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Help or Hindrance: Exploring the impact of hashtags and infographics on resistance against Anti-Asian hate

Aanandita Bali

Clark University, aabali@clarku.edu

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Performative Activism: Exploring the impact of hashtags and infographics on resistance against Anti-Asian hate

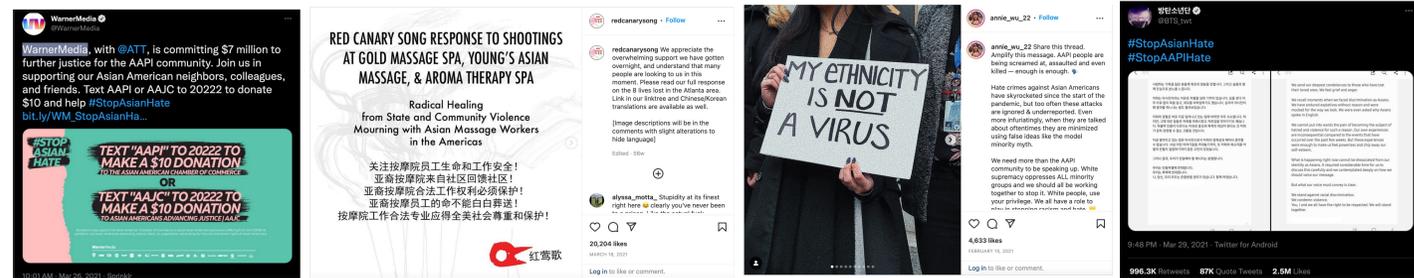
Aanandita Bali '23
Sponsor: Hu Young Jeong



Introduction

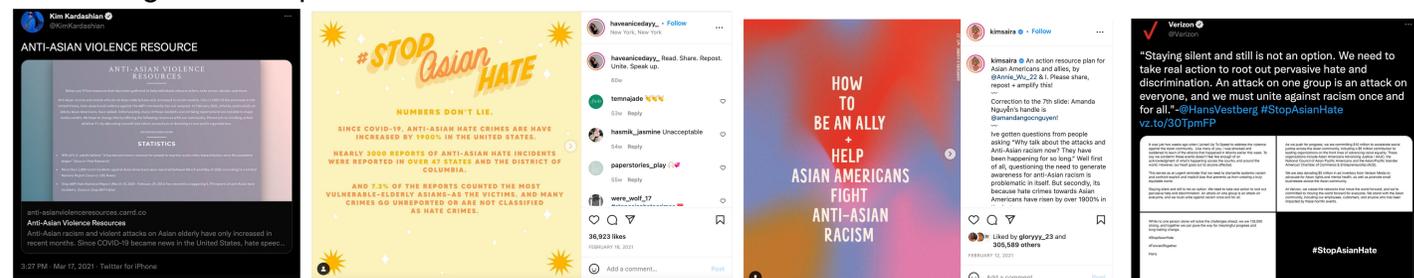
The rise of social media platforms such as Twitter, Instagram and TikTok has created new avenues for resistance movements to raise awareness. Resistance has evolved beyond confronting discriminatory institutions, and resistance measures now encompass even those actions that promote awareness or those that affirm resistance efforts (Suyemoto et al., 2022). The spread of this information usually takes place through **hashtags** (tags that help collate similar content, ex: #BlackLivesMatter, #StopAsianHate) and **infographics** (visual representations of textual information). The reach and engagement possible through these tools has allowed movements to educate more people about issues and encourage them to take action.

At the same time, the ease of sharing information on social media has also led to people engaging in “**performative activism**,” i.e., being minimally involved with a resistance (such as by reposting or resharing) as a way to demonstrate one’s credibility (Wellman, 2022). Some argue that rather than analyzing such social media posts individually, it is important to consider their collective impact on a movement (Nummi et al., 2019). However, very little research has gone beyond investigating collective action and practically no research has focused on the emerging movement against anti-Asian hate. Thus, in this research, I conducted a **qualitative analysis of the reactions and responses to social media posts that propagated the Stop Asian Hate movement**, which gained traction in March 2021, to understand whether these posts were ultimately of help or a hindrance to the movement.

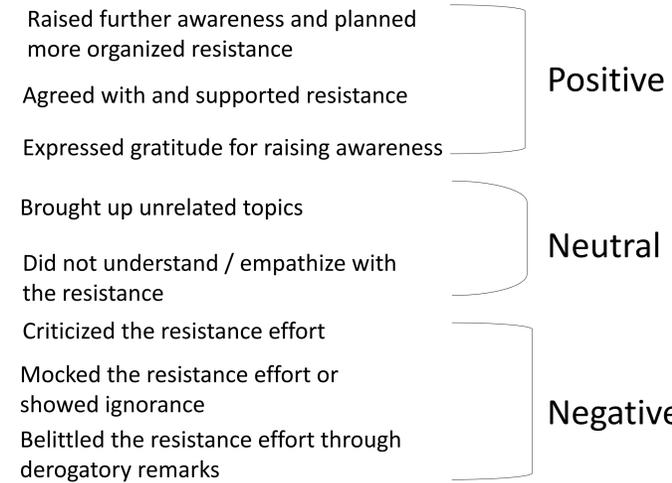
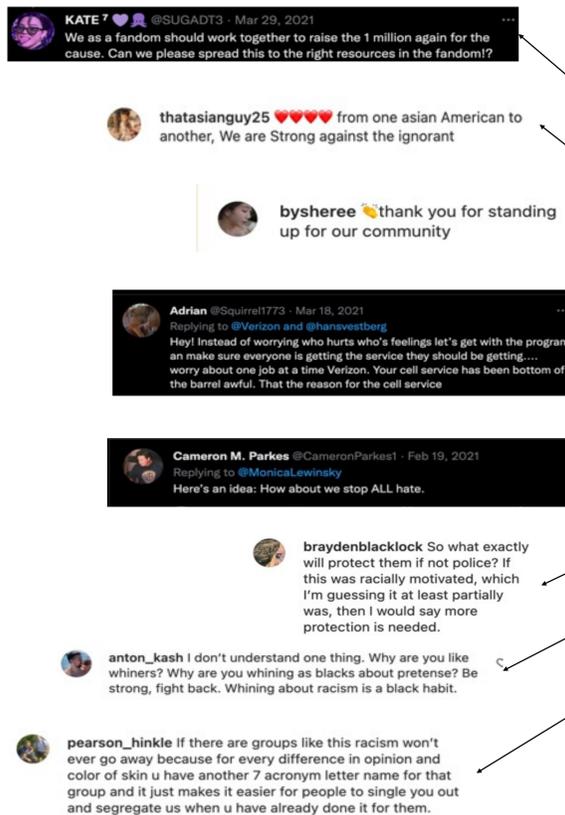


Methods

9 posts from Twitter and Instagram that supported the Stop Asian Hate Movement were chosen, and comments and other responses to them were collected. A **thematic analysis** was conducted, which involved identifying patterns across these comments (Braun & Clarke, 2012). A spectrum of themes was obtained from the codes, ranging from “Mobilizing” to “Disruptive.”



Results



Discussion

As evident from the range of themes, posts that supported the Stop Asian Movement were met with a variety of responses. The **positive** (in an additive sense) themes, namely “**mobilizing**,” “**supportive**” and “**grateful**,” included responses that **contributed to resistance efforts** in some way. Even simply by expressing appreciation, these comments are validating the resistance efforts, thereby encouraging more people to engage with the movement and share their own experiences and feelings. The **neutral** themes, i.e., “**irrelevant**” and “**disengaged**” **did not contribute in any way to the resistance**, and often strayed away from the topic of the movement. The **negative** (in a subtractive sense) themes, i.e., “**critical**,” “**insensitive**,” and “**disruptive**,” **went against the resistance**, and included responses that questioned the point of the resistance efforts, or even mocked them. Positive reactions were mainly evident in response to posts by users who had a wider reach, such as celebrities. Furthermore, these reactions were stronger when the posts were personal as opposed to an infographic, as seen clearly in the overwhelmingly positive reaction to BTS’ (a popular South Korean band) personal statement denouncing the spike in anti-Asian hate. Thus, social media posts are capable of mobilizing resistance efforts, contingent on factors such as the **poster’s reach** and the **content of post** (personal or not).

Limitations and Future Research

While attempts were made to capture a variety of posts and comments, one of the limitations of the study is the **lack of diverse social media resistance efforts**, which could skew the qualitative analysis. This research also only explored posts and responses on two social media platforms, so future studies should expand this scope in order to investigate the differences across platforms. Additionally, this research doesn’t further explore how helpful the contributions of the responders were to the movement. Thus, future studies could explore, for instance, whether showing support and expressing gratitude for a movement can aid resistance movements.