was also used to promote support for various movements. For example, the murder of George Floyd (Moody-Ramirez et al., 2021), police brutality towards citizens (Clark et al., 2017), the killing of Michael Brown (Moody-Ramirez et al., 2016), and the Citizenship Amendment Act in India (Edingo, 2021).

Researchers have investigated Twitter during the pandemic for several purposes (e.g., Borja & Gibson, 2020; Chong & Chen, 2021; Zheng & Zompetti, 2023). However, none of the published research articles or reports analyze these tweets using the AsianCrit framework. There is also missing information on how the U.S. House of Congress uses xenophobia slurs in their tweets to expand racism towards Asian Americans and jeopardize the lives of Asian Americans in the United States. Considering these tweets in the context of prejudice and discrimination against Asian Americans, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, and the effect of social media on the global community (Maben, 2022), this study seeks to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: What types of messages emerged in tweets containing stereotypical terms of COVID-19 during the pandemic by members of the 116th U.S. Congress?

RQ2: How do the tweets containing stereotypical terms of COVID-19 during the pandemic by members of the 116th U.S. Congress reflect the AsianCrit tenets?

RQ3: To what extent do the members of the 116th Congress' tweets expand racism towards Asian Americans?

Scholars contend that the race and gender of users influence the content of social media platforms that pertain to COVID-19 (Campos-Castillo & Laestadius, 2020). Their research

revealed that individuals of color are more inclined to contribute to COVID-19 content on social media. Furthermore, regardless of race or ethnicity, women are more inclined to post than males. Similar to these findings, according to a 2024 report from the Pew Research Center, African American, Hispanic, and Asian American users are more active on Twitter than their White counterparts (Gottfried, 2024). Nevertheless, the Pew report also discovered that men utilize Twitter more frequently than women. Additionally, Twitter is used primarily by Democrats or Democratic-leaning individuals (Gottfried, 2024). The following section will examine the influence of politics on social media usage, considering that Twitter users frequently articulate political opinions and affiliations with certain parties.

Polarization, Race, and Gender in Politics

Political polarization frequently arises in an atmosphere where people are primarily exposed to information and communities that promote their points of view while disregarding the opposite (Gruzd & Roy, 2014). In social media, research has found that people with similar political beliefs are more likely to be linked to an online group (Gilbert & Karahalios, 2009). Polarization can be explained through the well-known sociological phenomenon of homophily, where people on social media tend to group around similar backgrounds and interests, including shared political views (McPherson et al., 2001).

Polarization about the COVID-19 issue is also seen on Twitter, specifically related to political polarization. Green et al. (2020) found that between January 17 and March 31, 2020, Democrats in the 116th U.S. House of Congress discussed the pandemic more often than their Republican counterparts. They found that Democrats sent 19,803 tweets related to the COVID-19 pandemic, while only 11,084 tweets from Republicans from January 17 to March 31, 2020, which compared to Republican congressmen and women, Democrats discussed the pandemic more frequently. They discovered that Democrats mainly discuss public health and aid to workers by using terms like public health, pandemic, and health care. In contrast, Republicans commonly discuss business and China, as well as framing the pandemic as war.

Additionally, between January and May 2020, Rao et al. (2021) discovered a significant association between politics (liberal vs. conservative) and science (anti-science

vs. pro-science) in the COVID-19 discourse on Twitter. Liberals were more inclined to distribute pro-science coronavirus material, whereas conservatives were more likely to transmit anti-science coronavirus information. Similarly, Holt et al. (2022) argue that Republicans were more likely to blame China for the pandemic than Democrats. Van Green and Tyson (2020) also found that 78% of Democratic party supporters viewed the virus as a severe threat to the health of the U.S. people, whereas just 52% of Republican party supporters did. However, none of these studies discuss racism or xenophobia in members of the U.S. House of Congress's Twitter accounts.

Polarization can also be observed in political discourse related to race and gender. More than 80% of Democrats and Democratic partisans say white people have a greater social advantage than other racial groups, while only about 30% of Republicans share a similar argument (Pew Research Center, 2019). The impact of racial dynamics in polarization intensified during the pandemic, as several events highlighted racial issues in public discussions (Balz, 2020; Ruiz et al., 2020). First, the coronavirus pandemic killed disproportionately African Americans, exposing a more extensive range of disparities that still exist in black communities (Balz, 2020). Second, the George Floyd murder in Minneapolis has pushed many white Americans to recognize that their lives are vastly different from those of black Americans and that racism exists as part of their living experience (Balz, 2020). Third, compared to white and Hispanic Americans, about four in ten African Americans and Asian Americans are more likely to report being the target of racial or ethnic taunts or jokes; however, Asians are the most likely to claim this has happened since the coronavirus pandemic began (Ruiz et al., 2020).

On the other hand, a persistent gender disparity in political participation continues to plague society despite advancements in gender equality. On average, men demonstrate a higher level of understanding, interest, and engagement in political discussions than women (Verba et al., 1997). However, the landscape of gender and political study has changed dramatically, from excluding women from mainstream political science to the recognition of women as crucial actors in numerous areas of political theory and practice (Childs & Krook, 2006). Elder (2014) asserts that Democratic women have experienced significant progress in all regions and states, regardless of state ideology and partisanship; meanwhile, Republican women have seen limited advancements and

encountered substantial challenges in Republican and conservative states, where their party holds the most influence.

The 116th Congress is considered the most racially and ethnically diverse in history, with over 20% of voting members in the House of Representatives and Senate belonging to racial or ethnic minority groups (Bialik, 2019). According to Fraga and Hassell (2020), members of Congress do not reflect the gender or racial/ethnic identities of those they represent, as only 24% of the 116th Congress are women and 22% are African American, Latino, Asian American, or American Indian, whereas the United States demographic is 51% female and 39% non-white. Following the discussion about polarization, race, and gender in the 116th Congress members, this study aims to investigate the race and gender roles in tweets that contain stereotypical words by posing specific questions:

RQ4: How is the gender of the members of the 116th Congress related to the ideas expressed in their tweets?

RQ5: How is the race of the members of the 116th Congress related to the ideas expressed in their tweets?

METHODS

Data Collection and Data Analysis

This study used Sprinklr to collect all the tweets that contain common stereotypical words that highlight xenophobia towards Asian communities on Twitter, such as “China Virus,” “Kung Flu,” “Foreign Virus,” “Wuhan Virus,” and “Chinese Virus.” Data collection for this research started on March 1, 2020, and ended on January 20, 2022, which aligned with when former president Trump began to use the aforementioned phrases until one year after his presidency ended. Former President Trump is the focus of our timeline data collection because of the impact of his use of these terms, which continued to generate discussion long after his presidency ended. Only the 116th U.S. Congress' Twitter accounts are included since they are the most racially and culturally diverse in history (Bialik, 2019).

To ensure the integrity of the data, the researcher double-checked all the tweets individually before excluding tweets that use the words “China,” “Wuhan,” “Chinese,”

“Foreign,” and “Virus” but do not refer to the coronavirus name. For example, a tweet from Senator John Cornyn (R-TX) was excluded: “*WHO Team Can’t Get in China: The WHO team investigating the origins of the COVID-19 virus has been temporarily prevented from entering China because of visa issues, according to Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus. @BGOV.*” (@JohnCornyn [R-TX] on January 6, 2021).

Nevertheless, quote tweets from members that do not contain those stereotypical words, but the tweets they quoted use the included words. For instance, Rep. Mark Green’s (R-TN) tweet on March 17, 2020, “*we might disagree with the media a lot, but they are still an essential part of freedom. Some of these news agencies often get labeled fake, and some of them deserve it. But they are still OUR news agencies and it’s an affront to America to have China expel them from the country.*” that quoted Drudge Report Feed account, “*White House says to focus on stopping Wuhan virus instead...*” (@drudgefeed on March 17, 2020).

To investigate the first research question, the study used qualitative analysis software called Leximancer, which employs automated analysis techniques to generate conceptual maps, facilitating the identification and contextualization of prevalent themes within a textual dataset (Hull et al., 2019). Each theme is designated with the name of the most significant concept in that group, which is also represented by the largest dot in the theme cluster (Cretchley et al., 2010). While researchers can rename the themes, the authors of this study choose not to do so in order to preserve the originality of the theme occurrences.

Leximancer offers a two-stage process for analyzing text-based data: textual analysis and semantic analysis (Burch et al., 2018; Smith & Humphreys, 2006). Textual analysis involves extracting dominating themes from the content, while semantic analysis focuses on mapping the relationships between these topics (Smith & Humphreys, 2006). The central portion of the map corresponds to the most prominent themes, while the periphery contains less significant themes (Hull et al., 2019). This research employed Leximancer to conduct a comprehensive analysis of the complete dataset through textual and semantic analysis, with the objective being to examine the emergence of each dominant theme and explore their interconnections.

As an analysis tool, Leximancer brings its advantages to qualitative research, which inspired researchers to use it. Leximancer helps improve analysis by enabling stable, repeatable results and reducing analytical biases based on assumptions about the data that arise during data collection (Cretchley et al., 2010; Harwood et al., 2015). According to Harwood et al. (2015) and Cretchley et al. (2010), Leximancer shows significant parallels to the primary emerging themes identified through grounded theory analysis, which also served as a reliable method to ensure the completeness of the open coding stage. Leximancer, based on Lemon and Hayes's study (2020), improves the representation of specific themes in participant quotations, thereby enhancing the dependability of the findings. Leximancer has been extensively utilized by researchers to examine the responses of social media users to various digital occurrences (e.g., Burch et al., 2018; Hull et al., 2019; Wilk et al., 2021).

In addition, this study uses textual analysis using tenets of AsianCrit as a method of analysis for the second research question. Textual analysis involves the interpretation of textual language, symbols, and/or images to obtain insight into how people make sense of and convey their life experiences (Hawkins, 2017). The researchers also used Sprinklr to get information about the number of engagements for each tweet to answer the third research question. Meanwhile, the researchers collect gender and race information from the History, Art, and Archives United States House of Representatives website to answer the fourth and fifth research questions. Then the tweets were individually examined to check whether the members challenged or reinforced the idea of anti-Asian racism through their tweets. Challenging the concept of anti-Asian racism is based on their tweets that tend to urge their followers to refrain from using these xenophobic terms, stop discrimination towards Asian Americans, acknowledge the harmful impact of these words on Asian American communities, and criticize President Trump or their colleagues for their misuse of these words. In contrast, reinforcing anti-Asian racism occurs when Congress members use xenophobic terms without intending to do things listed above.

RESULTS

At the end of the data collection process, the researchers found 393 tweets from 125 representatives and senators from the 116th U.S. Congress official Twitter accounts appropriate to our criteria. The majority of tweets came from Rep. Judy Chu (D-CA), Senator Tom Cotton (R-AR), and Rep. Paul Gosar (R-AZ). Rep. Judy Chu (D-CA) tweeted 54 tweets focusing on the negative side of the racist behavior that Asian Americans experienced during the pandemic. Senator Tom Cotton (R-AR) focused on sharing information on how to get help during COVID while spreading words to blame Asian Americans for the pandemic. Similarly, Rep. Paul Gosar (R-AZ) also blames China's government for the virus.

Research Question 1 sought to determine what categories of messages emerged from all tweets containing stereotypical words. After aggregating all tweets through Sprinklr, data were imported into Leximancer to identify common themes. The results of Leximancer are depicted in Figure 1, which shows the six major discussions based on the most appeared words: viruses (n = 283), COVID (n = 230), Trump (n = 112), resolution (n = 66), people (n = 57), and the China Virus (n = 52). This indicates that stereotypical language was employed to describe the situation surrounding the coronavirus, as evidenced by the presence of terms such as China, Chinese, and racist. Additionally, there were tweets emphasizing the importance of finding a resolution to combat discrimination stemming from the use of stereotypical terms. For instance, "*Hydroxychloroquine protocols worked for me. Americans suffering from the Wuhan Virus deserve the right to consult with their doctors and try HCQ if deemed a safe and appropriate fit. Keep Big Govt out of this. Thank you Dr. Risch for your work and research on this*" (@replouieghmert [R-TX] on August 25, 2020).

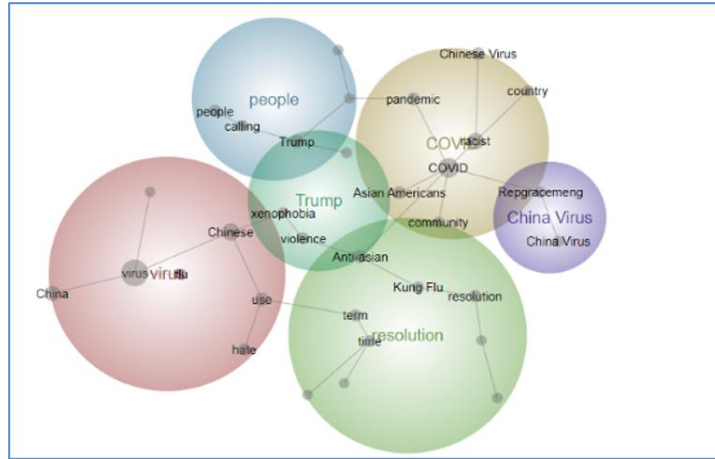


Figure 1. Leximancer themes from March 1, 2020, to January 20, 2022.

Research Question 2 focused on the tenets of AsianCrit theory that emerge from the tweets. All tenets are represented through tweets containing stereotypical terms of COVID-19 during the pandemic by members of the 116th U.S. Congress. For example, “As Trump calls COVID-19 “kung flu” and the “Chinese virus,” AAPI business owners and workers in Seattle’s International district and communities across America have been harassed and attacked—all while so many heroically serve on the frontlines of the crisis. I’ll be voting yes.” (@RepJayapal [D-WA] on September 17, 2020), which relates to Asianization. Another example, “Today, the House will vote on my resolution (#HRes908) that condemns anti-Asian sentiment related to #COVID19. @realDonaldTrump’s use of China Virus & Kung Flu 2 describe the virus have scapegoated #AAPIs as carriers of the new coronavirus. This is wrong & dangerous.” (@RepGraceMeng [D-NY] on September 17, 2020), which highlights her advocacy to eliminate anti-Asian sentiment.

Research Question 3 addressed engagement of all tweets by looking at the number of retweets, favorites, and replies. Our findings show that the highest engagement of Twitter conversations using the words “China Virus,” “Kung Flu,” “Foreign Virus,” “Wuhan Virus,” and “Chinese Virus” happened in the first quarter of 2020, at the same time when the WHO declared coronavirus as a pandemic, causing the situation to become worse in the United States (Jiang et al., 2020). The second peak of the conversation happened in the third quarter of 2020, at the same time as the school year was about to reopen after the previous semester became online distance learning, and the death toll exceeded 200,000 in the United States (CDC, 2022). Although the tweet with the highest

engagement shows a positive sentiment, the other tweets with over 30,000 combined retweets and favorites convey negative sentiments (Table 1.).

Table 1

Tweets with the highest number of favorites and retweets

Twitter Account	Tweets	Date and Time	RT and Favorites
Adam Schiff - @RepAdamSchiff (D-CA)	We need to bring people together to fight Coronavirus. Blaming China may seem like good politics, but it doesn't solve anything, or mitigate the Trump Administration's failures. Calling it the "Chinese virus" only breeds disunity, discrimination and division. Enough already.	March 21, 2020 11:17 PM	90,523
Adam Schiff - @RepAdamSchiff (D-CA)	Our nurses, doctors, and hospital staff are telling us that they need more ventilators and protective gear. Now. This isn't a future problem. There's no time to delay. The President must use every power to increase critical medical supply production. Lives are at stake.	March 19, 2020 2:28 PM	46,354
Tom Cotton - @SenTomCotton (R-AR)	Families and businesses need help now to survive the China virus pandemic. But @SpeakerPelosi walked away from negotiations to write her own bill, full of absurd provisions completely unrelated to the crisis at hand. Here's what Speaker Pelosi is demanding while Americans suffer:	March 23, 2020 7:21 PM	37,443
Chuck Grassley - @ChuckGassley (R-IA)	I don't understand why China gets upset bc we refer to the virus that originated there the "Chinese virus" Spain never got upset when we referred to the Spanish flu in 1918&1919	March 18, 2020 11:54 AM	33,247

Research Question 4 sought to explore the relationship between the gender of members of Congress and the ideas expressed in their tweets. The authors identified 36 representatives and senators who were listed in the Women in Congress roster that produced 131 tweets, leaving a remaining group of 89 representatives and senators classified as men that wrote 262 tweets. From women senators and congresswomen, 121

tweets challenge the use of these xenophobic terms. For instance, “*With Asians experiencing increased racism b/c of #COVID19, it’s simply irresponsible&wrong for Trump to stoke fear by calling it the “Chinese Virus.” Pandemics don’t care about race, ethnicity or anything else. We must do better. Be kind, wash your hands & #StayHealthy.*” (@SenDuckworth [IL] on March 17, 2020). Only 10 tweets that support this concept, primarily from Sen. Marsha Blackburn. “*It was always the China virus. They lied about its origins and we all know it.*” (@MarshaBlackburn [TN] on August 11, 2021). Meanwhile, among men senators and representatives, 172 tweets support the usage of xenophobic phrases, while 90 tweets oppose it. For instance, Sen. Chuck Grassley [IA] reinforced the idea of using these terms, “*I don’t understand why China gets upset bc we refer to the virus that originated there the “Chinese virus” Spain never got upset when we referred to the Spanish flu in 1918&1919*” (@ChuckGrassley [IA] on March 18, 2020). Additionally, Rep. Adam Schiff’s [D-CA] tweet is one of the example of challenging the used of terms, “*We need to bring people together to fight Coronavirus. Blaming China may seem like good politics, but it doesn’t solve anything, or mitigate the Trump Administration’s failures. Calling it the “Chinese virus” only breeds disunity, discrimination and division. Enough already.*” (@RepAdamSchiff [D-CA] on March 21, 2020).

Research Question 5 investigated the relationship between the race of Congress members and their tweets. The authors utilized the racial classifications based on the majority (White American) and the minority (African American, American Indian, Asian American, and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander) racial groups. It is important to note that the Census Bureau classifies Hispanic as an ethnicity, not a race (Lopez et al., 2023). However, the authors chose to include Hispanic as a separate category within the examined race groups since the United States House of Representative website provides information about the Hispanic American Caucus in Congress. The finding reveals that the tweets originate from 86 individuals who identify as White American (237 tweets), 14 individuals as Hispanic (31 tweets), 14 individuals as African American (21 tweets), 10 individuals as Asian American (103 tweets), and 1 individual as Native American (1 tweet). The racial majority group predominantly perpetuates the stereotype (172 tweets) rather than confront it (65 tweets), while racial minority groups are more likely to

confront stereotypes (146 tweets) rather than perpetuate them (10 tweets). One instance of a tweet against the use of xenophobic terminology directed at Asian Americans is from Rep. Nydia Velazquez (D-NY), the first Puerto Rican woman to hold office in Congress. *“This is why using hateful terms like “Chinese virus” is dangerous. I hope NYPD investigates swiftly and tracks this individual down. All of us must stand up to prejudice. #Coronavirus cannot be allowed to fuel bigotry, hate crimes, threats or violence.”* (@NydiaVelazquez [D-NY] on April 2, 2020). On the contrary, *“Spoke with @seanhannity and discussed my China Virus diagnosis and my #hydroxychloroquine + azithromycin + zinc treatment. youtube.com/watch?v=yaQYUr...”* (@LouieGohmert [R-TX] on August 5, 2020) is an example of a tweet from the majority group that perpetuates racism.

DISCUSSION

Twitter has become one of the most popular social media sites for individuals to instantly share and get information during pandemics (Crook et al., 2016; Dalili Shoaie & Dastani, 2020; Ortiz-Martínez & Jimenez-Arcia, 2017). The first finding indicates that misinformation spread on Twitter, particularly about the virus’s name. Although WHO has cautioned against referring to COVID-19 as Chinese Virus, China Virus, or other derogatory terms that offended Asian Americans in March 2020 (WHO, 2020), some people, including Donald Trump, still used the terms on tweets (Borja & Gibson, 2020; Chong & Chen, 2021; Chiu, 2020). While some members of Congress expressed disappointment with Trump’s attitude toward China-blaming in his tweets, some defended Trump’s actions positively. Due to this circumstance, the phrases “Virus,” “COVID,” “China Virus,” and “Trump” dominated our search results.

Following the AsianCrit tenets, Trump and Congress members who used derogatory words or had blaming-China sentiments contribute to Asianization, where they spread prejudice and bigotry against Asian Americans (Museus & Iftikar, 2014). In addition to prevalent model minority and perpetual foreigner stereotypes, Trump and congressional members perpetuating COVID-19 prejudice and racism towards Asian Americans have influenced their followers to believe that Asian Americans are the cause of this pandemic, which makes them the target of discrimination even after the pandemic. The concept of Asianization also appears in the last findings showing that white supremacy has

influenced the racialization of Asian Americans during the pandemic in social media. The dominant racial group, White Americans, have been found to utilize xenophobic words in their tweets instead of confronting them.

As part of condemning Asian Americans, Congress members who support the use of xenophobic terminology also utilize these terms to blame China and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) for the pandemic because the virus started in Wuhan, China. This situation can be explained by the AsianCrit as transnational contexts, where the historical, national, and international situation shaped the Asian Americans' experiences of racialization (Iftikar & Museus, 2018). Following the COVID-19 pandemic, there was a significant disparity in public reputation, economic connections, and strategic trust between China and the United States (Yuan, 2020). Since there were a lot of attitudes blaming China and the CCP on the congress members social media, it may have contributed to Yuan's argument (2020) that the goodwill of the American public toward China continuously declined, reaching the lowest mark of this century and one of the historic lows of the entire 40-year diplomatic relationship. However, future research is needed to expand this notion.

Furthermore, to fight the domination of Trump and Republicans on Twitter and to decrease the number of hate crimes against Asian Americans, Democrats and congressional members from racial minority groups released resolutions that focus on racism on Twitter, raising awareness of what is happening to Asian Americans. Hence, the term "resolution" is one of the dominant themes that we found. By releasing resolutions as well as giving examples of the pandemic's impact on Asian American communities, Rep. Judy Chu (D-CA), Rep. Grace Meng (D-NY), and other members utilize their Twitter accounts as a story, theory, and praxis or counterstory, highlighting the voices of oppressed people of color by listening to how their experiences have shaped their perspectives (An, 2017). Utilizing Twitter as a counterpublic aligns with Edingo's (2021) assertion that it provides political actors with a platform to establish networks of dynamic political and cultural discussions and effectively disseminate them across social media networks. Some of the studies on social media activism are related to George Floyd's murder (Moody-Ramirez et al., 2021), police brutality (Clark et al., 2017), and the death of

Michael Brown (Moody-Ramirez et al., 2016). Similar to the idea of fostering unity and support while challenging Trump's behavior, the Asian American members of Congress expressed empathy and solidarity with victims of racism and discrimination during the pandemic through their Twitter accounts.

Additionally, tweets supporting this idea largely come from male senators and congressmen, as well as White Americans. These findings support Borja and Gibson's argument (2020) contending that White American men make up the majority of Twitter offenders of online racism. Through findings from research questions 3 and 4, we realized that intersectionality tenet of AsianCrit connects this finding with our finding and Borja and Gibson's finding (2020), recognizing the pervasive and overlapping concept of social oppression and rejecting the notion that one type of oppression is more significant than others (Museus & Iftikar, 2014). Even though the overlapped identities of the Congress members are confined to race and gender, it highlights a crucial insight and multidimensional analysis that negatively affects the experiences of Asian Americans. However, additional identities are required to provide a deeper understanding of this tenet for future research.

The use of social media overall has provided the opportunity for Asian Americans, including Congress members, to share their stories and experiences directly with a massive audience. Asian American congress members, utilizing social media as a tool for communication and advocacy, play a crucial role in shaping the historical narrative and representation of Asians for future generations. By sharing their experiences, perspectives, and policy initiatives, they contribute to a more inclusive and diverse understanding of American history and governance, empowering future generations of Asian Americans to engage in civic participation and leadership roles. This phenomenon aligns with the tenet of (re)constructive history, where marginalized voices shape historical narratives and perspectives for future generations. Moreover, social media platforms have also become instrumental in the fight against Asian racism. Asian congress members, along with members from racial minorities, leverage social media to raise awareness about instances of discrimination, hate crimes, and systemic inequalities. Through campaigns, hashtags, and viral content on social media, they advocate for

change, mobilize support, and amplify their voices to combat racism and promote their commitment to social justice.

Using the AsianCrit framework, this article has described the experiences of Asian Americans during the pandemic. As previously stated, the pandemic greatly influences people's lives. However, the impact is exacerbated for Asian Americans because they have also experienced racism and discrimination. The final tenet of the AsianCrit commitment to social justice is to devote to advocacy by providing a strong rationale for why scholars should pay scholarly attention to the inclusion and portrayal of Asian Americans, as AsianCrit aims to annihilate racism and other forms of oppression in society, particularly against Asian Americans (Museus & Iftikar, 2014; Iftikat & Museus, 2018; An, 2017). This study is a continuation of our dedication to social justice in order to assist Asian Americans in this matter.

For future research, the authors assert that it is essential to integrate the AsianCrit framework into communication and media studies. AsianCrit theory provides a diverse viewpoint for examining media content, considering the unique experiences, historical backgrounds, and cultural contexts of Asian Americans. This enhances the discussion on media portrayals by providing valuable perspectives that Western-focused approaches may ignore. In addition, intersectionality is a valuable paradigm for examining how depictions of Asian and Asian American identities in media intersect with other social categories, which enables scholars to gain a deeper understanding of media representations and their effects on various groups within the Asian community, especially with so many ethnicities under the broad term "Asian". Furthermore, employing an AsianCrit perspective to analyze media content fosters a critical understanding of media literacy, enabling scholars to examine prevailing narratives and power dynamics inherent in media portrayals, which are typically influenced by Western control. Lastly, applying AsianCrit theory to communication and media studies can initiate activism and social change, promoting inclusion and equality in the large society.

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