



## **“We created this account to be free”:**

Twittering as a Communicative Genre, as Enacted  
by Users Identifying as Filipino Men Living with HIV

PhD in International and Rural Development  
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## **DECLARATION OF ORIGINAL AUTHORSHIP**

I declare that this research is my own original work and all citations from other sources have been acknowledged.

Date: 28 February 2025

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A red ink signature line, slanted upwards from left to right, positioned below the signature text.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AIDS	Acquired immunodeficiency syndrome
CD4	Cluster of differentiation 4
COVID-19	Coronavirus disease of 2019
Dx	Diagnosed
HAART	Highly active antiretroviral therapy
HIV	Human immunodeficiency virus
FMLWH	Filipino men living with HIV
LTE	Efavirenz, lamivudine, and tenofovir
MMC	Makati Medical Center
NSFW	Not safe for work
PLWH	People living with HIV
Poz	HIV-positive
RITM	Research Institute for Tropical Medicine
TLD	Tenofovir disoproxil, lamivudine, and dolutegravir
TLY	Testing by LoveYourself, Inc.
U=U	Undetectable is untransmittable
UD	Undetectable
VL	Viral load

## GLOSSARY

1. @mention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Used as a verb, the act of addressing a tweet to a specific user by tagging their Twitter handle using the symbol '@' (e.g., @TheMERL)</li> <li>◆ Used as a noun, a tagged Twitter handle in a tweet</li> </ul>
2. Blood brother	Term of endearment referring to fellow Filipino men living with HIV; also 'blooder,' 'blood bro,' 'blood sibling,' and 'blood sib'
3. Connection network	Social network based on Twitter follows
4. Conversation network	Social network based on Twitter @mentions
5. Favourite	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Used as a verb, the act of pressing the heart icon below a tweet</li> <li>◆ Used as a noun, a tweet that has been marked as a 'favourite' by pressing the heart icon below it</li> </ul>
6. Follow	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Used as a verb, the act of pressing the 'follow' button on an account owner's profile page</li> <li>◆ Used as a noun, a tie linking one user to another in the connection network</li> </ul>
7. Followees	Twitter users an account owner follows
8. Followers	Twitter users that follow an account owner
9. Friends	Two Twitter users who follow each other

10. Genre	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>According to Miller (1984: 165), “genres serve as keys to understanding how to participate in the actions of a community.” In this way, genres function as “devices for orienting and making sense of everyday life” (Lomborg, 2014: 33).</li> <li>Specifically, this research conceptualised Twittering as a functional-pragmatic genre characterised by typified forms of communication enabled by the affordances of the platform and the norms and conventions guiding participation (Lomborg, 2014).</li> </ul>
11. Human immunodeficiency virus	A virus that weakens the immune system, and if left untreated, can progress to Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
12. Original tweet	A Twitter post authored by the account owner; includes quote tweets but excludes retweets
13. Prominent user	Twitter user belonging to the top decile of activity (i.e., number of original tweets), influence (i.e., closeness centrality), and popularity (i.e., in-degree centrality) scores
14. Quote tweet	A tweet reposted by an account owner with commentary
15. Retweet	A tweet reposted by an account owner without commentary
16. Serodiscordant	Referring to a relationship wherein one is HIV-positive while the other is HIV-negative
17. Serostatus	Indication of HIV presence or absence through a blood test
18. Technobiographies	Accounts of users’ everyday experiences with technology, in this case, Twitter (Henwood, Kennedy, & Miller, 2001: 11 in Kennedy, 2003: 122)

19. Timeline conversation	A public tweet wherein a user is @mentioned
20. Tweet	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>◆ A microblog post on Twitter capped at 280 characters</li><li>◆ May refer to an original tweet, retweet, or quote tweet</li></ul>
21. Twitter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>◆ A microblogging platform where users can post short messages called tweets to their network of followers</li><li>◆ Renamed X in July 2023</li></ul>
22. Twitter handle	Unique username of a Twitter account owner, marked by the symbol '@' (e.g., @TheMERL)
23. Twitter name	String of text entered into the 'name' field in the Twitter profile; may not correspond to account owner's legal name
24. Twitterverse	A "neologism of 'Twitter' and 'universe,' referring to the ecosystem of Twitter users and the content that they create" (Chohan and D'Souza, 2020)

## ABSTRACT

A traditionally hard-to-reach population, Filipino men living with HIV (FMLWH) are visible on Twitter (now X), offering a unique window into their communicative practices. This online ethnography analysed Twittering as a communicative genre, as enacted by FMLWH. Primarily drawing on Lomborg's (2014) functional-pragmatic approach to genre, the analysis focused on user composition, content, style, and pragmatic function. Three studies were conducted via a multiphase sequential mixed-methods design. The research employed a palette of methods, including social network analysis, cluster analysis, technobiography, social media elicitation, corpus linguistics, and content analysis.

Analysis of 1,447 public accounts revealed an expansive network comprising 302,934 follows and 20,996 @mentions. Both connection and conversation networks showed low density, moderate to high reciprocity, and short degrees of separation between actors. While Twitter bios highlighted HIV identities, tweets covered a diverse range of topics and functions, indicating that Twittering extended beyond the discussion of HIV. Brevity, informality, and playfulness were the stylistic hallmarks of Twitter content produced by FMLWH.

Ultimately, Twittering fostered self-expression, community, and sexual reclamation among FMLWH, showing that their communicative practices were fundamentally rooted in the pursuit of freedom. Quoting one participant: “We created this account to be free.”

## PROLOGUE

It feels fitting that a tweet singlehandedly launched this ethnography of Twittering.

August 2016 sets the scene: I sit across from my friend Hans<sup>1</sup> in a pizzeria in Batangas, Philippines. He raises his phone for me to read a tweet that bluntly asks: “Am I dying?” This public post by a certain @impozzibol hangs heavy in the air. My friend explains that this Twitter user had just found out that he is HIV-positive. Hans recognises this not only because similar tweets have been populating his Twitter feed, but also because he received his own HIV diagnosis eight months ago.

The tweet demands my attention. It mentions a ‘CD4 count,’ seemingly to provide context for the alarming question posed. This jargon is lost on me, but Hans clarifies that CD4 essentially reflects immunity—higher numbers are better. With a CD4 count of 24, user @impozzibol’s condition has already progressed to AIDS. The hashtag #PLHIV punctuates the post. Hans explains that this stands for ‘people living with HIV.’ Using this hashtag suggests that user @impozzibol wants his tweet, and therefore himself, to be

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<sup>1</sup> The author secured the subject’s permission to share this narrative. To ensure user confidentiality, all names and Twitter handles of individuals within the manuscript have been replaced with pseudonyms.

discoverable by others. Plausibly, the hashtag might also function as a bird call—a *tweet*, if you will—to serve as a means of self-identification within a community.

The arrival of our food provides a welcome distraction. It is a relief to see Hans out of his dank, dark, and dingy apartment, his self-imposed exile for several months. I had read about the isolating nature of HIV, and Hans' experience offered a stark illustration of this reality. Following his diagnosis, he became increasingly reclusive, withdrawing from all social interaction, even with his family.

HIV took a heavy toll on Hans. He struggled physically, mentally, and emotionally—the weight of the condition leading him to shutter his coffee shop and retreat into isolation. Worse, he dismissed the value of the antiretroviral medication his doctor had prescribed him. Offering efficacy reports and positive testimonials, I urged: “These meds are life-saving!” His response was defeatist: “What’s the point in living?”

The only way to be certain Hans was taking his medication was to personally check up on him. For months, I travelled between Los Baños, Laguna and Lipa, Batangas, fearing the unknown at each visit. While Hans offered little in the way of updates on his health, he did disclose troubling thoughts of ending it all. The chosen method fluctuated; one day it was a cocktail of sedatives, the next a makeshift noose. Thankfully, these threats never came to pass. By the fifth month post-diagnosis, Hans finally sought psychiatric help, a positive

step toward recovery. He also, thankfully, maintained his antiretroviral regimen. However, it was not until this very day, in this pizzeria, that I saw a semblance of his normal self: Hans, glued to his phone, oblivious of his surroundings.

His relentless scrolling on his iPhone 6 had started to grate on me. Annoyed, I finally blurted out: “What on earth are you devouring?” It was then and there that Hans showed me user @impozzibol’s tweet. He went on to explain how this online community of ‘blood brothers’ had become a lifeline for him. My frustration instantly gave way to a mix of fascination and a strange sense of curiosity. Months of tireless effort on my part to get through to Hans, yet all it took was... Twitter?

At that time, Twitter functioned primarily as a platform for breaking news, mobilising voters (be it for the 2016 Philippine National Elections or American Idol), and sharing mundane life updates. Discovering this public and open platform being used for peer support by people living with HIV (PLWH) demonstrated user-led innovation, resourcefulness, and self-organisation. As a development communication scholar interested in technology use and digital culture, I was immediately captivated by this novel social media practice, particularly given its emergence from a marginalised and stigmatised user base.

Just like Hans, I found myself sucked into the stream of tweets posted by PLWH. As my immersion within the Twitterverse of PLWH deepened, my initial view of them as mere social media users dissolved. Instead, I observed them actively shaping the platform, taking advantage of its communicative affordances to engage in identity-work and forge connections with fellow PLWH. Through the strategic use of insider language, a shared repertoire of practices, and the construction of narratives, they demonstrated the ongoing negotiation of meaning within this unique online environment.

My fieldnotes during the early days of this ethnography left me asking a host of questions: *Why Twitter, of all platforms? What drives users to connect with others and expand their network? How come their Twitter bios follow a standard format? If Twittering is a “performative aspect of everyday life” (Pink, 2004: 46), for whom are they performing? If self-presentation on Twitter is more of an exhibition than a performance (Hogan, 2010), what drives the curation process? To what extent is HIV embedded in their everyday tweets—or must it be presumed that tweeting is predicated on HIV concerns?*

I did not know it then, but I was, in fact, thinking about Twittering as a communicative genre.

# **CHAPTER 1**

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Chapter Overview**

This introductory chapter lays the groundwork for the entire manuscript. It opens with the rationale behind viewing Twitter through the prism of genre and the choice to focus on a user base comprising vulnerable individuals. The chapter then announces the objectives that guided this mixed-methods online ethnography. Additionally, it elaborates on the researcher's personal motivations for undertaking this research. The chapter concludes with a roadmap of the manuscript, providing a brief description of each chapter.

### **1.2 Background and Rationale of the Research**

The online communication practices of people living with chronic illnesses, such as HIV, are well-documented in the literature (Reeves, 2001; Smith, 2004). Researchers have turned to computer-mediated platforms to understand how people living with HIV (PLWH) cope with their condition and associated social stigmas (Flickinger et al., 2017;

Harris et al., 2015; Mo and Coulson, 2010, 2012, 2013). Likewise, a substantial volume of literature is dedicated to examining the social support messages exchanged by PLWH in virtual environments (Bar-Lev, 2008; Coursaris and Liu, 2009; Mo and Coulson, 2008). However, outside of research on social support, there is a relative lack of scholarly work exploring how PLWH form networks on social media and the everyday functions served by these communicative genres.

To frame the research enquiry, this section establishes a link between Twitter and genre analysis. It then justifies the need to focus on PLWH, particularly Filipino men living with HIV (FMLWH). Finally, it identifies areas where existing knowledge is limited and outlines the potential for this research to make unique contributions to scholarship.

### **1.2.1 Thinking of Twitter as a Genre**

The interplay of media, users, and text positions social media as communicative genres. Lomborg (2014: 33) describes genres as “devices for orienting and making sense of everyday life.” Now known as X, Twitter exemplifies this concept<sup>2</sup>. Meaningful participation

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<sup>2</sup> In July 2023, Twitter was renamed X. The decision to refer to the original platform name (i.e., Twitter) and associated terminologies (e.g., tweet and retweet) in this manuscript is deliberate, as the current research took place prior to the rebrand

on Twitter transcends basic computer literacy; it necessitates an understanding of the genre's conventions and communicative norms. To borrow from Miller (1984: 165), "genres serve as keys to understanding how to participate in the actions of a community." Furthermore, Twitter itself is a dynamic genre. It is constantly in flux, driven not only by changes in the platform's features but, more crucially, by the evolving communicative practices of its users.

According to Lomborg (2014: 30), genre analysis offers a framework for examining "interaction dynamics and negotiations of meaning" within social media. From a functional-pragmatic perspective, this approach centres on analysing the communicative practices of user groups. A review of literature shows that traditional content analysis has been the mainstay in genre-based analyses of Twitter (Alam and Lucas, 2011; Sæbø, 2011; Shaffer et al., 2013). While this method effectively characterises tweet format and content, it falls short in capturing the nuances of user interaction, genre negotiation, adherence to Twitter norms, and the social achievements of Twittering. To address these limitations, Lomborg (2014) proposes a genre-based framework informed by a functional-pragmatic perspective for analysing social media. This framework integrates the four interrelated dimensions of composition, content, style, and pragmatic function.

The focus on Twittering practices by FMLWH stems from two important considerations. Firstly, the Philippines faces the fastest-growing HIV epidemic in the

Western Pacific region, with infections overwhelmingly affecting Filipino men. Secondly, while Twitter is only the fifth most used social media platform in the Philippines (Kemp, 2022), it hosts a significant user base or 'Twitterverse'<sup>3</sup> of individuals identifying as FMLWH. Despite this, research on how FMLWH engage with social media remains limited, creating a significant void in the scholarship.

### **1.2.2 HIV Incidence in the Philippines**

Although new HIV infections are on the decline in most of Southeast Asia (UNAIDS, 2023), the Philippines is experiencing a rise in HIV incidence, making it the country with the fastest-growing HIV epidemic in the Western Pacific region (Gangcuangco and Eustaquio, 2023). New infections surged by 327% between 2010 and 2021, with daily diagnoses reaching 41 by 2022 (Department of Health- Epidemiology Bureau, 2022; UNAIDS, 2019). Filipino men bear the brunt of the epidemic, comprising 94% of diagnosed cases, with a significant portion involving men who have sex with men (Department of Health- Epidemiology Bureau, 2022). This gender disparity highlights the urgency of addressing the unique vulnerabilities of Filipino men regarding HIV. Moreover, in the Philippines, the social stigma surrounding HIV is particularly pronounced, with

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<sup>3</sup> According to Chohan and D'Souza (2020), the term 'Twitterverse' is a "neologism of 'Twitter' and 'universe,' referring to the ecosystem of Twitter users and the content that they create."

negative attitudes and discrimination based on gender identity and sexual preferences (Herek, 1999; Laguna and Villegas, 2019; Taylor, 2001). This is further compounded by Roman Catholic values, which contribute to an intersectional stigma experienced by queer Filipinos living with HIV (Adia et al., 2018; Pamoso et al., 2024).

### **1.2.3 PLWH as Networked Publics**

The literature acknowledges the potential positive impact of social media on the lives of PLWH (Cifor and McKinney, 2020; Gaysynsky et al., 2015; Taggart et al., 2015). For individuals recently diagnosed with HIV, social media provide significant opportunities for coping (Strand, 2011), obtaining information (Taggart et al., 2015; Malik et al., 2021), and seeking social support (Bar-Lev, 2008; Chen et al., 2019; Chen and Shi, 2015; Cifor and McKinney, 2020; Mo and Coulson, 2010; Strand, 2011).

Despite Facebook's widespread adoption in the Philippines (Kemp, 2022), FMLWH are more visible on Twitter. This community may find Twitter's unique connection structure and capacity for increased anonymity beneficial for disclosing sensitive information (Boudewyns et al., 2015; Schlosser, 2020; Suler, 2004). Drawing on Livingstone (2005), FMLWH can be understood as a 'public,' as they possess a shared understanding of their reality, a sense of collective identity, a demand for inclusivity, and a unified vision for their common interests. When FMLWH participate in social media, they

transform from mere media audiences or consumers to ‘networked publics.’ boyd (2011) argues that the communicative affordances of networked technologies alter how information flows and social interactions occur within these platforms.

Unlike online forums designed to foster a peer-only environment (Yeshua-Katz and Hård af Segerstad, 2020), the boundaries of social media tend to be fuzzy with diverse users merging into an ambiguous collective (Marwick & boyd, 2011a; Marwick & Ellison, 2012). This phenomenon called ‘context collapse’ poses implications on how PLWH negotiate visibility management (Lasser and Tharinger, 2003) on social media, where heterogeneous publics potentially bear witness to such performances. In this respect, the emergence of social media technologies has transformed the ways in which networked publics share intimate information about themselves, like an HIV diagnosis (Bazarova and Choi, 2014), and connect with similar account owners based on personal and social cues (Baym, 2010; Schmidt, 2013).

#### **1.2.4 Research Gaps and Entry Points for Enquiry**

Despite the Philippines experiencing a rapid rise in HIV infection rates, published research on the experiences of FMLWH is relatively scarce. While a substantial body of work exists on HIV prevention strategies, a critical gap remains in understanding the social realities of Filipinos living with HIV. Existing research has primarily focused on stigma and

discrimination (Adia et al., 2018; Lopez et al., 2017; Ortega et al., 2005; Trinidad et al., 2011), neglecting the broader spectrum of challenges and experiences faced by this population group. While some studies have explored the narratives of Filipinos with HIV (Acaba, 2018; Bagasol and Embate, 2018), the scholarship in this area is largely driven by a small group of local researchers (Adia et al., 2018; Lopez et al., 2017; Trinidad et al., 2011).

Meanwhile, the past two decades have witnessed a growing interest in the online interactions of PLWH, with a particular emphasis on social support. Research in this area has primarily focused on online health communities, such as discussion forums, bulletin boards, and message boards. While some studies have explored PLWH-oriented online spaces, social media have received less scholarly attention. Twitter, for example, has been acknowledged as a platform for PLWH interaction (Hawn, 2009; Moorley and Chinn, 2014; Taggart et al., 2015), but it remains under-investigated in this context. These arguments, coupled with a research gap in men's experiences with technology (Lohan and Faulkner, 2004), most notably with digital media (Light, 2013, 2017a), support the need to foreground the social media experiences of men living with HIV.

Existing research on PLWH and social media primarily consists of content analyses examining tweets about HIV drug treatments (Adrover et al., 2015; McLaughlin et al., 2016; Schwartz and Grimm, 2017). Researchers could significantly enhance their understanding of the online interactions and communicative practices of PLWH by

expanding the range of topics studied on social media platforms. This approach would allow them to access a wider spectrum of data, encompassing “the personal everyday lives and moods of users, their daily efforts at coordinating social activities, and loads of informal small talk alongside more information-oriented media uses” (Lomborg, 2011: 51).

The internet presents a valuable resource for exploring the multifaceted nature of the HIV experience. However, a common yet limiting research approach treats the internet as a mere tool or place. Researchers examining the intersection of PLWH and online behaviour often conceptualise the internet as either a conduit of information sharing or a cultural space where meaning-making occurs. Furthermore, online contexts are frequently seen as separate from the offline or ‘real’ world, limiting insights into how social media are woven into the fabric of everyday life (Boellstorff, 2008).

As argued by Markham (2007), the internet is not only a tool or a place, but also a way of being. This viewpoint suggests that “computer-mediated communication is both process and product, medium and outcome” (Markham, 2007: 363). Such reframing challenges simplistic views of social media as a black box isolated from users, online meeting spaces with transient interactions, or mere communication tools. Instead, approaching social media as a way of being invites researchers to examine them as communicative genres.

### **1.3 Statement of the Problem**

A genre analysis informed by a functional-pragmatic perspective allows for a more comprehensive examination of both the thematic content of tweets authored by PLWH and the ways in which PLWH engage in Twitter to achieve social outcomes. Embracing this perspective grants agency to PLWH, a group often portrayed in research as passive and dependent. It recognises them instead as sense-making agents who appropriate social media for self-organisation and innovation. As argued by Couldry (2004: 121), a focus on practices requires examining what people do and say in relation to media. Seen in this light, the fundamental research enquiry then shifts from “How do they *use* social media?” to “How do they *enact* social media?” Along these lines, the term ‘Twittering’ extends beyond simply posting tweets. It encompasses the range of communicative practices involved in skilfully applying genre knowledge and negotiating participation in the platform.

Taking these points together, this research was implemented with the goal of answering this overarching question: *How is Twittering enacted as a communicative genre by users identifying as FMLWH?* This general research question was parsed into four subsidiary questions:

1. *What is the composition of this user base on Twitter?*
2. *What contents are featured in their tweets and Twitter bios?*
3. *What style of communication is exhibited in their tweets and Twitter bios?*
4. *What are the pragmatic functions of Twittering for these users?*

## **1.4 Objectives of the Research**

This online ethnography was steered by this overall mission: *To analyse how Twittering is enacted as a communicative genre by Twitter users identifying as FMLWH.* To this end, three sequential studies were undertaken to address the following specific objectives:

1. Study 1 (Composition)
  - a. General study objective: *Analyse the composition of Twitter users identifying as FMLWH.*
  - b. Specific study objectives:
    - i. *Explore how FMLWH negotiate visibility management on Twitter.*
    - ii. *Analyse the socio-technical characteristics of these Twitter users.*
    - iii. *Analyse the connection network of these Twitter users.*

- iv. *Analyse the conversation network of these Twitter users.*
- v. *Cluster these Twitter users into distinct personas based on their socio-technical characteristics and network measures.*

2. Study 2 (Pragmatic Function)

- a. General study objective: *Analyse the pragmatic functions of Twittering among users identifying as FMLWH.*
- b. Specific study objectives:
  - i. *Trace select participants' entry to Twitter and their introduction to the Twitterverse of PLWH.*
  - ii. *Elucidate their communicative practices that define Twittering as a communicative genre.*
  - iii. *Situate the role of Twittering within their lived experiences as FMLWH.*

3. Study 3 (Content and Style)

- a. General study objective: *Analyse the thematic orientations and stylistic features of Twitter content generated by users identifying as FMLWH.*
- b. Specific study objectives:
  - i. *Describe the textual features of Twitter content.*
  - ii. *Uncover how these users describe themselves in their Twitter bio.*
  - iii. *Classify these users' Twitter bio content based on the framework developed.*
  - iv. *Uncover the types of tweets posted by these users.*
  - v. *Classify these users' tweets based on the framework developed.*

## 1.5 Researcher Positionality and Motivations

Consistent with the practices of ethnographic research, this opening chapter addresses my positionality and the motivations that fuelled my interest in this specific topic. I account for my potential biases and viewpoints in relation to both Twitter and the HIV community. This transparency is crucial for ensuring the trustworthiness of the research and fostering a more nuanced interpretation of the results.

My firsthand experience with social media platforms, particularly Twitter, sparked my interest in studying online communities. Joining Twitter as early as 2008 provided me with a foundational understanding of the platform's functionalities (such as @mentions, retweets, and hashtags) and general conventions. This familiarity facilitated initial access for my ethnographic research. Meanwhile, focusing on the online community of FMLWH allowed me to compare my own Twitter experiences with their practices, highlighting the platform's multifaceted nature.

As detailed in the prologue of this manuscript, a friend's HIV diagnosis fostered within me a profound sensitivity toward PLWH, a vulnerable population that continues to face significant stigma in Philippine society. This, along with the surprising revelation of Twitter's role in aiding my friend's path toward recovery and self-acceptance, ignited my

curiosity about how individuals leverage social media for unconventional purposes. With my primary research interests residing at the intersection of development communication and digital culture, this topic naturally lent itself to further exploration.

Embarking on my PhD in 2018, I was struck by the lack of research on this subject matter. As I complete this research project six years later, I remain surprised by the limited academic exploration in this topical space. While HIV prevention research is undeniably crucial, it can unintentionally neglect the lived experiences of PLWH. Similarly, studies focused on treatment, care, and support—though well-intentioned—can inadvertently frame PLWH as mere recipients of aid. As argued by Van Leeuwen (2008), such portrayals align with a ‘passivated’ social actor role, neglecting the agency of PLWH. This research, however, approaches Twittering as a techno-social practice, highlighting the dynamic relationship between the platform and the agency exercised by users. Analytically, a functional-genre perspective resonates with this line of thinking. To borrow the words of Miller et al. (2018: 272), “genre offers theorists... a construct that mediates specific practices and performances with abstract considerations of agency and typification.” Philosophically, PLWH can be considered *Homo faber* or tool-wielders (Assmann, 2000), *Homo significans* or meaning-makers (Chandler, 2022), and *Homo narrans* or storytellers (Fisher, 1984)

This ethnography is informed by the understanding that the social practices of PLWH on Twitter position them as curators who “mediate our experience of social information” (Hogan, 2010: 381). Conceptualising Twitter as an exhibition space (Hogan, 2010), PLWH curate various semiotic resources into a multimodal ensemble (*Homo faber*). Their goal is to construct a meaningful social product imbued with significance (*Homo significans*). Meanings ascribed to Twittering are socially and culturally situated and are actively negotiated by this user base. Furthermore, PLWH make sense of their techno-social experiences (Kennedy, 2003) by telling stories about them (*Homo narrans*). As a disclaimer, this research employs the term ‘Twitter users’ for practical reasons, rather than to suggest a specific ontological status ascribed to these individuals (i.e., that they are plain media consumers on the platform). These ontological assumptions served as the foundation for the methodological approach adopted in this ethnography. I continue this discussion of researcher reflexivity in Chapter 3.

## **1.6 Structure of the Thesis**

This manuscript unfolds across nine chapters. This chapter serves as an introduction, followed by Chapter 2, which presents a review of related literature and the theoretical framework underpinning the research. Chapter 3 details the overall research methodology employed and integrates researcher reflexivity. The subsequent four chapters

(Chapters 4–7) present the empirical findings from the three studies conducted. The first study analysed Twittering at the level of network composition. Chapter 4 presents the qualitative findings from this study, while Chapter 5 delves into the quantitative results. Chapter 6 then weaves select technobiographies of Twittering from the second study, illuminating the pragmatic functions embedded within social practices. This is followed by Chapter 7, which explores the thematic orientations and stylistic features of Twitter content (Study 3). A general discussion chapter (Chapter 8) synthesises the empirical findings presented in these four chapters. Chapter 9 brings the manuscript to a close, outlining conclusions and recommendations.

## **1.7 Chapter Summary**

This introductory chapter set the table for the rest of this manuscript by highlighting the merits of a functional-pragmatic approach to genre in analysing Twittering practices. It also justified the selection of FMLWH as a unique user base for genre analysis. The research questions are aligned with Lomborg's (2014) genre dimensions, which are elaborated upon in Chapter 2. Three sequential studies were implemented as part of this mixed-methods online ethnography. The value of pursuing this research topic lies in the dearth in scholarship focused on understanding the lived experiences of PLWH.

Ultimately, this ethnography aspires to harness the potential of Twitter for understanding the experiences of a marginalised and stigmatised community: FMLWH.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

#### **2.1 Chapter Overview**

Drawing on existing literature, this chapter establishes the social, cultural, and academic context of the research. The literature review first focuses on HIV prevalence in the Philippines and the most at-risk populations, highlighting how contracting HIV can disrupt the life course of newly diagnosed individuals. It then explores how people living with HIV (PLWH) utilise the internet, as a coping mechanism. A substantial portion of the chapter focuses on Twitter, the social platform on which this online ethnography is based. Finally, it explores in detail the theoretical and conceptual frameworks that ground this research.

#### **2.2 HIV Incidence in the Philippines as the Research Context**

The following news headlines capture the severity of HIV incidence in the Philippines:

- ◆ UN body projects 200,000 HIV case [sic] in Philippines by 2025<sup>4</sup>
- ◆ HIV surge to 100,000 cases feared amid COVID pandemic<sup>5</sup>
- ◆ As AIDS, HIV awareness among PH youth declines, cases, deaths rise<sup>6</sup>

The Philippines grapples with the fastest-growing HIV epidemic in the Western Pacific region, with almost all reported infections occurring among Filipino males (Gangcuangco and Eustaquio, 2023). From 2010 to 2021, HIV incidence in the country saw a staggering 327% increase (Department of Health- Epidemiology Bureau, 2022; UNAIDS, 2019). This trend showed no signs of abating, with the average number of daily new cases reaching 41 by the end of 2022, compared with only two per day in 2009 (Department of Health- Epidemiology Bureau, 2022).

While the alarming rise in HIV infections in the Philippines demands attention, identifying the most vulnerable populations is equally important, as they can differ based on geographical and epidemiological contexts. The Philippines faces a significant challenge

<sup>4</sup> Crisostomo S (2019) UN body projects 200,000 HIV case in Philippines by 2025. Available at: <https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2019/10/22/1962260/un-body-projects-200000-hiv-case-philippines-2025> (accessed 24 April 2024).

<sup>5</sup> Baclig CE (2022) HIV surge to 100,000 cases feared amid COVID pandemic. Available at: <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1551720/for-posting-edited-hiv-surge-to-100000-cases-feared-amid-covid-pandemic> (accessed 24 April 2024).

<sup>6</sup> dela Peña K (2022) As AIDS, HIV awareness among PH youth declines, cases, deaths rise. Available at: <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1681539/as-aids-hiv-awareness-among-ph-youth-declines-cases-deaths-rise> (accessed 24 April 2024).

due to the disproportionate impact of HIV on men, who constitute 94% of diagnosed cases (Department of Health- Epidemiology Bureau, 2022). This is broken down into men who have sex with only men (62%), men who have sex with both men and women (28%), and men who have sex with only women (10%). These figures illustrate a notable sex-based asymmetry observed in Philippine cases, highlighting the gendered nature of HIV (Treichler, 1999; Squire, 2013).

### **2.3 HIV and Stigma**

Living with a chronic illness like HIV goes beyond just managing physical symptoms. Socioeconomic, cultural, and ecological factors profoundly shape how individuals manage this condition. This underscores its status as a critical social issue, potentially even more impactful than its biological aspects. Unlike other chronic conditions, such as cancer, diabetes, and heart disease, HIV is disproportionately burdened by social stigma (Herek, 1999; Taylor, 2001). This stigma often manifests as societal blame directed toward PLWH (Gwyn, 2002).

Since its emergence in the 1980s, HIV has been tagged as a condition primarily affecting homosexual communities (Herek, 1999; Aggleton, 2009). Despite decades of progress in highly active antiretroviral therapy, the misconception that HIV is a death

sentence persists (Herek, 2002). Fear of HIV transmission remains a driver of stigma for PLWH. Herek (2002) highlights how some HIV-negative individuals harbour anxieties about contracting the virus through casual interaction. Altogether, social stigmas surrounding HIV manifest in ostracism or avoidance of PLWH. This reinforces the notion of the virus as “an intruder, penetrating literally and symbolically the boundaries of both the physical and social body” (Bar-Lev and Tillinger, 2010: 302).

Gregory M. Herek’s definition of HIV stigma is widely recognised in the literature. He propounds that the scope of HIV stigma encompasses “prejudice, discounting, discrediting, and discrimination directed at people perceived to have AIDS or HIV, and the individuals, groups, and communities with which they are associated” (Herek, 1999: 1107). This definition expands upon Herek & Glunt’s (1988) earlier work by acknowledging the enactment of stigma and its wider social impact, extending beyond PLWH.

Rintamaki and Weaver (2008) conducted a comprehensive analysis of existing literature on the social dynamics of HIV-related stigma in the United States. Drawing upon the work of Alonzo and Reynolds (1995), they identify six key sources of stigma: 1) linking HIV with deviant behaviours; 2) beliefs about personal responsibility for contracting the virus; 3) religious views on morality; 4) fear of contagion; 5) association with an undesirable form of death; and 6) a general lack of knowledge among the public. These stigmas can

manifest in four negative health outcomes: 1) stress; 2) shame and low self-esteem; 3) depression; and 4) suicide (Rintamaki and Weaver, 2008: 76–79).

Research on HIV stigma in the Philippines highlights concerning trends. The latest stigma index for PLWH in the Philippines reports that the upward trend in the number of HIV cases in the country is accompanied by persistent negative attitudes from the general population toward PLWH (Laguna and Villegas, 2019). Specifically, PLWH in the Philippines reported encountering stigma and discrimination based on their gender identity and sexual preferences (Laguna and Villegas, 2019).

Trinidad et al. (2011) found that Filipinos living with HIV experience greater internalised than externalised stigma. Lopez et al. (2017) highlighted the presence of stigma within the healthcare system, specifically among workers at the Philippine General Hospital. Meanwhile, Adia et al. (2018) investigated the experiences of HIV-positive Filipino men who have sex with men, revealing they grapple with both HIV-related stigma and stigma associated with homosexuality, which the authors linked to concepts of morality, uncleanliness, and sin.

A study by Ofreneo et al. (2011) emphasises a key challenge for PLWH in the Philippines: reconstructing their self-identity in the context of an HIV diagnosis. Coping effectively requires embracing self-acceptance and adjusting to a new life with HIV. This

concept of a ‘new life’ aligns with Goffman’s (1963) seminal work on stigma and spoiled identity. Here, Goffman argues that individuals facing stigma manage it by connecting with others who share their experience or those equipped to handle it, such as medical professionals and counsellors. Furthermore, Goffman suggests that stigmatised individuals often avoid ‘mixed contacts,’ as interactions with those perceived as ‘normal’ can negatively impact their psychosocial well-being (Goffman, 1963). According to Rintamaki (2009), an HIV diagnosis can lead to a social upheaval. Individuals may disengage from their previous ‘healthy and normal’ social circles and gravitate toward communities viewed by society as ‘unhealthy and abnormal’ due to HIV stigma. This underscores the isolating impact of stigma on PLWH.

Reinforcing the impact of an HIV diagnosis, Bury’s (1982) concept of chronic illness as a biographical disruption suggests that HIV can fundamentally change an individual’s life course. According to Bury (1982: 169), “illness, and especially chronic illness, is precisely that kind of experience where the structures of everyday life and the forms of knowledge which underpin them are disrupted.” The combination of stigma and chronic illness makes HIV a significant challenge for those affected (Alexias et al., 2016; Carricaburu and Pierret, 1995). These repercussions, as shown by Power et al. (2003) and Tate and George (2001), extend beyond physical health, potentially leading to a loss of self, a core element of suffering for the chronically ill, as highlighted by Charmaz (1983). Goffman’s (1963) concept of stigma once again sheds light on this. Stigma, he argues,

disrupts an individual's ability to author their life story as originally planned. In light of these considerations, development communication research concerning PLWH would gain significant value by emphasising a social and cultural approach to health, which would illuminate the interactions and social dynamics that shape the experiences of PLWH (Dutta, 2008; Körner, 2009).

## **2.4 Internet Use among PLWH**

Since the AIDS crisis in the 1980s, PLWH have increasingly turned to digital technologies as a coping mechanism (Cifor and McKinney, 2020). At the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the first published accounts of internet use among PLWH (Flicker et al., 2004; Marlink et al., 1997; Reeves, 2000, 2001) heralded the potential of online forums and websites in improving PLWH's access to up-to-date information on HIV treatment, as well as social support. Likewise, computer networks have proven instrumental in the timely provision of healthcare to PLWH (Brennan and Ripich, 1994).

In the first published accounts of how PLWH use the internet, Reeves (2000, 2001) found that PLWH take to online forums and websites to obtain information about HIV, as well as form connections with fellow PLWH. Social support theories and models, in particular, have largely informed research enquiries on coping with HIV and related stigma

(Flickinger et al., 2017; Harris et al., 2015; Mo and Coulson, 2010, 2012, 2013), and message content and exchange processes in computer-mediated settings (Bar-Lev, 2008; Coursaris and Liu, 2009; Mo and Coulson, 2008). Researchers have also taken an interest in analysing the social network of PLWH who use internet-based tools (Chen and Shi, 2015; Rykov et al., 2016; Shi et al., 2017).

In terms of online environments, HIV-related enquiries have mainly been situated in online forums and discussion boards. Studies on the use of social media and social networking sites by PLWH are not only sparse but also appear to be still primarily framed within the context of social support (Chen et al., 2019; Chen and Shi, 2015; Han et al., 2018; Shi and Chen, 2014). Altogether, beyond social support in online forums, relatively little scholarly work has explored how PLWH form networks on social media and integrate social media into their everyday lives.

## **2.5 Negotiating HIV Disclosure and Visibility in Online Spaces**

Self-disclosure is defined as the act of allowing somebody access to intimate information, such as one's HIV serostatus (Greene et al., 2003: 4–5), and is traditionally conceptualised as a private affair involving dyads and requiring safe spaces (Jourard, 1971; Pearce and Sharp, 1973). This contrasts with public disclosure, which is characterised by

broader visibility and, hence, less control over the audience obtaining the information (Greene et al., 2003: 5). PLWH often refrain from disclosing their serostatus due to the fear of HIV-related stigmas (Paxton, 2002: 560). Nonetheless, HIV disclosure is essential as it serves as the necessary first step toward obtaining social support (Greene et al., 2003; Serovich, 2001). Given the positive outcomes linked to disclosure, Paxton (2002: 565) encourages PLWH to openly share their status and engage in conversations about their lived experiences of coping with a health condition laden with stigmas. However, Edenborg (2020) challenges the paradigm of visibility as emancipation, asserting its foundation in Western ideals. When public recognisability carries potential harm, marginalised communities resort to creative strategies of performing visibility (and invisibility).

Conceptually, disclosure is inextricably linked to visibility, as it involves the act of making private information known to another party. A useful theoretical frame to understand how people confronting stigma negotiate their identities is visibility management, defined as “the ongoing process by which individuals employ multiple strategies to actively regulate the degree to which they disclose or reveal invisible traits (Lasser and Wicker, 2008: 105). Where disclosure entails a singular event, visibility management is characterised by a strategic and continuous process involving a ‘constellation of strategies’ (Lasser and Tharinger, 2003: 237–238).

The literature on visibility management tends to focus on minorities and marginalised communities. While Melbourne has legalised sex work, Ham and Gerard (2014) identified 'strategic in/visibility' as a tactic adopted by sex workers, allowing for different forms of class, financial, and social mobilities. In their exploratory study, Lasser and Tharinger (2003) discovered that gay, lesbian, and bisexual youths employed various means to regulate the visibility of their sexual identity, revealing it selectively to particular audiences while concealing it from others. However, visibility can be counterproductive in certain contexts, potentially leading to legal consequences. Cisneros and Bracho (2019) investigated how 'undocuqueer' immigrants engaged in 'visibility schemas,' strategically choosing when to reveal or conceal their identities in various contexts. Meanwhile, in Vietnam, queer spaces often experience state policing. Here, Newton (2016) discovered that Vietnamese lesbians perform 'contingent visibility' by employing symbolic codes that reveal their identities to fellow les but not to the larger public. In this way, they can mitigate the risks associated with government policing and potential public shaming in Vietnamese public spaces.

Although the concept of visibility management has been mostly explored in literature concerning the disclosure of sexual identities, Lasser and Tharinger (2003) assert its applicability to other contexts that involve the active management of the self (Dewaele et al., 2013, 2014; Song et al., 2022; Twist et al., 2017), including the experience of living with HIV.

## 2.6 Online Self-Presentation among PLWH

HIV diagnosis opens the door to the construction of new identities (Rintamaki, 2009), with media playing an integral role in the process. As Bruckman (1992) notes, online environments function as an ‘identity workshop’ where users can perform a version, or multiple versions, of themselves (Turkle, 1995). The affordances of social media, such as Twitter, provide PLWH a space in which they can construct, deconstruct, and reconstruct their identities. Similarly, Twitter’s platform features fosters social identifiability, allowing PLWH to connect with others who share similar experiences, all while maintaining a level of anonymity (Jaidka et al., 2022).

While there is a substantial body of literature on HIV disclosure (Ankrah, 1993; Chaudoir et al., 2011; Doyal and Anderson, 2005; Evangelisti and Wroe, 2017; Smith et al., 2008), fewer studies have honed in on the specific dynamics of disclosure on social media (Davis and Flowers, 2014; Philpot et al., 2022). The concept of visibility in the context of HIV disclosure becomes especially salient in the social media milieu, as multiple audiences potentially bear witness to the performance of HIV identities.

Considering the stigmas surrounding HIV, the self-presentation practices of PLWH on social media take on greater nuance. In contrast to HIV discussion forums, which are

usually private spaces accessible to a relatively homogenous crowd, social media platforms are more open and host disparate audiences. Hence, social media are prone to context collapse wherein individuals from varied social contexts are reduced into a generic category of ‘friends’ or ‘contacts’ (Marwick & boyd, 2011a; Marwick & Ellison, 2012). In effect, context collapse may lead to a feeling of diminished privacy (Marwick & boyd, 2014). Thus, negotiating the presence of multiple audiences has the potential to complicate the self-presentation strategies that PLWH might otherwise employ in more confined and controlled social settings. For this reason, HIV disclosure on social media inevitably calls for more nuanced performances.

Self-presentation on social media may be partially understood through Goffman’s (1956) dramaturgy metaphor. Goffman argues that the self is performed; individuals wear a figurative mask to project a suitable image depending on the social situation. This performance inherently involves an element of real-time/synchronous presentation and a live audience to witness it. However, because the nature of social media content is asynchronous—meaning, it is displayed on-demand to online spectators—this metaphor of performance falls short. As a response, Hogan (2010) extends Goffman’s dramaturgical approach by reimagining social media as an exhibition site. Along these lines, social media users are not actors but curators, and their social media content not performances but artefacts.

## 2.7 A Focus on Twitter

Twitter has piqued the interest of researchers to better understand the communicative practices and social networks of people living with illnesses and disorders. While a significant body of literature examines how Twitter is used by individuals with conditions such as cancer (Himelboim and Han, 2014; Sugawara et al., 2012; Tsuya et al., 2014), traumatic brain injury (Brunner et al., 2018, 2019), and dementia (Talbot et al., 2018, 2020; Thomas, 2017), research specifically focused on Twitter use by PLWH is noticeably lacking. The current scholarship on PLWH and social media use lacks investigation into their everyday online communication on Twitter and how they tailor the platform to their health and personal needs.

### 2.7.1 Twitter as a Social Media Platform

Launched in 2006, Twitter (now X) is a microblogging platform that allows users to broadcast 280-character messages called ‘tweets’ to their followers (if their account is protected) or to the public (if their account is open). On Twitter, media outlets can break the news and provide real-time updates as events unfold. At the same time, the platform allows ordinary users to share seemingly trivial details about their lives, reflecting the open-ended prompt in Twitter’s message bar: *What is happening?* (Weller et al., 2014). As of March 2020, Twitter was ranked as the fourth most visited website globally, with users

averaging a visit duration of 10 minutes and 26 seconds (SimilarWeb, 2019). When it comes to social media platforms in particular, as of January 2020, Twitter was the 13<sup>th</sup> most popular with 340 million global users (Clement, 2020).

Twitter falls under the umbrella of social media, defined by Carr and Hayes (2015: 49) as “internet-based, disentained, and persistent channels of masspersonal communication facilitating perceptions of interactions among users, deriving value primarily from user-generated content.” The following discussion explores how each component of this definition manifests within the Twitter environment.

- ◆ Internet-based: Twitter’s functionality extends beyond the World Wide Web, which is a specific application of interconnected networks. While web browsers offer a common access point to Twitter, they do not represent the only means for users to engage with the platform (Carr and Hayes, 2015: 50).
- ◆ Disentained, persistent channels: Asynchronicity is a defining characteristic of Twitter interaction. This contrasts with face-to-face communication, where participants need to be simultaneously engaged. Twitter’s ‘disentained’ communication model allows users to participate when it suits them. Despite its asynchronous nature, Twitter creates a ‘persistent’ online space. Messages (whether tweets or direct messages) are continuously generated, transmitted, and accessed regardless of individual users’ online presence. This allows users to resume conversations with others seamlessly, picking up from where they left off (Carr and Hayes, 2015: 50–51).

- ◆ Perceived interactivity: Twitter's design fosters a sense of interactive engagement despite the potential absence of actual user interaction. This perceived interactivity distinguishes the platform from traditional communication methods. Additionally, Twitter can nurture parasocial relationships, characterised by the illusion of a close friendship with someone encountered solely online (Carr and Hayes, 2015: 51; Marwick and dm boyd, 2011: 144).
- ◆ User-generated value: The value of Twitter stems primarily from interactions with other users, rather than content produced on the platform. User interaction, facilitated through replies, retweets, likes, and direct messages, fuels continued engagement with the platform's content (Carr and Hayes, 2015: 51–52).
- ◆ Masspersonal communication: The concept of masspersonal communication acknowledges that individuals can leverage traditionally mass communication channels for interpersonal purposes, and vice versa. This challenges the rigid distinction between these communication forms (O'Sullivan and Carr, 2018: 1164). Twitter embodies this feature, as users can broadcast messages ('tweets') to a vast audience, but this audience frequently retains a sense of interpersonal connection. Receivers can choose to respond directly to the individual or by posting their own public tweet (O'Sullivan and Carr, 2018: 52).

## 2.7.2 Twitter as a Social Network

While Twitter leans more toward the characteristics of a social media platform than a social network site (Murthy, 2013: 10), it cultivates user connections through features like following and tagging (Schmidt, 2014). This emphasis on connectivity aligns with the

definition of social network sites provided by boyd & Ellison (2007: 211): “web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system.”

The following section details how these three attributes are realised on Twitter.

- ◆ Construction of a profile: Social network sites typically require users to furnish a profile that includes a self-description and a display picture (boyd and Ellison, 2007: 213). Twitter profiles consist of several elements. The biographical description, known as a ‘Twitter bio,’ allows users to describe themselves. Additionally, users can optionally upload a profile image and a header image. It is worth noting that users’ profiles are always publicly available, regardless of their privacy settings. However, the visibility of tweets and follower/following lists is determined by users’ privacy settings. Public tweets can be viewed by anyone, whereas protected tweets are restricted to approved followers. Similarly, only approved followers can see the lists of followers and ‘followees’ for protected accounts. The anatomy of a Twitter profile will be explored in more detail in the following section.
- ◆ Forging user connections: New user registration on social network sites often includes a guided process that prompts users to identify and connect with existing account owners who are already part of their social circle (boyd and Ellison, 2007: 213). Unlike Facebook, which relies on a system of mutual connections, Twitter utilises a directed network structure. User connections are established through the act of ‘following’ another user. In a directed relationship, User A follows User B (but not vice versa). In this scenario, User

User A is the follower, and User B is the ‘followee.’ However, if both User A and User B follow each other, they are considered ‘friends’ on Twitter. Following other accounts is a core function for user connection on Twitter. However, @mentions, retweeting, ‘favouriting’ tweets, and direct messaging also contribute to establishing ties.

- ◆ Viewing user connections: A core aspect of social network sites is the visibility of connections made available to the public or to one’s followers. Users can explore this list to discover their own connections and those of their friends (boyd and Ellison, 2007: 213). Twitter exemplifies this concept with two lists: followers (users who follow a particular account) and ‘followees’ (accounts a particular user follows).

### 2.7.3 Anatomy of the Twitter Profile

The Twitter profile displays the following core elements:

- ◆ Name: The Twitter display name is a personal identifier distinct from one’s Twitter handle. Capped at 50 characters, display names offer more space for creativity compared with handles. This allows users to choose a name that reflects their personality, business, or even their legitimate name (Twitter, 2020). This field supports alphanumeric characters, as well as emojis.
- ◆ Twitter handle: Upon registering for a Twitter account, users are required to nominate a username. These usernames, also referred to as handles, must be unique and consist only of alphanumeric characters. The maximum length permitted for usernames is 15 characters (Twitter, 2020).

- ◆ Bio: Unlike the name and Twitter handle, which are mandatory during account creation, the Twitter bio is an optional field. This section functions as a space for users to introduce themselves on their profile. They can utilise up to 160 alphanumeric characters and emojis to craft their bio (X, 2024b).
- ◆ URL: Twitter profiles include an optional field where users can input a website address of up to 100 characters. This entered URL is then automatically converted into a clickable link displayed on the profile.
- ◆ Tagged location: Twitter profiles offer users the option to add their location. This open field allows users to enter any text string up to 30 characters. However, the platform does not guarantee the entered information corresponds to an actual location.
- ◆ Date of birth: A user's day and month of birth can be displayed on their profile, but only if they choose to make this information visible.
- ◆ Account creation date: Twitter profiles show a user's join date, indicated by the month and day.
- ◆ Profile image: Twitter allows users to personalise their profiles with a display image, but uploading one is entirely optional. For optimal display, Twitter recommends using an image sized 400 x 400 pixels. If a user chooses not to upload a picture, a default gender-balanced figure icon appears (Twitter, 2017).
- ◆ Header image: Users can also customise their profile by uploading a banner or header image. Twitter recommends using an image sized 1500 x 500 pixels (X, 2024b).
- ◆ Following count: One publicly visible element on Twitter profiles is the following count. This number represents the total accounts a user follows and is viewable by all profile visitors.

- ◆ Follower count: Oppositely, the follower count indicates the total number of users who follow the account owner. Anyone viewing the profile can see this information.
- ◆ Similar followers: Twitter profiles offer a way to identify shared connections, indicating which accounts a logged-in user follows that also follow the profile being viewed.
- ◆ User timeline: Beneath the proper profile section lies the timeline, which showcases a continuous stream of the user's tweets. Twitter allows users to pin specific tweets to the top of their timeline for increased visibility.

Of these elements, only the account owner's name and Twitter handle are mandatory fields that must be completed. Meanwhile, the account creation date, follower count, following count, and similar followers are immutable sub-canvas that account owners themselves cannot modify (Bateman et al., 2017). The anatomy of a Twitter profile is shown in Figure 1.



Figure 1. Anatomy of the Twitter profile

## 2.7.4 User Innovation on Twitter

Twitter's unique environment fosters user innovation, as scholars have acknowledged (Bruns, 2012; Rogers, 2014). The platform's flat network and open structure inherently encourage user interaction and invention (Halavais, 2010). Unlike other social media platforms, Twitter was not designed with a specific user or purpose in mind. Instead, its features organically evolved in response to user needs and practices (Pegoraro, 2014).

Twitter itself recognises the platform's evolving nature. In a blog entry dated 13 August 2009, Twitter co-founder Christopher Isaac Stone wrote: "Some of Twitter's best features are emergent—people inventing simple but creative ways to share, discover, and communicate" (Stone, 2009). User-invented practices like hashtags, @replies, and retweets have since been built into the Twitter infrastructure (Bruns, 2012; Rogers, 2014).

**Hashtags.** The earliest use of the Twitter hashtag dates to 23 August 2007 when user Chris Messina tweeted: "How do you feel about using # (pound) for groups. As in #barcamp [msg]?" (2007). Messina's proposition to use the hashtag to group together similar conversations takes its cues from Internet Relay Chat, wherein the pound sign (#) prefaced channel names (e.g., #usenet, #teen, #hiphop).

The utility of hashtags gained momentum two months later during the San Diego wildfires. Inspired by their use on Flickr, Chris Messina proposed adopting the hashtag *#SanDiegoFire* to organise tweets related to the event (Pandell, 2017). This incident underscored the value of social tagging for news outlets, enabling them to mine crowdsourced information for event-based reporting (Bigelow, 2019).

While Twitter hashtags were initially intended for organisation and indexing, they have adopted new functions. The New Yorker columnist Susan Orlean (2010) identifies creative uses such as side-commentaries, disclaimers, and ironic markers. Though these

applications may not be functional, they exemplify Bruns' (2012) concept of 'user-led communicative innovation' as a form of discursive practice (Lee, 2018; Zappavigna, 2015).

**@replies.** Another key user innovation on Twitter involved employing the at sign (@) to address other users. Once again, Stone acknowledged this user-created method of addressing others in a 30 May 2007 blog post, where he also announced Twitter's integration of the @ functionality (Stone, 2007).

Similar to hashtags, the @ symbol for addressing users originated from earlier virtual spaces like newsgroups and blog comments (Halavais and Martin-Elmer, 2009, in Bruns, 2012). This shift marked a divergence from Twitter's original purpose as a public instant messaging platform (Rogers, 2014). Using the @ sign use for mentions and threaded replies transformed Twitter into a platform for conversation and collaboration.

**Retweets.** Like forwarding emails, retweeting involves sharing another user's tweet while preserving the original content. Initially, user convention prefixed retweets with 'RT' until Twitter integrated the official retweet function in 2009 (Stone, 2009). While retweeting may appear as a plain means of information propagation, its use has evolved into a multifaceted conversational tool. boyd et al. (2010) highlight its impact on authorship, attribution, and communication fidelity, reflecting its conversational nature. Subsequently,

Majmundar et al. (2018) developed a ‘Why We Retweet Scale’ to explore retweeting motivations, such as approval, argument, attention-seeking, and entertainment.

**Lists.** In 2009, Twitter introduced lists, a response to the growing challenge of information overload on the platform. Announced on the Twitter blog by Kallen (2009) on 30 September 2009, lists were described as public by default, with the ability for other users to subscribe. However, users also had the option to create private lists. This feature was implemented to address user feedback regarding the need for better methods of organising information on Twitter (Kallen, 2009).

While Twitter lists were initially conceived for account organisation and curation, their application has grown considerably. Reifman (2015) identifies several alternative uses, including fostering communities, supporting event coordination (often through dedicated hashtags), establishing influence, and managing public relations. The Indigenous Tweets project (Ní Bhroin, 2015) exemplifies such innovation, leveraging Twitter lists to convene and connect users tweeting in Indigenous languages.

**Rotation curation.** Twitter accounts have traditionally been the domain of a single owner. However, a new approach emerged in 2011, when the Swedish Institute and VisitSweden utilised a technique known as ‘rotation curation’ for a nation-branding campaign. This social media practice involves stakeholders from relevant communities

taking turns managing an established account for a set period (Fuller and Sandham, 2017: 1). Curators typically use the hashtag #RoCur to signal tweets originating from these accounts. The 'Curators of Sweden' project entrusted everyday Swedes with control of the account for week-long stints, allowing them to tweet freely before nominating a successor. This user-driven initiative sparked a global trend, with similar accounts emerging for various entities: countries (e.g., @I\_amGermany, @WeAreAustralia), regions (e.g., @CatalanVoices), cities (e.g., @WeAreBrisbane, @WeAreHyderabad), cultures/sectors (e.g., @IndigenousX, @TWkLGBTQ, @WeAreDisabled), and professions (e.g., @biotweeps, @iamsicomm) (Fuller and Sandham, 2017).

## **2.7.5 Twitter Use by Filipino Men Living with HIV**

Among the array of available social media platforms in the Philippines, Filipino men living with HIV (FMLWH) are most prominently visible on Twitter. In 2022, Twitter ranked fifth among the most used social platforms among Filipino users aged 16–64, trailing behind Facebook, Facebook Messenger, Instagram, and TikTok (Kemp, 2022). While Facebook remains the preferred social platform among Filipinos, the expanding Twitterverse of FMLWH indicates a special attraction to Twitter. Its appeal may be explained by the concept of affordances, which describes the actions that material artefacts, such as media technologies, enable (Bucher and Helmond, 2017: 235). Compared with Facebook, for instance, Twitter is distinct in the ways social ties are actualised. Twitter

connections are inherently unidirectional, which stands in contrast to Facebook's architecture wherein ties between 'friends' are reciprocal by default. In this way, communication on Twitter is not confined to a centralised space but rather unfolds through interconnected and distributed conversations (Schmidt, 2014: 6).

Moreover, owing to its somewhat 'identification-agnostic infrastructure' (Triggs et al., 2021: 7), Twitter allows account owners the option of anonymity, should they prefer it. While Facebook encourages account owners to supply their singular, 'true' identity (Van Dijck, 2013), Twitter provides users with the ability to maintain anonymity, which, explains Scott (1998: 384), "may be achieved not only by the absence of a source's identity, but through a fictitious alternative identity called a pseudonym." As Froomkin (1995) further points out, online anonymity and pseudonymity can be either traceable or untraceable. Despite integrity concerns surrounding online anonymity, (Donath, 1999; Johnson, 1997), maintaining pseudonymous or anonymous identities can afford social media users a sense of online disinhibition (Suler, 2004). This allows them to disclose sensitive information about themselves, including aspects that might otherwise lead to stigmatisation (Boudewyns et al., 2015; Schlosser, 2020).

Despite the increasing presence of FMLWH on Twitter, the ways in which they accomplish meaningful communication on this platform have received little scholarly attention. At best, only passing references to this user base have been made in local studies

that investigated the affordances of Twitter for the alter community (Cao, 2021; Piamonte et al., 2020) and the role of ICT in the provision of health services to PLWH during the COVID-19 pandemic (Cebedo et al., 2022; Joves et al., 2023). Nevertheless, the broader literature on the media practices of PLWH points to HIV-related stigmas as a driving force in their participation in online platforms (Cifor and McKinney, 2020; Gillett, 2003; Philpot et al., 2022; Rains, 2014; Reeves, 2001; Taggart et al., 2015).

## **2.8 Theoretical Framework**

The foundation of this research lies in a functional-pragmatic genre perspective advanced by Lomborg (2011, 2014). This approach to genre analysis takes stock of the dynamic nature of social media, making it well-suited for understanding how Twittering is enacted as a communicative genre. Moreover, because engaging with social media is founded on interactional dynamics, visibility is inherently embedded in genre enactment. As such, the research also draws upon the theory of visibility management (Lasser and Tharinger, 2003), especially considering the vulnerable population under study. Visibility management provides a valuable lens to understand how FMLWH regulate the disclosure of their HIV serostatus on Twitter, a platform prone to context collapse. Furthermore, the research is informed by the theory of networked publics (boyd, 2011), which posits that the communicative affordances of social media reconfigure structures of participation among

users. Finally, graph theory concepts informed the analysis of network measures at the individual and collective levels. The following discussion orients this research to these theoretical frames, setting the stage for the conceptual framework that follows.

### **2.8.1 A Functional-Pragmatic Genre Perspective**

The varied viewpoints on genre make it a challenging concept to pin down. As noted by Devitt et al. (2003: 550) the etymological roots of ‘genre’ in French and Latin indicate that genres exist ‘to sort’ and ‘to generate.’ The former role finds its clearest illustration in traditional literary genre theories, which hold genres as static texts that can be classified according to their distinctive characteristics. Conversely, the latter function is based on the contemporary understanding that genre constitutes social action; that is, genres are the products of purposeful interaction.

Given the multifarious nature of genre, it becomes imperative to articulate the theoretical perspective guiding any genre analysis. According to Dean (2008: 20–21), genre theories vary along a continuum, with ‘genre as text’ positioned at one end, ‘genre as practice’ at the other, and ‘genre as rhetoric’ situated in between. ‘Genre as text’ is characterised by its reliance on formalist perspectives. Under this approach, genres are seen as static and stable units, with their textual features facilitating classification. Thus, seeing genre as text prioritises form and categorisation over situational context (Dean, 2008: 21–

22). Meanwhile, positioned at the opposite end of the spectrum is ‘genre as practice,’ which argues that genres represent ways of being. This perspective redirects attention away from the genres themselves and toward the activities and environments in which they are produced and reproduced. Given the focus on the dynamic and unstable characteristics of genres, theories related to ‘genre as practice’ tend to be more abstract (Dean, 2008: 23).

Occupying a middle ground between these two perspectives is ‘genre as rhetoric,’ which highlights the social actions essential for the existence of genres (Dean, 2008: 22). This theoretical standpoint aligns effectively with the dual generic functions of categorisation and creation. Even so, with this stance, textual features are regarded as indicators rather than decisive factors of genres (Devitt, 2004). This implies that classification is not the sole focus of genre analysis within the perspective of ‘genre as rhetoric.’ Thus, while genre analysis may involve an examination of the form and content of a particular text, it also entails delving into the recurring contexts that give rise to these texts, as well as how these texts respond to these situations (Dean, 2008: 22).

In analysing Twittering as a communicative genre, this research takes a central stance by adopting a functional-pragmatic genre perspective. In this context, genre analysis moves away from merely describing the formal features of static texts to understanding how dynamic genres are negotiated to fulfil communicative purposes. As noted by Lomborg

(2011, 2014), the functional genre perspective is informed by genre theories developed in the fields of applied linguistics, rhetoric, and media studies.

Deriving from the contributions of Swales (1990) and Bhatia (1993), functional genre theory in applied linguistics underscores communicative purpose as a central aspect of genres. According to Swales (1990: 58), “a genre comprises a class of communicative events, the members of which share some set of communicative purposes.” Expanding upon Swales’ definition, Bhatia (1993) describes genres as ‘highly structured and conventionalised,’ thereby placing constraints on the permissible degree of modification. Yet these constraints are also “often exploited by the expert members of the discourse community to achieve private intentions within the framework of socially recognised purpose(s)” (Bhatia, 1993: 49). These tactics emphasise the concept of genre as a dynamic process, making functional genre theory well-suited for analysing social media, which are continually shaped by the actions of users. In this regard, Lomborg (2011) points out that communicative purpose—that is, why members of a discourse community use language in a specific way—may be revealed by analysing the content and linguistic style of social media texts.

The aforementioned attributes of genre are also apparent in the rhetorical tradition. In her seminal paper *Genre as Social Action*, Miller (1984) emphasises the situational contexts in which genres are enacted and the purposes they serve communicators. She

writes: “A rhetorically sound definition of genre must be centred not on the substance or the form of discourse but on the action it is used to accomplish” (Miller, 1984: 151). According to Miller (1984), typified social action encompasses both situation and motive. Social action is labelled as ‘typified’ because communicators utilise symbols commonly employed in situations to fulfil their social motives. To borrow Paré’s (2014: 85) words, “the regularity of a genre depends on mutual agreement that this moment requires this particular discursive response.” Focusing on the social media landscape, the socially negotiated character of communicative purpose is manifest in how users navigate and appropriate social media platforms to cater to their needs (Lomborg, 2011: 63).

When delving into the concept of genre in media studies, the locus of analysis shifts from communicative purpose and situational context to “systems of orientations, expectations and conventions that circulate between producers, texts and audiences of mass media texts” (Neale, 1980: 19). Thus, media studies scholarship enriches genre analysis by moving beyond textual categorisation. This perspective considers the processes of production and interpretation that shape genres. Traditionally, analysis is performed on established communication formats that rarely see little modification as they are distributed and used. Moreover, professional creators produce these media texts, which are then passively consumed by audiences (Lomborg, 2011: 64–65). However, the underlying assumptions of this genre-based approach do not fit with the nature and communicative affordances of social media.

According to Lomborg (2011: 65–66), social media differ from mass and broadcast communication in three ways: 1) symmetrical communicative relations; 2) deinstitutionalised or deprofessionalised space; and 3) destabilised text. Firstly, social media facilitate open communication lines among users. Users can freely connect with others without the need for intermediaries. Furthermore, the role of producers as traditional sources of information becomes less pronounced in the communication and collaboration process. In this context, social media are considered deinstitutionalised or deprofessionalised spaces. Whereas traditional media view ordinary people as passive recipients of information, social media enable them to become content creators. Consequently, social media disrupt the power dynamics that favour media producers. Bruns (2008: 21) refers to this new paradigm as ‘produsage’—a portmanteau of production and usage—characterised by “the collaborative and continuous building and extending of existing content in pursuit of further improvement.” This dynamic co-creation of content demonstrates that “social media grant contemporary audiences new participatory privileges” (Chovanec and Dynel, 2015: 7). For example, discussion themes emerging from networked communication stem from the participants themselves, indicating that these are issues of relevance to them. Yet it is the very nature of produsage that makes social media texts susceptible to destabilisation, as they are continually altered by users who leave their mark on them (Lomborg, 2011: 66).

Given these considerations, the communicative dynamics on social media prompt a re-examination of the functional genre perspective from a pragmatic viewpoint, which is supported by Lomborg's (2011: 68) proposed approach that underscores genre knowledge, genre enactment, conventions, and the interactional skills needed for meaningful platform engagement. This perspective allows for an analysis of genre enactment on social media, shifting the focus way from mere usage. Specifically, Lomborg's (2014) genre-based framework for social media encompasses the four interrelated dimensions of composition, content, style, and pragmatic function. As will be outlined in the conceptual framework, this research integrates these four components in analysing Twittering as a communicative genre as enacted by users identifying as FMLWH.

## **2.8.2 Theory of Visibility Management**

The management of visibility is a crucial aspect of HIV communication. Visibility plays a central role in decisions about disclosing one's HIV status, a process that can cause significant distress for PLWH (Buseh et al., 2006; Doyal and Anderson, 2005; Paxton, 2002), despite HIV disclosure being necessary as it serves as the first step toward obtaining social support (Greene et al., 2003; Serovich, 2001). In turn, the invisibility of PLWH presents significant challenges to the effective provision of HIV prevention, treatment, care, and support services (Zhou, 2013).

For PLWH, virtual platforms can be more advantageous than in-person interactions, as they afford “space independency, anonymity or ‘pseudonymity’, invisibility, disinhibition, and status neutralization” (Prestin and Chou, 2014: 189). Reframing HIV disclosure in online spaces as an act of empowerment can challenge stigma by shifting the focus from burdensome disclosure to informed self-expression, fostering a more nuanced and compassionate public discourse surrounding HIV (Philpot et al., 2022; Zhou, 2013).

Building upon these ideas, Lasser and Tharinger’s (2003) theory of visibility management provides a framework for understanding how FMLWH navigate the process of disclosing their HIV status, and the extent to which they choose to do so. According to Lasser and Tharinger (2003: 237–238), visibility management describes the continual process by which individuals utilise a range of strategies and modes of communication to disclose private information to others. Moreover, visibility management exists on a continuum ranging from minimal to extensive disclosure, reflecting the dynamic interplay between individuals and their social environments (Lasser and Tharinger, 2003: 237–238). Although the theory of visibility management has been mostly applied to research concerning the coming out of gay, lesbian, and bisexual individuals, Lasser and Tharinger (2003) assert its applicability to other contexts that involve the active management of the self (Dewaele et al., 2013, 2014; Song et al., 2022; Twist et al., 2017), including the experience of living with HIV.

While extensive research on HIV disclosure exists (Ankrah, 1993; Arnold et al., 2008; Chaudoir et al., 2011; Doyal and Anderson, 2005; Evangel and Wroe, 2017; Smith et al., 2008), research specifically examining how PLWH manage their visibility in socially mediated environments is limited (Davis and Flowers, 2014; Milosavljevic, 2018; Philpot et al., 2022). Davis and Flowers (2014) explored the use of ‘metaphorical identity talk’ as a form of strategic in(visibility) on social media, allowing for nuanced disclosures without explicitly mentioning their HIV status. Similarly, Milosavljevic (2018) utilised the concept of strategic in(visibility) in an ethnography of gay dating sites to explore the HIV disclosure strategies of gay men in Serbia. Philpot et al. (2022) emphasised the importance of context in visibility strategies, highlighting the value of limiting audiences to those knowledgeable about HIV and likely to respond positively (Philpot et al., 2022: 883).

Negotiating visibility on social media may be further understood through Couldry’s concept of ‘presencing,’ which encompasses “individuals’ and groups’ acts of managing through media a continuous presence-to-others across space” (2012: 38). Couldry (2012: 38–39) further explains that this practice entails strategically circulating information and representations of themselves online to maintain a public presence. For this reason, presencing on social media is akin to rendering oneself visible to others in a public space. On Twitter, presencing is achieved through a series of actions: registering a handle; providing a name and biographical description, uploading profile and header images; and ultimately, engaging in public tweeting (O’Reilly and Milstein, 2009). These activities serve

to actively provide personal identity cues, over which account owners have greater control. Conversely, social identity cues about Twitter users are given off by their list of followers and 'followees'<sup>7</sup>, replies to their tweets, and likes they have received (Baym, 2010; Schmidt, 2013).

Presencing practices on Twitter are shaped by platform affordances, defined by Ronzhyn et al. (2023: 3181) as the "perceived actual or imagined properties of social media, emerging through the relation of technological, social and contextual that enables and constrains specific uses of the platforms." One key affordance for users is visibility, allowing them to intentionally make personal information, user activity, and connections accessible to others (Devito et al., 2017; Ramirez, 2018; Treem and Leonardi, 2013). According to Malhotra (2024), social media environments can be delineated into high-visibility platforms, like Facebook and Twitter/X, and low-visibility platforms, like instant messaging applications and private chats within social media. Therefore, the presencing practices of FMLWH on Twitter, a public space where they interact with others without anticipating complete privacy (Light, 2017b: 232), merit study.

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<sup>7</sup> To ensure clarity, this research distinguishes between 'followees' and 'friends' on Twitter. The term 'followees' refers to the users an account follows, while the term 'friends' denotes a reciprocal relationship where both account owners follow each other.

Visibility and presencing become particularly complex for PLWH participating in social media, where multiple audiences may encounter their online presence. Unlike the more controlled environments of HIV discussion forums, social media platforms often exhibit context collapse (Marwick and boyd, 2011; Marwick and Ellison, 2012), where the diverse social circles of an individual converge. This blurring of social contexts can lead to diminished privacy (Marwick and boyd, 2014) and necessitate more nuanced performance strategies for PLWH to navigate the complexities of visibility and maintain control over their online identities.

### **2.8.3 Theory of Networked Publics**

Engagement within social platforms such as Twitter transforms individuals from being mere media audiences or consumers to ‘networked publics’ comprised of “reactors, (re)makers and (re)distributors, engaging in shared culture and knowledge through discourse and social exchange as well as through acts of media reception” (Ito, 2008: 3). boyd (2011: 41) further describes networked publics as “simultaneously a space and a collection of people,” structurally distinct from other publics. Bypassing ‘real-name web’ expectations (Hogan, 2013), Twitter creates a user collective that can also be understood as ‘pseudonymous networked publics,’ which Light (2017b: 244) defines as “public spaces in which we do things alongside or with others, where there is no expectation of complete privacy but where the use of real names is not warranted.” Moreover, these public spaces

facilitate counterpublic communication, allowing users to explore ideas related to identity, community, and relationships, and to develop strategies for asserting or adapting their identities (Renninger, 2015: 1516).

boyd (2011) argues that information flows and social interaction within networked publics are reconfigured by four affordances:

- ◆ Persistence: Online expressions are automatically recorded and archived.
- ◆ Replicability: Content is easily reproduced.
- ◆ Scalability: Content is widely visible to others.
- ◆ Searchability: Search engines may be used to locate other users or expressions made by other users.

Alongside affordances, algorithms shape user connectivity and interaction in datafied spaces (Galloway and Thacker, 2007; Hartley, Bengtsson, et al., 2023; Van Der Nagel, 2018b). Algorithms produce ‘calculated publics’ (Gillespie, 2014) or ‘algorithmic publics’ (Christin, 2020; Hartley, Bengtsson, et al., 2023), comprising imagined collectives based on shared affinity, as seen in Twitter recommendations like ‘who to follow’ and ‘you might like.’ Thus, both affordances and algorithms facilitate the visibility of FMLWH on Twitter, resulting in new communication dynamics that connect them in ways that might not occur in ordinary circumstances.

## 2.8.4 Graph Theory

Social identifiability is guided by the homophily principle, which posits that individuals tend to forge links with those whom they perceive as possessing similar characteristics (Rogers and Bhowmik, 1970). As McPherson et al. (2001: 415) put it, “similarity breeds connection.” The ties binding social media users sharing similar traits may be examined using social network analysis. This approach derives from graph theory, the study of points and lines to model relations between and among nodes. At its core, graph theory is “the mathematical study of interactions, conflicts, and connections” (Saoub, 2021: xi). The enactment of a genre is not only shaped by the pragmatic functions its serves actors but also the social relations that underpin participation. Thus, the integration of graph theory into a functional-pragmatic approach to genre facilitates a detailed analysis of the network structures of interactants engaging in a social platform, such as Twitter.

Graph theory holds that the social sphere of Twitter users identifying as FMLWH is constructed by the volume of ties that bind them. These relationships can manifest in several ways on Twitter, including follows, @mentions, retweets, and favourites. However, this research specifically focused on follows, which form the foundation of the connection network, and @mentions, which constitute the conversation network. Network measures are outlined in the conceptual framework.

## 2.9 Conceptual Framework

This research is conceptually grounded in Lomborg's (2011, 2014) genre-based approach for analysing social media. Although other scholars have interrogated genres on the internet (Askehave and Nielsen, 2005; Giltrow and Stein, 2009; Santini et al., 2010; Schmidt, 2007), Lomborg's work is well-suited to this research because it accounts for the unique interactional dynamics enabled by social media.

Lomborg (2011, 2014) advances a genre-based approach as a response to the disparate ways in which social media are conceptualised. Some definitions highlight the 'social' in social media by emphasising their functional purposes, which set them apart from traditional public media. Others stress the 'media' aspect of social media, giving importance to their material and technological features. While these are useful definitions, Lomborg (2011, 2014) laments social media's lack of theoretical grounding, which could potentially bridge these fragmented conceptualisations. She thus advances a genre-based framework for social media that is "constituted at the interplay between interactive functionalities configured in software and the distinctly social purposes that users orient to in their communicative practices" (Lomborg, 2011: 51). The proposed framework examines how the concept of genre, traditionally applied to conventional forms of communication, may be

adapted to contemporary, dynamic, and multi-modal communication platforms like social media.

In Lomborg's (2014) framework, four interconnected components define social media as a communicative genre: 1) composition; 2) content; 3) style; and 4) pragmatic function. An exploration of these dimensions follows.

### **2.9.1 Composition**

Lomborg (2014) identifies two facets of genre analysis at the compositional level. The first aspect entails examining network structures and activity levels, while the second involves analysing the social organisation of communicative practices on social media. Given the research focus on genre enactment by FMLWH, analysis was confined to this user base on Twitter. However, it was recognised from the outset that identifying these individuals on Twitter would present challenges given the pervasive stigmas surrounding HIV, gender identity, and sexual orientation among FMLWH (Laguna and Villegas, 2019). Hence, it was crucial to first understand how these individuals negotiated visibility management on Twitter to be able to construct the pseudo-population of Twitter users for this research.

From a functional-pragmatic perspective, the communicative practices that shape social media genres are embedded in webs of interaction within a given user base. In this research, analysis was limited to a six-month timeframe, spanning from 21 October 2021 to 21 April 2022. The following measures were used to analyse the social networks of FMLWH users on Twitter:

- ◆ Network-level measures: metrics that provide an overview of the general properties and characteristics displayed by the connection and conversation networks (Valente, 2010: 22)
  - Average geodesic distance: the mean number of paths connecting any two Twitter users in the network
  - Centralisation: the degree to which 'follow' ties (connection network) or @mentions (conversation network) are concentrated to only one or a select few Twitter users
  - Density: the level of interconnectedness between and among Twitter users, with scores ranging from 0 (all nodes disconnected from one another) to 1 (all nodes connected to one another).
  - Diameter: the farthest distance that separates any two Twitter users in the network
  - Modularity: a measure of the network's structure by determining how well nodes cluster, where there is a marked difference in density within and between communities
  - Reciprocity: the tendency of any two Twitter users to follow each other (connection network) or respond to a tweet in which they are tagged (conversation network)

- ◆ Individual-level measures: metrics that offer insights into each Twitter user in the network, derived from actual follows and @mentions given to and received from other Twitter users in the network (Valente, 2010: 22)
  - Centrality
    - Betweenness centrality: the degree to which a Twitter user lies on the shortest path to other Twitter users in the network
    - Closeness centrality: the extent to which a Twitter user is nearer other actors, compared with other users in the network
    - Eigenvector centrality: the extent to which a Twitter user is followed by well-connected Twitter users
    - In-degree centrality: the number of followers in the network a Twitter user has (connection network) or the number of @mentions from within the network directed to himself (conversation network)
    - Out-degree centrality: the number of followees in the network a Twitter user has (connection network) or the number of @mentions directed by him to other users in the network (conversation network)
  - Connectivity
    - Isolates: Twitter users with no connections whether in-degrees or out-degrees
    - Sinks: Twitter users who receive ties from others but themselves have not forged links with Twitter users in the network
    - Sources: Twitter users who have made connections with others, but themselves have not received any connections from Twitter users in the network

The socio-technical characteristics of these Twitter users were delineated into principal characteristics and usage characteristics:

- ◆ Principal characteristics: attributes pertaining to the Twitter account
  - Account age: the number of years the user has been on Twitter from the date of account creation to 21 April 2022
  - Presence of profile bio: the input of alphanumeric characters or emojis in the 'profile bio' sub-canvas of the Twitter profile
  - Number of characters of profile bio: the total count of alphanumeric characters, excluding emojis, URLs, @mentions, and @replies, displayed in the 'profile bio' sub-canvas of the Twitter profile
  - Number of emojis in profile bio: the total count of occurrences of emojis, irrespective of repetition, displayed in the 'profile bio' sub-canvas of the Twitter profile
  - Presence of profile image: the display of a photo in the 'profile image' sub-canvas of the Twitter profile
  - Presence of header image: the display of a photo in the 'header image' sub-canvas of the Twitter profile
  - Presence of website: the input of text in the 'URL' sub-canvas of the Twitter profile
  - Presence of location information: the input of text in the 'location' sub-canvas of the Twitter profile
- ◆ Usage characteristics: behavioural attributes pertaining to Twitter activity
  - Number of original tweets: the total count of user-authored tweets, including quote tweets but excluding retweets without commentary, recorded during the six-month period of analysis
  - Number of retweets: the total count of reposted tweets recorded during the six-month period of analysis
  - Number of quote tweets: the total count of retweets with commentary recorded during the six-month period of analysis

- Average number of tweets: the mean count of tweets from the date of account creation to 21 April 2022
- Average number of characters per tweet: the mean count of alphanumeric characters per tweet, excluding emojis, URLs, @mentions, and @replies
- Number of emojis in tweets: the total count of occurrences of emojis, irrespective of repetition, appearing in original tweets recorded during the six-month period of analysis
- Number of links shared in tweets: the total count of URLs appearing in original tweets recorded during the six-month period of analysis
- Number of hashtags used in tweets: the total count of text strings marked by the hash symbol (#) appearing in original tweets recorded during the six-month period of analysis
- Number of photos or videos posted: the total count of user-uploaded media content appearing in original tweets recorded during the six-month period of analysis
- Number of Twitter lists belonging to: the total count of Twitter lists where the user has been added
- Average number of tweets liked: the mean count of tweets the user has marked as a favourite from the date of account creation to 21 April 2022

## 2.9.2 Content

According to Lomborg (2014), one way to investigate communicative practices in social media is to concentrate on the thematic orientations of content that users create and share. Uncovering the predominant communication topics illuminates the norms guiding which types of content are deemed acceptable by a specific user base. This research focused

on tweets and Twitter bios as exhibition spaces where Twitter users identifying as FMLWH curate digital content (Hogan, 2010). The focus of the analysis was on uncovering the prevalent self-identifiers showcased in Twitter bios and classifying the content featured in tweets during the six-month period of analysis. From content analysis and interviews, insights were gained into the norms and conventions surrounding appropriate content on Twitter.

### **2.9.3 Style**

For a genre to be enacted competently, Lomborg (2014) asserts that users must have mastered the conventions and stylistic attributes of communication established within a given language community. Thus, the dimension of style examines the strategies and tone of communication demonstrated by members of a user base. In this research, negotiating Twitter as a communicative genre requires an understanding of the stylistic hallmarks of communication adopted within the network of users identifying as FMLWH. In addition, analysing the use of emojis in tweets and Twitter bios indicated style affect or “the emotional loading of messages” (Moser et al., 2013).

#### 2.9.4 Pragmatic Function

Analysis at the level of pragmatic function explores the significance users ascribe to engaging with social media. It ultimately addresses the reasons why users enact the genre, including “the range of functions and meanings that users assign to Twitter in everyday life” (Lomborg, 2014: 126). In this research, participants’ social practices on Twitter and the social achievements fostered by engaging with Twitter over other social platforms were focal points of analysis. Pragmatic function was explored through the technobiographies of select individuals’ engagement with Twitter. Defined as “accounts of everyday (Henwood, Kennedy, & Miller, 2001: 11 in Kennedy, 2003: 122), these technobiographies served as an analytic source material to explore these individuals’ integration into the network of PLWH on Twitter, their Twittering practices, and the role of Twittering in their lived experiences as FMLWH.

As a whole, undertaking analyses at the levels of composition, content, style, and pragmatic function provides insight into how users identifying as FMLWH enact Twittering as a communicative genre. Figure 2 provides a visual representation of this conceptual model as applied to this research.

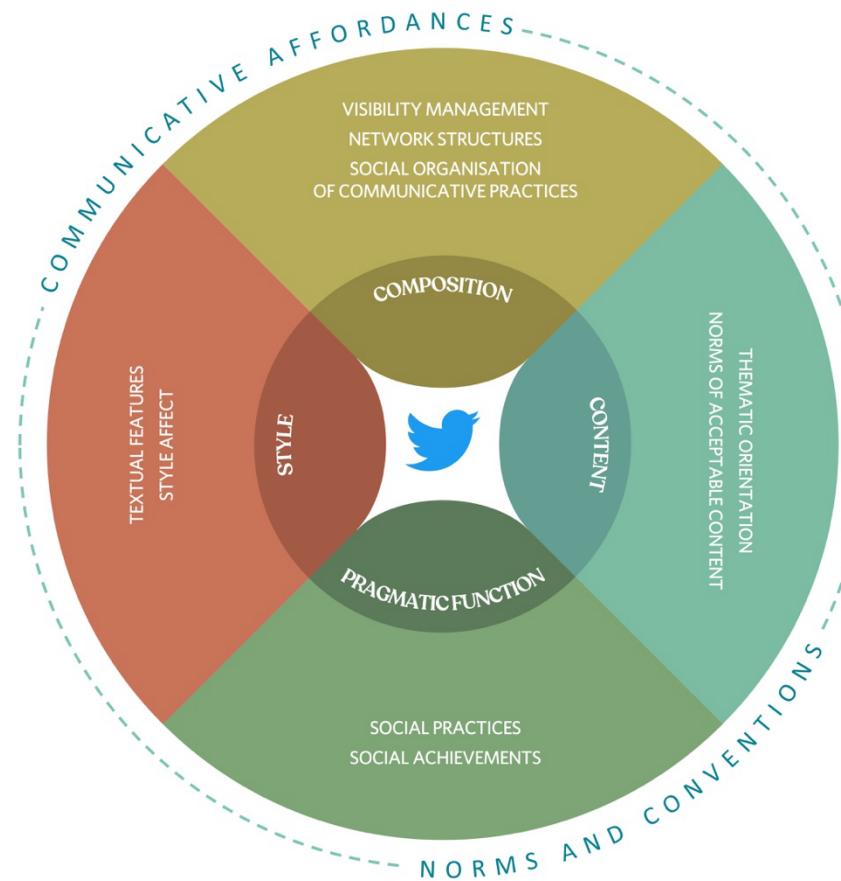


Figure 2. Conceptual framework based on Lomborg (2014)

## 2.10 Chapter Summary

In this chapter, relevant literature was synthesised to establish the social, cultural, and academic context of this ethnography. Theories and concepts that aptly frame the research inquiry were also considered. Notably, the discussion highlighted the rising trend of HIV in the Philippines, particularly affecting men. It also explored the social dynamics

of HIV stigma and its profound negative impact on the well-being of PLWH. Social isolation, a diminished sense of self, and avoidance of social interaction were identified as key challenges faced by PLWH. In response, internet use has emerged as a coping mechanism for PLWH. Support groups on the internet have been a key focus of research on the online interactions of PLWH. However, the potential of social media in connecting PLWH remains largely unexplored. While Twitter may not be the dominant social media platform in the Philippines, its significance for the FMLWH community cannot be ignored. The chapter critically examined Twitter as a social platform, asserting that adopting a genre-based approach yields a more nuanced understanding than merely approaching it as a channel for interaction. Consequently, a multifaceted theoretical framework was devised, integrating elements from a functional-pragmatic approach to genre analysis, the theory of networked publics, the theory of visibility management, and graph theory. Furthermore, the research was built upon Lomborg's (2014) conceptual framework for exploring social media as a communicative genre, guiding the analysis of Twittering at the levels of composition, content, style, and pragmatic function. The following chapter details the overall research methodology, illustrating how the conceptual framework was operationalised in this ethnography.

# CHAPTER 3

## METHODOLOGY

### 3.1 Chapter Overview

This chapter outlines the research strategy employed in this project. It begins by discussing the philosophical orientation that guided the research design and methodology. Subsequently, the chapter justifies the use of online ethnography as the overarching research approach and argues for its implementation within a multiphase mixed-methods design. A significant portion of the chapter focuses on conceptualising the online ethnographic fieldsite and detailing the strategies used to gain access. Additionally, the chapter reflects on the researcher's position as a semi-outsider and describes the methods employed to achieve *Verstehen* in interpreting the lived experiences of Filipino men living with HIV (FMLWH) on Twitter. Finally, it addresses issues of trustworthiness, validity, and ethics in the research process.

Throughout this chapter, the discussion of the methodology primarily adheres to 'realist tale' conventions in ethnographic writing (Van Maanen, 2011). This composition style employs a matter-of-fact tone, focusing on the objective steps and procedures

undertaken during the research. However, acknowledging the inherent subjectivity in ethnographic research, certain sections incorporate elements of a ‘confessional tale’ (Van Maanen, 2011). These parts explicitly address the researcher’s reflexivity and positionality, reflecting on his personal experiences and how they shaped the conduct of the ethnography.

### **3.2 Philosophical Orientation**

A strictly purist methodological approach may struggle to fully capture the richness of social media content, the intricacies of online interactions, and the diversity of communicative practices. To quote Hammersley and Atkins (2007: 7), “a first requirement of social research... is fidelity to the phenomena under study, not to any particular set of methodological principles.” For this reason, this research situates itself within the philosophical foundation of pragmatism to analyse how Twittering is enacted as a communicative genre by Twitter users identifying as FMLWH. As a research paradigm, pragmatism encourages the integration of varied research methods with the goal of producing socially useful knowledge (Feilzer, 2010: 6). Drawing on a pragmatist philosophy, the research employed a mixed grounded theory approach (Johnson and Walsh, 2019). This approach integrates both quantitative and qualitative paradigms (i.e., ‘mixed-methods’) and employs a variety of data collection and analysis techniques (i.e., ‘multimethod’).

Similarly, a mixed grounded theory perspective informed the research design for studying online environments. Hine (2000: 39) proposes two approaches to studying the internet: “as a discursively performed culture and as a cultural artefact, the technology text.” This research adopts a pragmatist approach to genre analysis, which reconciles these viewpoints. Miller et al. (2018) argue for the multifaceted nature of genre, encompassing multimodal, multidimensional, and multimethodological elements. The decision to adopt Lomborg’s (2014) genre-based framework, which integrates interconnected dimensions of Twittering, aligns with the pragmatist orientation of this research. Analysing these dimensions necessitated a mixed-methods approach, drawing on both quantitative and qualitative methodologies to different extents. Within the paradigm of pragmatism, distinct phases within the research were informed by post-positivist and constructivist approaches, as outlined in the following discussion.

A post-positivist orientation was adopted in the quantitative phases of Study 1 (composition) and Study 3 (content and style). Post-positivism acknowledges a real but complex social world, knowable through evidence (O'Reilly, 2012: 58). Specifically, a cybernetic approach was taken with the aim of constructing the social network of Twitter users identifying as FMLWH and segmenting them into distinct personas. Understood as a ‘system of information processing,’ cybernetic thinking assumes that communication processes occur within networks of actors who serve as conveyors of information (Craig, 1999: 141; Griffin et al., 2019: 38). Similarly, communication topics, conventional

expressions, and social norms are understood to circulate within networked publics—in this case, the Twitterverse of FMLWH.

In contrast, a constructivist perspective guided the qualitative phases of Study 1 (composition) and Study 3 (content and style), and the entirety of Study 2 (pragmatic function). Constructivism holds that knowledge and reality are socially constructed through human interaction and practices (Crotty, 1998: 42). This understanding of socially constructed reality aligns with the semiotic and socio-cultural traditions of communication (Craig, 1999; Griffin et al., 2019). Twitter users wield signs and symbols to make sense of their world. These semiotic resources are socially situated and historically rich, reflecting their previous use within the same language game (Van Leeuwen, 2004). The use of these resources is often governed by norms and rules, requiring genre knowledge—aspects that a post-positivist/cybernetic approach may overlook. A constructivist perspective, however, frames Twittering as a socio-cultural practice, achieved through the meaningful and continual use of a shared repertoire of signs and symbols by a community of interactants such as FMLWH.

Moreover, constructivism acknowledges that multiple, subjective realities exist. Part and parcel of analysing the communicative practices of Twitter users identifying as FMLWH was understanding how they presented themselves on the platform whether through performance (Bruckman, 1992; Butler, 1988; Goffman, 1956) or curation (Hogan,

2010). From a communication perspective, “language produces the discursive possibilities of performance” (Jackson and Mazzei, 2012: 83). These constructivist assumptions challenge the humanist ideal of a singular, biologically rooted, ‘real’ identity. Furthermore, they contrast with a positivist stance that questions authenticity when online and offline identities do not match. This ethnography’s qualitative studies rejected the notion of a singular, stable, and embodied identity, and instead explored automediality (Smith and Watson, 2014; Van Der Nagel, 2018a) within Twitter. However, for practical reasons, the quantitative studies focused solely on the Twitter profile associated with sampled users, regardless of whether they maintained multiple accounts.

Overall, this research adopted a pragmatist philosophy to integrate post-positivist and constructivist approaches through a multi-phase mixed methods design. These approaches informed methodological decisions, which will be detailed in the discussion of the research design and the overview of the three studies conducted within this online ethnography.

### **3.3 Research Design**

The research design for this project is articulated in two parts. The first part discusses the rationale for employing online ethnography as the primary research approach

for genre analysis. The second part brings the discussion into more operational terms, elaborating on how online ethnography was carried out through a multiphase mixed-methods research design.

### **3.3.1 Online Ethnography**

This research sought to understand how users identifying as FMLWH engaged with Twitter, framing this activity as a practice woven into their daily lives. This approach aligns with Emerson et al.'s (2011: 1) description of ethnographic field research, which involves observing and understanding groups and individuals within the context of their everyday experiences. Moving beyond a basic examination of Twitter usage, this research explored how FMLWH engaged with the platform in a socio-cultural context. This focus on *doing* Twitter—rather than *using* Twitter—informed the decision to employ ethnography as an overall research approach. Broadly defined as “the observation and documentation of social life in order to render an account of a group’s culture” (Saldaña, 2011: 4), ethnography proved to be a suitable methodology to delve into these users’ meaning-making practices surrounding Twittering. A systematic approach was employed to explore the enactment of Twitter as a communicative genre by FMLWH, facilitating the production of a ‘thick description’ (Geertz, 1973) of their Twittering practices.

The ethnography drew upon digital trace data, defined by Howison et al. (2011: 769) as “records of activity (trace data) undertaken through an online information system (thus, digital).” These authors further characterise digital trace data by highlighting three key aspects. Firstly, they are ‘found data,’ a byproduct of user activity rather than data specifically collected for research. Secondly, they are event-based, with insights into relationships gleaned from recorded interactions instead of participant memories. Thirdly, digital trace data offer a longitudinal dimension, enabling researchers to analyse the development of relationships over time (Howison et al., 2011: 769–770). The ephemeral nature of face-to-face interaction stands in stark contrast to the wealth of digital traces generated by computer-mediated communication (Herring, 2004). These digital footprints hold particular significance for researchers conducting online ethnography. As Kleinberg (2008: 66) observes, “we can replay and watch the ways in which people seek out connections and form friendships.”

While digital trace data offer valuable insights, relying solely on these artefacts can limit the richness of ethnographic findings. As Marwick (2014: 119) cautions, “identifying large-scale patterns can be useful, but it can also overlook *how* people do things with Twitter, *why* they do them, and how they *understand* them.” To mitigate this limitation, the research incorporated trace interviews. Defined by Latzko-Toth et al. (2017: 203) as “interviews in which users reflect on their own digital traces, therefore providing a metadiscourse about them,” trace interviews essentially involve co-analysis of the data between the researcher

and the user. A subsequent section will elaborate on technobiography and social media elicitation, specific techniques employed within trace interviews in this research.

In investigating Twittering as a socio-cultural practice, 'being there' meant being online. Thus, ethnography was pursued as an exclusively online endeavour to document "the richness and diversity of social interactions enabled by the internet" (Hine, 2016: 401). Online ethnography puts the emphasis on being connected to the internet as a precondition of investigating social life. As the research focused on online activity, fieldwork was conducted virtually. This flexibility facilitated data collection from any physical location with an internet connection.

While contemporary perspectives in ethnographic research argue against demarcating between online and offline worlds (Hallett and Barber, 2014; Hine, 2015; Postill, 2008), the choice to focus on online and digital spaces was guided by the research aims, as well as practical and ethical considerations in researching a hard-to-reach population (Wilkerson et al., 2014). Notably, the COVID-19 pandemic necessitated a shift in the research design. Originally intended to involve in-person interactions with participants, health and safety protocols, alongside mobility restrictions, necessitated a virtual approach. Nevertheless, remote interactions with participants might have been more advantageous than in-person meetings. Several Twitter users agreed to participate in the research under the condition of anonymity. This was especially facilitated by Zoom calls,

where they had the freedom to change their display name and deactivate their camera. This modality of communication might have fostered online disinhibition, enabling participants to be less guarded and share stories about their lives more freely (Suler, 2004).

### **3.3.2 Multiphase Mixed-methods Design**

The implementation of this online ethnography followed a multiphase mixed-methods design, covering three studies. This type of research design is apt for large projects involving “connected quantitative and qualitative studies that are sequentially aligned, with each new approach building on what was learned previously” (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2011).

Because this research employed both computational and qualitative techniques for text analysis, Andreotta et al.’s (2019) four-step mixed-methods framework offered valuable guidance for navigating the analysis process at various junctures. The first step in this framework involves data collection and corpus creation. The second step utilises data science techniques to limit the scope of the corpus based on relevance. In the third step, a subset of data is extracted from the most relevant sections of the corpus. Finally, qualitative analysis is performed on extracted data (Andreotta et al., 2019: 1767).

Three studies were implemented to address the four dimensions in Lomborg's (2014) genre-based approach to analysing social media. These are: composition (Study 1); pragmatic function (Study 2); and content and style (Study 3). The inaugural study (composition) was essential in identifying the Twitter users who met predefined inclusion criteria. After which, through social network analysis, exploratory factor analysis, and cluster analysis, corresponding samples for the subsequent studies were generated. Specifically, the most and least prominent Twitter users in the network were identified and recruited for the second study (pragmatic function). Meanwhile, user clusters identified in the first study served as a basis for drawing stratified random samples for the third study (content and style).

An integral output of the first study was an archive of each user's Twitter profile and tweets posted from 21 October 2021 to 21 April 2022. Practical considerations related to data management led to the decision to limit the analysis of digital trace data to a six-month period. Recruitment of research participants commenced only after all Twitter data had been collected unobtrusively. This step was taken to maintain the researcher's non-interference with their tweet content and overall behaviour on Twitter. Figure 3 shows the multiphase mixed-methods design of this online ethnography.

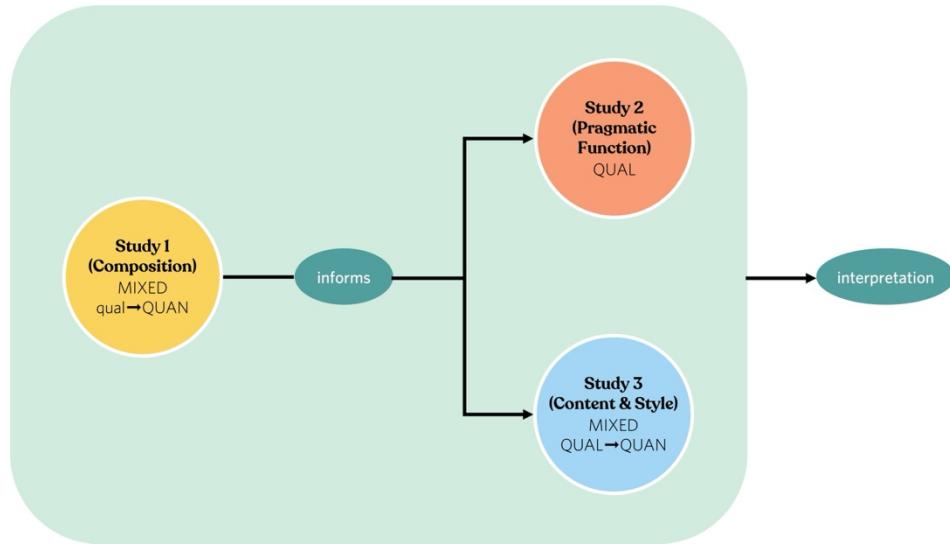


Figure 3. Multiphase mixed-methods design of the research

### 3.4 Overview of the Studies Conducted

This section provides a broad outline of each of the three studies implemented to illustrate how the research project was undertaken. A more detailed discussion of each study's methodology may be found in its respective chapter.

#### 3.4.1 Study 1 (Composition)

**Study objective.** Serving as the foundational study of this research project, this investigation analysed the composition of Twitter users who identify as FMLWH. This included exploring their visibility management practices, identifying the Twitter users of

interest, analysing their socio-technical characteristics and network measures, and clustering them into distinct personas.

**Study design.** Given the dearth of published research on how FMLWH curate or perform their identities on social media, an exploratory sequential mixed-methods design was deemed suitable. In this type of dual-phase design, insights from the initial qualitative phase inform the subsequent quantitative phase (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2011). In this study, identifying the relevant Twitter users required prior knowledge of how they rendered visible their identities as FMLWH.

**Qualitative phase.** To gain familiarity with the discourse of FMLWH Twitter users, the researcher lurked on the platform for two years, from April 2020 to April 2022. Although lurking might carry a negative connotation, internet scholars submit that this type of participant observation is instrumental in getting a sense of a community's embedded rules and norms (Catterall and Maclaran, 2002; Livia, 1999; Mann and Stewart, 2000; Richman, 2007). Lurking on Twitter enabled the researcher to catalogue an exhaustive list of linguistic

references these users employed to express their Filipino nationality, masculinity<sup>8</sup>, and HIV serostatus. Specifically, these references included recurring keywords, phrases, and statements found in their profile bio, Twitter handle, display name, and tweets.

**Quantitative phase.** Using the social identifiers culled from fieldnotes, systematic search queries were formulated to identify candidate Twitter users to constitute the pseudo-population of the research. Ultimately, a total of 1,447 Twitter users met inclusion criteria. Twitter data pertinent to these 1,447 account owners were then scraped using the R package *rtweet*. After which, social network analysis was undertaken to construct the connection and conversation networks of these users. Following this, a two-stage clustering procedure involving exploratory factor analysis and cluster analysis generated personas based on these users' socio-technical characteristics and social network measures.

The methodology of Study 1 is elaborated upon in Chapter 4, which addresses the qualitative phase, and Chapter 5, which focuses on the quantitative phase.

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<sup>8</sup> Drawing on Connell's (2005) concept of masculinity as a discursive construct, this research adopted a broad perspective on gender identity, acknowledging the fluidity of masculine ideals. Since interaction with Twitter users was not part of the study design at this stage, signifiers of masculinity were gleaned from tweets and Twitter bios. These included pronouns (e.g., *he*, *him*, and *his*), sexual positions (e.g., *top*, *bottom*, and *versatile*), and relational roles (e.g., *brother*, *father*, and *boyfriend*). This approach ensured the inclusion of transgender men while excluding those identifying as transgender women. However, this method is acknowledged to potentially present a discrepancy with national HIV data, which is categorised by sex assigned at birth rather than gender identity.

### 3.4.2 Study 2 (Pragmatic Function)

**Study objective.** To analyse Twittering as a communicative genre, it is crucial to understand the social achievements it facilitates for a user network. Consequently, this study was conducted to analyse the pragmatic functions of Twittering as revealed through the lived techno-experiences of FMLWH.

**Study design.** This qualitative case study applied technobiography, a narrative approach that “allows access to the context in which online lives are produced, to lived experience, to living experience” (Kennedy, 2003: 121). The researcher engaged with both the most and least prominent users in the network to explore the role social media plays in their life, their foray into Twitter, norms and practices in the Twitterverse of users who identify as FMLWH, and other topics salient to genre analysis.

**Sampling.** The 1,447 Twitter users in the network were ranked in terms of their activity, popularity, and influence scores (Riquelme and González-Cantergiani, 2016). From this ranked list, 19 of the most prominent and five of the least prominent users were recruited for interviews.

**Procedure.** Semi-structured interviews lasting one to three hours were conducted via Zoom with each participant. An interview guide facilitated the conversational flow,

beginning with general social media use before focusing on Twittering practices. Additionally, participants engaged in social media elicitation, a narrative technique where participants scrolled through their timeline and reflected on their past posts (Grant, 2019; Robards and Lincoln, 2017).

For a full account of the methodology used in Study 2, please refer to Chapter 6.

### **3.4.3 Study 3 (Content and Style)**

*Study objective.* The third and final study of this online ethnography analysed the content and style of the tweets and Twitter bios of users identifying as FMLWH. This time, the research enquiry placed a focus on the substantive and stylistic features of messages these account owners published on Twitter.

*Study design.* Like the first study on composition, an exploratory sequential mixed-methods design was employed. Qualitative data collected in the first phase were used to develop codebooks for quantitatively analysing written Twitter content. The study was carried out in two legs, with the first round involving content-analysing Twitter bios and the second round focusing on tweets.

**Qualitative phase.** Both rounds of this study began with a qualitative content analysis of tweets and Twitter bios published from 21 October 2021 to 21 April 2022. To put it plainly, content analysis is “a systematic reading of a body of texts” (Krippendorff, 2004: 3). Qualitative content analysis was done to exhaust all possible categories of content with the end goal of crafting codebooks to be used in the ensuing quantitative phase. Specifically, a combination of directed and conventional content analysis approaches (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005) were applied to analyse tweets and Twitter bios.

**Quantitative phase.** Resulting categories from directed and conventional content analyses were then combined to produce two coding manuals for the quantitative content analysis of tweets and Twitter bios. Both codebooks were pilot tested by a set of three independent coders to gauge the reliability of the instruments. Inter-coder agreement scores were used to improve the definition of categories prior to proceeding with the proper coding of tweets and Twitter bios. In addition, corpus linguistics techniques were employed to identify recurring linguistic patterns within tweets and Twitter bios. This process involved several steps: data pre-processing to clean and prepare the text; calculation of basic descriptive statistics; generation of word clouds to visualise frequent terms; and identification of concordances and collocations to examine word relationships.

**Sampling.** For the qualitative phase, data from the accounts of 25 prominent users who had consented to having their tweets and Twitter bio analysed were extracted from the

archive prepared in the first study. Content analysis was performed on a total of 25 Twitter profiles and 250 original tweets. For the quantitative phase, it was determined that a random sample of 91 Twitter users was statistically significant to achieve estimates with a confidence level of 95% and a margin of error of  $+/-10\%$ . To make provisions for the likelihood of non-responses, this initial sample size was expanded to 360, representing an increase of almost 400% from the computed sample size of 91. For representation, this adjusted sample size was then divided proportionally based on the cluster sizes determined in the first study. Ultimately, 146 Twitter users gave their informed consent to include their Twitter data in the analysis. Each user's Twitter bio and a set of 10 randomly chosen tweets, covering the period 21 October 2021–21 April 2022, were extracted from the archive. After applying inclusion and exclusion criteria, the final corpora comprised 142 Twitter bios and 1268 original tweets.

Chapter 7 offers an extensive discussion of the methodology employed in Study 3.

### **3.5 Ethnographic Subjects**

This online ethnography involved Twitter users identifying as FMLWH, with the composition of this group shifting across the different research phases. During the qualitative phase of Study 1, online lurking was confined to a public Twitter list comprising

1,632 self-identified FMLWH as of 11 May 2020. This initial phase provided the groundwork for the quantitative component. Subsequently, in the quantitative phase of Study 1, sampling efforts yielded a total of 1,447 eligible account owners. This group served as the research's pseudo-population and formed the basis for social network analysis, exploratory factor analysis, and cluster analysis. These users' available socio-technical characteristics are presented in Chapter 5.

In Study 2, trace interviews were conducted with a subset of the user base identified in Study 1. Selection criteria were employed to identify 19 of the most prominent and five of the least prominent Twitter users within the network. These individuals are hereafter referred to as 'participants' due to their more active role in this ethnography. Participant characteristics are outlined in Chapter 6.

For the qualitative phase of Study 3, a total of 25 prominent users agreed to subject their tweets and Twitter bios to content analysis, with the goal of developing a coding framework for classifying Twitter content. In the subsequent quantitative phase, 146 users, representing four distinct Twitter personas, consented to the analysis of their tweets and Twitter bios.

No prior contact with Twitter users was established by the researcher, with the sole exception of Kyle. Their encounters occurred at informal gatherings hosted by Hans, a

figure introduced in the prologue and Chapter 1. The selection of Kyle as a research participant was guided by objective criteria and was not influenced by the researcher's pre-existing familiarity with him.

### **3.6 Networked Technologies as the Fieldsite**

The emphasis on fieldsite in ethnographic research poses a dilemma for researchers studying cyberspace because conventional definitions of place and entry become less clear-cut in the context of the "online world with fuzzy space and time boundaries" (Tunçalp and Lê, 2014: 59). Moreover, with social media becoming increasingly embedded in everyday life, the idea of a distinct, predefined ethnographic place requires rethinking (Hine, 2016: 406; Postill and Pink, 2012: 123–124). Eschewing conventional geographical boundaries in favour of a cultural perspective, this research conceptualised cyberspace as a social setting in its own right; that is, "a place to be or dwell" (Slater, 2002: 534), and a space "in which meaningful human interactions occur" (Markham, 2007: 362).

When it comes to problematising the internet, Meredith and Potter (2014) distinguish between internet-as-resource (i.e., a means to connect with internet users) and internet-as-topic (i.e., a space wherein internet practice unfolds). This research treated Twitter as more than just a data source. It also served as a platform for interaction with

users and a socio-technical context shaping their experiences (Baker, 2013; Markham, 2004).

Drawing inspiration from Burrell's (2009) reimagination of the fieldsite as a network, this ethnography shifted away from the traditional notion of a fixed, bounded location where the researcher is immersed. It further recognised the network as a place, being that the internet itself as a rich social space laden with history and social life (Friedberg, 2006). Seen through the lens of networked publics, the Twitterverse of users who identify as FMLWH may be interpreted as "a space constructed through networked technologies" (boyd, 2011: 40). The ethnography spanned various Twitter domains, encompassing public Twitter lists, Twitter feeds, Twitter profiles, and direct messages.

Additionally, a host of applications and communication channels external to Twitter likewise emerged as crucial components of this ethnography. While the ethnography did not involve face-to-face interaction or participant observation in physical settings, it utilised networked technologies. Phone calls, text messages, Zoom sessions, email exchanges, and instant messaging interactions with Twitter users facilitated data collection over a period of almost four years, spanning mid-2020 to early 2024.

### 3.7 Negotiating Access

Any meaningful discussion about a fieldsite must address the concept of access. In ethnography, gaining *access* is offered by Harrington (2003: 599) as a more useful construct than gaining *entry* because the former represents a process of “negotiating for information.” In this regard, the idea of accessing a fieldsite shifts from physical entry to knowledge acquisition. This notion of access becomes especially more pertinent when the ethnographic fieldsite comprises networked technologies. Here, I discuss how I negotiated social access following Lofland and Lofland’s (1995) processes of ‘getting in’ and ‘getting along,’ which Carmel (2011) later expanded to include ‘getting around.’

#### 3.7.1 Getting In

My official foray into the Twitterverse of users who identify as FMLWH involved accessing the now-defunct public Twitter list *PLHIV PH*. I became aware of this Twitter list through Hans, a friend living with HIV<sup>9</sup>. He suggested that viewing the tweets posted by the listed users would be my gateway to their online space. This was a publicly accessible Twitter list, allowing me to view the stream of tweets posted by users included by the list

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<sup>9</sup> The prologue of this manuscript outlines the genesis of this online ethnography.

curator. Importantly, my access was limited to tweets from users with a public account; none of my existing Twitter friends were included in this list at the time. This Twitter list exemplifies a ‘public and open setting’ as defined by Lofland and Lofland (1995: 32). This means that accessing the list did not necessitate any formal registration or physical entry point. Given the public nature of this Twitter list, the process of ‘getting in’ was straightforward. However, I opted for a covert approach by abstaining from any actions that might attract attention, such as following users, replying to tweets, or interacting with content through retweets or favourites.

PLHIV PH was curated by Edward, who self-identifies as a person living with HIV (PLWH) in his Twitter bio. In a tweet posted in April 2013, Edward announced his plan of creating a publicly accessible list of HIV-reactive Twitter users in the Philippines and contemplated its potential reach. In the succeeding years, this list curator would post milestones based on the list’s growing member count: 278 in August 2014; more than 800 in September 2017; and more than 1300 in November 2018. As of 11 May 2020, this list comprised 1,632 users, most of whom self-identified as FMLWH in their Twitter bio.

To understand how this initiative came about, I reached out to Edward via email on 1 April 2020. He recounted that, initially, the list served a personal purpose, as he simply wanted to curate in a single stream the tweets posted by Filipinos living with HIV he follows. Later, it served as a means of facilitating peer support: “It was very helpful [for] receiving

and giving support from and to people who are also going through the same thing. I've met and made great friends because of Twitter" (Edward, 2020).

### **3.7.2 Getting Around**

Beyond exposing me to the content of tweets posted by users in the HIV sphere on Twitter, PLHIV PH also proved valuable in identifying prominent accounts based on their level of interaction with other users. However, a closer examination of the users curated in this list revealed that Edward had also included Twitter accounts belonging to HIV support organisations, clinics, and HIV advocates who explicitly identified as HIV-nonreactive. Recognising this, it became clear to me that the Twitter list did not precisely align with the intended demographic for the ethnography.

While PLHIV PH served as a valuable resource, I identified six similar public Twitter lists. An examination of these lists revealed that a considerable number of users identifying as FMLWH were not included by Edward in PLHIV PH. Thus, a thorough exploration of the Twitterverse was necessary to capture the full scope of this user base. To this end, online lurking was an effective means of 'getting around,' which Carmel (2011) likens to being around research participants. In cybertultural research, the concept of presence is not always tantamount to being around online interactants in real time. In this context, 'getting around' meant examining artefacts left behind by users on Twitter. This

involved back-reading tweets, running search queries on Twitter, and scraping Twitter content. The materiality and affordances of digital media thus facilitated the ability to 'get around' the platform.

The sampling approach used in Study 1 is elaborated upon in Chapter 4. For the time being, it is sufficient to mention that I inspected the list of followers and friends of 2,245 Twitter account owners to cast a wider net of potential candidate users. This technique was informed by the homophily principle (Rogers and Bhowmik, 1970) in that Twitter users are predisposed to follow and be followed by others who share similar characteristics. For efficiency, I automated the process of harvesting these accounts' followers and friends by accessing the Twitter API through the R package *rtweet*. As a final step, I used Twitter's advanced search feature to actively find candidate users. In so doing, I constructed a series of search queries incorporating keywords representing FMLWH identities. Altogether, the process of 'getting around' during the initial phase of online ethnography involved navigating the intricate network of Twitter.

### **3.7.3 Getting Along**

To minimise the potential influence of the Hawthorne effect, I maintained a covert observer role throughout the initial phase of the ethnography. The Hawthorne effect, as described by O'Reilly (2012: 93), refers to the possibility of affecting human subjects'

behaviour when they are aware of being observed. However, the emphasis on the pragmatic functions of Twitter in Study 2 necessitated a shift from indirect to direct qualitative methods. Consequently, I revealed my researcher identity during participant recruitment, initiating the process of getting along with recruited participants. This social interaction necessitated a critical evaluation of my stance and communication style (Lofland and Lofland, 1995: 54).

Stance pertains to ascertaining trust and suspicion in relation to the narratives of research subjects. Referencing Wax's (1971) reflections on scepticism in ethnographic fieldwork, Lofland and Lofland (1995: 54) acknowledge the potential for interviewees to fabricate information, both through deliberate omissions and outright falsehoods. They emphasise, however, that researchers should avoid adopting an overly distrustful stance, particularly when engaging with vulnerable populations who have consented to participate in the study.

While I actively framed my ethnography as an exploration of Twittering practices, I acknowledged the near-inevitability of discussing HIV, a sensitive and potentially uncomfortable topic. However, it is noteworthy that throughout the interviews, this subject was consistently raised by the participants, not me. Given the pervasiveness of HIV-related stigmas within Philippine society (Laguna and Villegas, 2019; Pamoso et al., 2024), I saw no strong incentive for my interviewees to misrepresent their lived experiences.

Furthermore, conducting the interviews via Zoom meetings afforded participants a layer of anonymity, potentially fostering a more open and candid atmosphere. While I perceived minimal reason for interviewees to be disingenuous, I nevertheless adopted a conservative approach to data analysis. This entailed trusting the veracity of their narratives while remaining attentive to potential manifestations of omission, exaggeration, and social desirability<sup>10</sup>.

Just as a researcher's stance is important, their ability to develop a communication style—a set of skilful presentation techniques—is crucial for securing continued access to information (Lofland and Lofland, 1995: 55). Ensuring that I posed no threat to participants was a paramount concern. I initiated contact with potential participants through private Twitter messages, extending a concise and informal invitation to participate in my research. Following expressions of interest from potential participants, I directed them to a detailed research information sheet. This document equipped them with the necessary knowledge to make an informed decision about their participation. After obtaining informed consent to participate, I arranged interviews with participants and retrieved their Twitter data from the archive (refer to Appendix C and Appendix D for the

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<sup>10</sup> Social desirability is the tendency to underreport negative behaviours and inflate positive ones. According to Paulhus (1984), this arises from two factors: impression management, the conscious effort to present oneself favourably, and self-deception, the unconscious motivation to maintain a positive self-image.

information sheet and consent form used in Study 2). I then followed the same steps to secure informed consent and data from additional account owners whose data would be included in the analysis (refer to Appendix E and Appendix F for the information sheet and consent form used in Study 3).

While conducting interviews, I ensured that my approach adhered to established good practices while remaining mindful of the participants' health vulnerabilities. To achieve this, I drew upon national ethical guidelines for research involving human participants (Philippine Health Research Ethics Board, 2017, 2022), HIV community-based research guidelines (Guta et al., 2014), and literature on sensitive interviewing (Dempsey et al., 2016; Sque et al., 2014). The interview agenda used in Study 2 can be found in Appendix G.

Finally, my role as a male researcher might have fostered a sense of openness among participants. Shared gender and, in most cases, similar age demographics could have contributed to a more relaxed atmosphere, facilitating discussions on sensitive topics such as sex, sexuality, and gender identity.

### **3.8 Locating Myself: The Researcher as the Research Instrument**

Maintaining a reflexive stance was crucial in ensuring the trustworthiness, credibility, and transparency of this online ethnography. While reflexivity is heralded as a necessary element of quality in qualitative research (Holloway and Freshwater, 2007: 110), its role in mixed-methods research has not been extensively addressed (Brownlie, 2011; Cheek et al., 2015; Olaghene, 2022). Nevertheless, Popa and Guillermin (2017) argue that it is through reflexivity that we can blend methods in ways that are meaningful and tailored to a specific context. Moreover, reflexive engagement has the potential to foster transparency in mixed-methods research (Cain et al., 2019). This discussion explores how I practised reflexivity throughout the online ethnography. In particular, it examines how I utilised my position as a semi-outsider to achieve *Verstehen*, the act of gaining an empathetic understanding of the participants' experiences.

#### **3.8.1 Achieving *Verstehen***

The German philosopher Wilhelm Dilthey asserts the importance of emphatic understanding or *Verstehen* in interpreting social phenomena and lived experiences (Dillon, 2014: 21). It is only when we imagine ourselves in the position of others that such understanding arises. Barker (1984: 20) puts it thusly: “*Verstehen* is a process of enquiry during which the researcher tries to put himself in other people's shoes or, to use another

metaphor, to see the world through their glasses.” Recognising my position as a semi-outsider within this online community, I acknowledged that achieving *Verstehen* was essential for this ethnographic work.

To gain a deeper understanding of the online space I was exploring, I lurked on Twitter for an extended period. This approach not only allowed me to become familiar with the shared semiotic resources used by FMLWH but also fostered an empathic understanding of the realities associated with HIV. To gain a more holistic understanding of living with HIV, I sought out additional knowledge sources. This included collaborating with a research supervisor who has significant expertise in this field. Furthermore, I consulted with medical professionals and counsellors working in sexual health clinics in both the United Kingdom and the Philippines. These consultations equipped me with valuable knowledge about the biomedical procedures involved in HIV testing and treatment.

### **3.8.2 Doing Research as a Semi-Outsider**

The ongoing consideration of my position as a semi-outsider in relation to the FMLWH community highlights the importance of reflexivity. Following Gold’s (1958) typology of participant observer roles, I first operated as a complete observer by employing ‘systematic eavesdropping’ as groundwork for the ensuing phases of my research (Gold,

1958: 222). Recognising my role as a semi-outsider in relation to both the Twitterverse of FMLWH and the wider HIV community, I considered participant observation to be a fitting starting point for this research.

I acknowledged that while online lurking offered a springboard for initial exploration, it might not yield the nuanced understanding I sought in this online ethnography. As Gold (1958: 222) argues, the role of a complete observer holds the least potential for 'going native.' Thus, I transitioned to a more engaged role as an observer-as-participant during the subsequent phases of this ethnography. In this role, I actively collected data through interviews, facilitated social media elicitation sessions, and exchanged direct messages with Twitter users.

During an interview, a participant rightfully questioned my motivations for researching a community of which I was not a member. This enquiry reflects an epistemological debate concerning the ability of outsiders to accurately represent a group's experiences (Bridges, 2001; Charlton, 1998). Further, while external researchers might offer an objective perspective, they lack the inherent closeness to the context that allows insiders to achieve a deeper understanding (Lofland and Lofland, 1995: 61).

While some scholars posit a clear distinction between insider and outsider researchers, this binary has been contested as overly simplistic (Corbin Dwyer and Buckle,

2018; Kerstetter, 2012; Levy, 2013). The researcher's role is often more nuanced and negotiated throughout the research process. Dwyer and Buckle (2018) propose a 'space between' insider and outsider roles, acknowledging the multifaceted nature of the researcher's location within the community. In this ethnography, I occupied this 'space between' as a semi-outsider. While I lacked the lived experience of FMLWH, my understanding was informed by witnessing Hans' journey through HIV diagnosis, treatment, and care.

Over a year, I offered emotional support to Hans as he navigated this challenging period. I familiarised myself with current treatment protocols, care options, and support structures available to PLWH. In addition, I extensively reviewed testimonials from individuals prescribed the same highly active antiretroviral therapy (HAART) as Hans. Furthermore, for several months, I made frequent long-distance visits to his residence, not only for companionship but crucially, to ensure his adherence to HAART.

While lacking formal membership in the FMLWH community, I had gained significant preliminary knowledge about living with HIV through my peripheral association with the group. Although I did not share a lived experience of the condition, my perceived proximity to the context instilled in me a sense of competence in interpreting the texts (re)produced by FMLWH on Twitter.

Finally, the concept of ‘naïve status,’ as explored by Finefter-Rosenbluh (2017), proved advantageous in my role as a semi-outsider researcher. This status allowed me to approach the social world FMLWH have constructed on Twitter from a fresh perspective, distinct from that of an insider. By critically examining seemingly mundane phenomena, I was able to challenge taken-for-granted assumptions and, in doing so, fulfil the ethnographic goal of “making the familiar strange” (Van Maanen, 1995: 20).

### **3.9 Enhancing Trustworthiness and Reliability**

This mixed-methods research employed strategies to bolster the quality of data gleaned from both qualitative and quantitative analyses. Research validity was ensured through a focus on the design quality and interpretive rigour of each individual study within the broader mixed-methods approach (Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2009). For qualitative data, trustworthiness—defined by Lincoln and Guba (1985: 290) as the researcher’s ability to persuade the audience that the study’s findings are credible, and warrant being considered—served as the key evaluation criterion. Meanwhile, strategies were employed to assess the validity of quantitative data. These measures aimed to minimise potential threats that could undermine the ability to draw accurate conclusions and make sound judgments from the data (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2011).

### **3.9.1 Convening a Research Advisory Team**

From the outset, I acknowledged that my position as a semi-outsider was a potential barrier to achieving a profound understanding and interpretation of the lifeworld of Twitter users identifying as FMLWH. To address this, I convened a research advisory team, mirroring the approach of Talbot et al. (2020), who involved dementia patients in their Twitter research. My team comprised three active Twitter users identifying as FMLWH: Hans; Brody; and Vic. Hans was my first recruit. Recognising that his prior knowledge of my research could potentially bias his role should he later be selected as a participant, I opted to engage him as a resource person instead. In this capacity, he provided informal feedback on my initial interpretations and clarified any ambiguities encountered during the qualitative data analysis phase of Study 1 (composition). All research instruments were also pretested with Hans. To broaden the range of perspectives informing my work from the initial stages, Hans recruited two additional active Twitter users, Brody and Vic, to form a well-rounded research advisory team. Their 'real' identities were not disclosed to me; Hans simply created a secure group chat on Telegram for our communication. Throughout the initial stages of data collection, I maintained regular communication with Hans, Brody, and Vic. Their input was instrumental in refining my data analysis approaches and participant recruitment protocol. It is important to note that their feedback did not extend to confirming the HIV serostatus of any Twitter user, in accordance with the Philippine HIV and AIDS Policy Act.

### 3.9.2 Managing Bias

Unlike quantitative research, qualitative methods embrace subjectivity as a defining feature. However, to enhance the plausibility of interpretations, qualitative researchers hold the responsibility to acknowledge their personal biases and assumptions concerning the subjects and the research context. To enhance the plausibility of my interpretations, I adopted bracketing, a technique where researchers identify potential biases like vested interests, personal experiences, and cultural assumptions that might influence data analysis (Fischer, 2009: 583). This approach allowed me to analyse all data forms with equal weight, preventing my own biases from favouring certain experiences over others (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998: 48). Recognising that complete bracketing is unrealistic in qualitative research, I utilised reflexive auditing to minimise bias. This involved self-reflection through an implicit association test and by keeping thorough fieldnotes.

To gain insight into potential unconscious biases I may hold regarding gender and sexuality, I participated in an implicit association test developed by Project Implicit (Project Implicit, 2011). Project Implicit is a non-profit organisation that functions as a virtual laboratory for studying these hidden prejudices. Understanding these implicit preferences allowed me to develop a heightened awareness of potential biases during the coding and analysis of textual data.

In conducting this online ethnography, I employed fieldnotes not only to capture and comprehend the socio-cultural world of Twitter users identifying as FMLWH, but also to establish a clear audit trail that transparently documented the path leading to my research conclusions (O'Reilly, 2012: 105). These fieldnotes included inscribed personal experiences (e.g., memories related to providing support to a friend living with HIV), initial impressions (e.g., candid observations about Twittering), open codes (e.g., 'I was here,' 'I think I belong'), methodological considerations (e.g., ethical implications of using digital traces from a vulnerable population), encountered ethical dilemmas (e.g., revealing the language game played by a niche online group), and emerging theoretical insights (e.g., critically examining Twitter users identifying as FMLWH as more than just networked publics). These fieldnotes facilitated the systematic coding of Twitter data and interviews transcripts. Moreover, by critically examining these notes, I ensured that the research distinguished between my own values and those of the participants.

### **3.9.3 Member Checking**

To ensure the accuracy of the technobiographical narratives, I employed member checking, a technique described by Lincoln and Guba (1985: 11) as "a trustworthiness technique to improve credibility." This process involved continually summarising key points and verifying unclear details with participants throughout the interview process. Additionally, member checking was conducted at the study's conclusion to confirm the

interpretation of identified themes with participants and the research advisory team. A public research presentation was delivered in December 2023, with a handful of participating and non-participating Twitter users in attendance<sup>11</sup>.

### **3.9.4 Measuring Intercoder Reliability**

Study 3 employed content analysis in its qualitative phase, examining both tweets and Twitter bios. The researcher hand-coded a theoretical sample of material to develop a coding framework for the subsequent quantitative analysis. Intercoder reliability using Krippendorff's alpha ( $\alpha$ ) was calculated to test the consistency of codes assigned to content categories. Only codes demonstrating tentative ( $0.667 \leq \alpha < 0.8$ ) or strong reliability ( $\alpha \geq 0.8$ ) were retained for the final analysis. Details regarding reliability testing can be found in Chapter 7.

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<sup>11</sup> Alvarado MJ, Pader MC and Rumbines P (2023) DSC prof highlights soc med's role in understanding vulnerable groups at SCICOMversation 2023. Available at: <https://devcom.edu.ph/2023/12/20/dsc-prof-highlights-soc-meds-role-in-understanding-vulnerable-groups-at-scicomversation-2023> (accessed 17 May 2024).

### **3.10 Ethical Considerations**

The research received ethical clearance from the Research Ethics Committee of the University of Reading's School of Agriculture, Policy, and Development, and the Social Science Ethics Research Board of the Philippine Social Science Council (refer to Appendix A for the certificates of ethical clearance). The research was guided principally by national ethical standards, including the National Ethical Guidelines for Health and Health-Related Research (Philippine Health Research Ethics Board, 2017) and its updated version, the Philippine National Ethical Guidelines for Research Involving Human Participants (Philippine Health Research Ethics Board, 2022). The ethical principles for internet research outlined by the Association of Internet Researchers (AoIR) (franzke et al., 2019) were also observed. Furthermore, the researcher ensured that the highest ethical standards were maintained when processing naturally occurring online data produced by 'amateur artists' (Bruckman, 2002). This section elaborates on the ethical considerations undertaken in conducting research with PLWH and processing social media data they have generated.

#### **3.10.1 Handling Social Media Data**

The initial stages of this research necessitated participant observation via 'online lurking,' which Whiteman (2012: 109) defines as data collection within an online setting without being actively involved and without participants' knowledge of the researcher's

presence. Lurkers, in this context, act as passive observers within online communities. The primary objective of lurking is to gain insights by observing the information and experiences shared by other actors, typically contributing minimal or no written content themselves (Popovac and Fullwood, 2019: 286). While the ethics of online lurking can be a source of debate, its use in this study can be ethically justified in three key ways:

1. Unprotected Twitter accounts comprise a ‘public and open setting’ (Lofland and Lofland, 1995: 32). This accessibility allows anyone with an internet connection to examine publicly available Twitter data, regardless of whether they follow users or have their own account. The researcher presumed that users behind these public accounts were aware of the public visibility of their tweets to online audiences. Consequently, the acts of reading and archiving these tweets were not deemed an intrusion on their privacy.
2. Lurking in offline research frequently necessitates covert methods, such as going undercover. Online lurking, however, takes advantage of the distinct nature of online spaces, where shared invisibility is an expected norm within such environments (Whiteman, 2012).
3. The purpose of online lurking in this study was to achieve *Verstehen*, a deep understanding of the online practices of Twitter users identifying as FMLWH. It is important to differentiate this approach from malicious activities like stalking or user deception. Furthermore, this form of covert participant observation ensured the researcher’s presence had no impact on the behaviour of these Twitter users.

Nevertheless, because social media data originate from human beings, accessing datafied spaces must emphasise the agency and reflexivity of online content creators (Couldry and Powell, 2014; Kennedy et al., 2015). Reflecting this principle, this online ethnography treated social media users with respect as autonomous individuals, recognising them as more than just data points. Respect for these Twitter users was particularly emphasised when their tweets were used as illustrative examples in this manuscript. Aligning with the recommendations of Ahmed et al. (2017) and Williams et al. (2017), the traceability of tweets was assessed, and the consent of original posters was sought before republishing any content. Furthermore, references to account owners throughout this manuscript refrain from using their actual Twitter handles or display names, even for public accounts or those with pseudonymous profiles.

### **3.10.2 Doing Research with a Vulnerable Group**

Safeguarding the well-being of research participants was a paramount concern throughout this research. The researcher prioritised measures to prevent any potential negative consequences on participants' lives. These measures included obtaining informed consent, ensuring participant anonymity, and fostering a safe space for participation in the research.

The vast number of tweets generated daily by users identifying as FMLWH makes obtaining informed consent from every individual user impractical. This challenge is acknowledged within the AoIR's ethical guidelines as a limitation of big data research (franzke et al., 2019). Moreover, soliciting prior informed consent would have fundamentally undermined the goal of collecting naturally occurring data via unobtrusive means. However, it is important to acknowledge that the majority of FMLWH users on Twitter possess 'alter' accounts, as evidenced by their use of pseudonyms and censored photos of themselves (Piamonte et al., 2020). These users typically withhold their 'real'-life identities, including legal names, affiliations, and any images that could reveal their persona. One could argue that these account owners have themselves established a layer of protection to safeguard their privacy.

To strike a balance between ethical research practices and the practicalities of data collection, Twitter users sampled for Study 2 (composition) and Study 3 (content and style) were contacted to seek their permission to include their tweets and Twitter bios in the analysis. Additionally, participants in Study 2 provided informed consent to participate in interviews and social media elicitation conducted via an online meeting. During the recruitment process, emphasis was placed on prioritising the safety, privacy, and confidentiality of potential participants. They were informed that participation in the study was entirely voluntary and could be withdrawn at any point up to one week following their interview. In such cases, all data pertaining to the participant would be deleted. While some

individuals opted not to participate before the scheduled meetings, no participants withdrew after their interviews.

The participant information sheet explicitly stated that interviews would focus on their Twitter engagement, not their personal experiences with HIV. The topic of HIV was discussed if and only if initiated by the participant. The researcher acknowledged the potential for discussing HIV, even voluntarily, to be emotionally challenging for participants. Accordingly, each interview was approached with a prepared protocol for managing distress during sensitive topics, as outlined by Dempsey et al. (2016). This included pausing for breaks, rescheduling the interview, and providing participants helplines. Fortunately, there was no occasion that warranted the activation of this distress protocol during the interview (see Appendix H for the distress protocol).

To ensure participant well-being following the interview, a follow-up care protocol adapted from Sque et al. (2014) was implemented. This protocol involved contacting participants two and four weeks after the interview to assess any potential emotional distress arising from the interaction (refer to Appendix I for the post-interview follow-up care protocol). Fortunately, none of the participants reported experiencing any negative emotional effects.

Participants who took part in interviews received a token of appreciation for their time and contribution. This included a ₦500 (£7) voucher for an online shopping platform and ₦200 (£2.80) in mobile credit to offset any data charges incurred during the interview. Twitter users who consented to data analysis but did not participate in interviews did not receive compensation. However, the information sheet provided to them outlined the potential benefits of contributing to this research.

To uphold participant privacy and anonymity, a pseudonymous data collection process was employed throughout the studies. Twitter handles served as the sole identifiers for recruited participants, with no active solicitation of socio-demographic information. Gift vouchers were delivered via email addresses or mobile numbers that participants voluntarily provided for this specific purpose. Any additional personal details disclosed during interviews were offered freely by participants themselves.

To ensure the anonymity of account owners associated with the data, robust pseudonymisation techniques were implemented. Following Bruckman (2002), a 'heavy disguise' approach was adopted to protect Twitter users who might have inadvertently revealed identifiable information online. This involved substituting Twitter handles and names with pseudonyms during the web scraping process. It is important to note that none of the fabricated Twitter handles presented in this manuscript existed as of March 2024.

Beyond pseudonymisation, additional safeguards were implemented to ensure the anonymity of Twitter content used as illustrative examples. Drawing on Markham's (2012) critique of conventional anonymisation techniques in social media research, the manuscript showcases modified Twitter content. The rationale behind this approach lies in the evolving nature of online platforms like Twitter, which are becoming increasingly open and searchable. Markham (2012) argues that fabrication serves as an ethically justifiable safeguard to ensure that online material may not be traced back to its author. To thwart information retrieval, fabrication was employed in the following ways:

- ◆ Careful rephrasing of Twitter content while preserving its substance
- ◆ Translation of content (either complete or partial) between English and Filipino
- ◆ Modification of immaterial names of people, places, and objects

These procedures were underpinned by the principle that protecting users' privacy outweighs the faithful representation of Twitter content. Such fabrication techniques were not viewed as threats to validity, as the methodology did not involve interactional analysis, where preserving the original form of texts is ideal. To ensure transparency, all Twitter users were shown both the original and modified versions of their posts presented in this manuscript. In some instances, the researcher respected the wishes of account owners who explicitly requested verbatim quotes for their tweets.

### **3.10.3 Storing and Managing Data**

Stringent data security protocols were followed throughout the research process. All research data were stored securely on the researcher's University of Reading OneDrive account, a protected service utilising two-factor authentication. Data analysis was conducted on a password-protected laptop, which was kept in a secure location when not in use. Prior to sharing datasets with analysts and coders, any identifiable participant details were meticulously redacted during a data cleaning process. Finally, all research data will be retained for a maximum of five years following project completion. At that time, digital files will be permanently deleted, and any printed materials will be shredded and securely disposed of.

### **3.11 Chapter Summary**

This chapter presented the overall research methodology. It opened with a discussion of pragmatism as the worldview that best aligned with the overall research aims. The pragmatist orientation of this project was evident in the conduct of an online ethnography through a multiphase mixed-methods design. The research drew on Lomborg's (2014) framework for analysing social media genres, which informed the design of three studies. This online ethnography integrated both qualitative and quantitative methods, including lurking, web scraping, technobiographic interviews, social media

elicitation, social network analysis, cluster analysis, content analysis, and corpus linguistics techniques. A general overview of the methods used for each study was provided here, with a dedicated section in Chapters 4–7 detailing each study's specific methodology.

This online ethnography subscribed to Burrell's (2009) notion of the fieldsite as a network. While Twitter served as the primary platform for data collection and interaction, the research extended to other networked technologies like instant messaging applications and Zoom for communication with participants. Reflecting this networked approach, the ethnographic space encompassed 1,447 Twitter users identifying as FMLWH. This pseudo-population served as the broader context for the study, with 24 participants engaging in interviews and social media elicitation tasks, and an additional 146 users consenting to Twitter content analysis.

Reflexivity discussions centred on negotiating access and the researcher's positionality. Inspired by Lofland and Lofland (1995) and Carmel (2011), negotiating access involved three stages: accessing the Twitterverse of FMLWH ('getting in'), navigating and familiarising oneself with different spaces within Twitter ('getting around'), and building rapport with select users ('getting along'). The researcher clarified his role as a semi-outsider. While he occupied an external position relative to the FMLWH community, he maintained some level of proximity due to firsthand experience witnessing a friend's HIV diagnosis and treatment. Recognising this positionality, he sought to

establish *Verstehen* by undertaking an extensive period of lurking on Twitter to acquire insider knowledge both about the discourse of living with HIV and the social norms surrounding Twittering. Measures to enhance the trustworthiness and reliability of data were also outlined.

Ethical clearance for this research was granted by two institutional review boards. Throughout the online ethnography, rigorous research ethics were upheld, particularly regarding investigating a vulnerable population and handling social media data. The subsequent four chapters detail findings from the three studies conducted.

## CHAPTER 4

### **HIDING IN PLAIN SIGHT: NEGOTIATING VISIBILITY MANAGEMENT ON TWITTER**

#### **4.1 Introduction**

In analysing Twittering as a communicative genre, this online ethnography spotlights the social practices of Filipino men with HIV (FMLWH). As outlined in Chapter 1, the emphasis on FMLWH is prompted by the Philippines' continuous struggle with an upward trend in HIV cases, particularly among Filipino men (Department of Health-Epidemiology Bureau, 2019; UNAIDS, 2022). Meanwhile, the substantial presence of account owners who identify as FMLWH on Twitter makes it a social platform worthy of examination.

Aligned with Lomborg's (2014) genre-based framework for social media, the first study in this online ethnography examined the composition of Twitter users identifying as FMLWH. It followed an exploratory sequential mixed-methods design. The first stage involved a qualitative examination of the visibility management practices employed by this user base. The second stage involved a quantitative analysis of their sociodemographic

characteristics and network structure. This chapter covers only the qualitative phase of the study; the quantitative data analysis is presented separately in Chapter 5.

The study argues that genre knowledge is rooted in shared practices surrounding self-presentation in online environments. Visibility management on Twitter may be imagined as a socially mediated process shaped by norms and conventions, as well as platform affordances. Drawing on the theories of networked publics (boyd, 2011) and visibility management (Lasser and Tharinger, 2003), the qualitative phase of this study explored how FMLWH negotiate visibility management on Twitter.

## **4.2 Methodology**

### **4.2.1 Research Design**

With hardly any literature on visibility management and self-presentation on social media among FMLWH, this study utilised an exploratory sequential mixed-methods design (qual → QUANT). The initial qualitative phase served as a foundation, offering insights that guided the subsequent quantitative phase (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2011). In the context of this study, identifying pertinent account owners hinged on prior knowledge of how FMLWH rendered visible their identities on Twitter. The study solely

drew on digital trace data and account metadata. Figure 4 shows the study design, highlighting the qualitative phase.

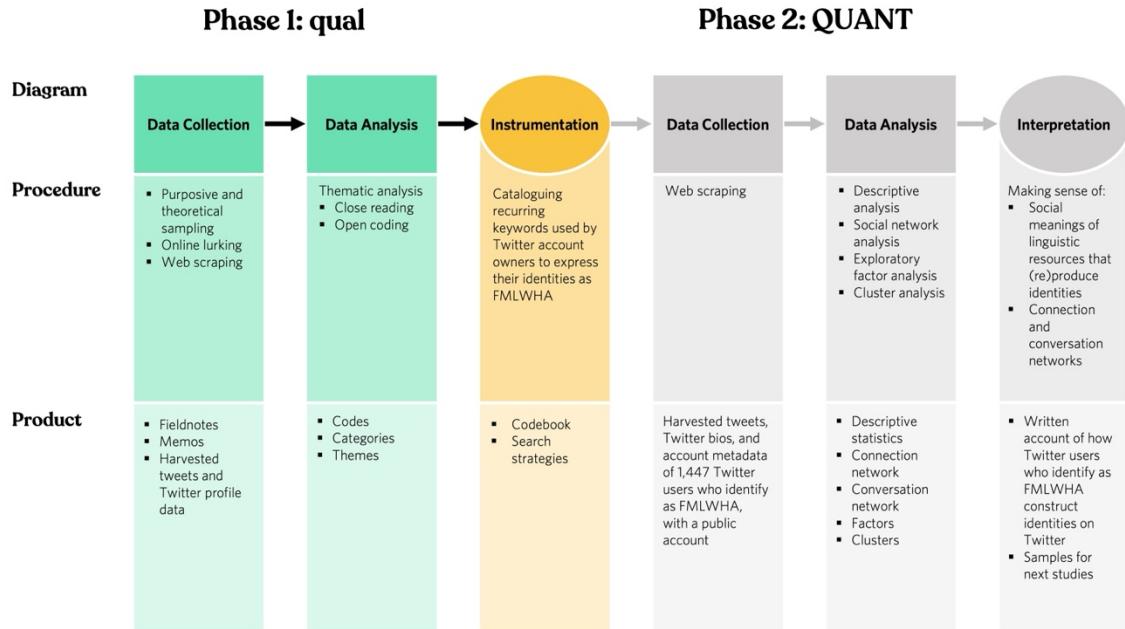


Figure 4. Mixed-methods design of Study 1 highlighting the qual phase

#### 4.2.2 Data Collection

This study identified FMLWH on Twitter using HIV signifiers uncovered through ‘online lurking.’ Through this strategy, researchers gather data from an online setting without actively participating or revealing their presence to the participants (Whiteman, 2012: 109). This approach was chosen because FMLWH may be less likely to openly disclose their HIV serostatus due to the stigmas they face (Herek, 1999; Laguna and

Villegas, 2019; Rintamaki and Weaver, 2008). As a semi-outsider to this community, the researcher found this strategy valuable for gaining empathic understanding of the discourse of FMLWH on Twitter. From April 2020 to April 2022, he immersed himself in the stream of everyday tweets posted by self-identified FMLWH belonging to a public Twitter list, recording observations in fieldnotes.

Utilising the R package *rtweet* (Kearney, 2019), Twitter data were collected unobtrusively. Rtweet requires a Twitter developer account, which generates tokens that grant authorised users access to Twitter's application programming interface (API). An API may be thought of a backdoor to a website (in this case, Twitter) through which developers enter to obtain the data they need. The generated tokens may then be passed to certain rtweet functions, which, in turn, communicate with Twitter's API to collect the data requested. Additionally, the researcher manually compiled relevant tweets and Twitter profiles by saving them as PDF files or capturing screenshots.

### **4.2.3 Data Analysis**

Fieldnotes underwent Braun et al.'s (2019) thematic analysis process with the goal of uncovering these users' visibility management strategies. Salient social identifiers, including recurring linguistic references to these users' masculinity and HIV serostatus, were recorded. After processing the ethnographic fieldnotes, a total of 84 HIV-related

keywords and 170 masculinity-oriented keywords were generated. Some examples of the keywords include:

- ◆ For HIV status: Aluvia, CD4, PLHIV, poz, and TLD
- ◆ For masculinity: Blood brother, guy, he/him, *kuya* (Filipino for older brother), and *tito* (Filipino for uncle)

#### **4.2.4 Sampling**

The purposively selected data source was a public Twitter list curating self-identified FMLWH users. As of 11 May 2020, the list contained 1,632 users. Theoretical sampling guided the selection of illustrative tweets and Twitter profiles to ensure comprehensive coverage of the topic. This process continued until data saturation was achieved, resulting in a final sample of 41 Twitter profiles and 2,442 tweets.

### **4.3 Findings**

This section presents qualitative insights into how FMLWH manage visibility on Twitter. Examples shown in this chapter have been suitably adjusted using Bruckman's (2002) heavy disguise techniques and Markham's (2012) fabrication procedures. Furthermore, all images embedded in the tweets are artificial intelligence-generated, and the assigned Twitter handles did not exist as of March 2024.

Three key themes surrounding the visibility management practices of Twitter users identifying as FMLWH emerged: 1) negotiating HIV disclosure through succinct identifiers; 2) maintaining pseudonymous identities; and 3) composing threaded tweets.

#### **4.3.1 Negotiating HIV Disclosure through Succinct Identifiers**

Conveying HIV status through succinct labels emerged as a prominent strategy within the presencing practices of these Twitter users. This straightforward approach to HIV disclosure involved employing any or a combination of three categories of identifiers: 1) HIV clinical details; 2) HIV biomarkers; and 3) HIV social identifiers.

***HIV clinical details.*** Twitter users often made references to clinical details, including their highly active antiretroviral therapy (HAART), HIV confirmatory code, and treatment hub or care facility. Disclosing one's HAART in shorthand was standard practice for Twitter users who identify as FMLWH. For example, the triple drug combination *TLD* (tenofovir disoproxil, lamivudine, and dolutegravir) appeared numerous times in Twitter bios. Some users prefixed their HAART with the medical abbreviation *Rx* (prescription) or *ARV* (antiretroviral) (e.g., *Rx: 3TC AZT NVP* and *ARV: LTE 🌈*). It was also common practice for these users to indicate their alphanumeric HIV confirmatory code, which signifies their treatment hub and year of diagnosis. For example, the code *R14* indicates an HIV diagnosis in 2014 with the Research Institute for Tropical Medicine as the treatment

hub. Lastly, Twitter users who identify as FMLWH were also keen to disclose their HIV treatment hub or care facility, again often referring to them in shorthand: *Anglo* for LoveYourself Anglo; MMC for Makati Medical Center; and TMC for The Medical City.

**HIV biomarkers.** Account owners also invoked their HIV biomarkers to disclose their serostatus. These details included their CD4 count, undetectable status, and viral load. HIV attacks the human body by targeting white blood or CD4 cells; a CD4 count below 200 cells/ $\mu$ L indicates that a person has AIDS. The goal of HAART is to improve patients' CD4 count while simultaneously decreasing their viral load or the amount of HIV in the blood (Gill et al., 2002). Twitter users who identify as FMLWH usually indicated not only their current CD4 count but a series of values over a given period to show progression, as these examples illustrate:

- ◆ My stats: 406-457-673-723-508-645
- ◆ 14 ➔ 161 ➔ 247
- ◆ CD4: 148 (12/18/18), 249 (04/01/19), 428 (07/26/19)
- ◆ 229-619-715-850

Providing their CD4 count was a more common practice among these Twitter users than disclosing their viral load. Those who did post about their viral load often abbreviated it to VL, as these examples show:

- ◆ vl=less than 30 UD
- ◆ VL @ 32
- ◆ VL less than 40 copies/mL 09.01.18

In these instances, the mention of a low viral load signifies an HIV undetectable status (generally 200 copies/mL or lower). These Twitter users conveyed this milestone by using the abbreviations *UD* (i.e., undetectable) and *U=U* (i.e., undetectable is untransmittable). By disclosing details about their CD4 count, viral load, and undetectable status, the Twitter bios of FMLWH resembled laboratory test forms. The act of pinning these details on their profile could be interpreted as a means for these account owners to display an evidence-backed snapshot of their well-being to other FMLWH on Twitter.

**HIV social identifiers.** FMLWH also used social identifiers to signal their HIV serostatus. Some users explicitly disclosed their status with their use of staple keywords such as *HIV+*, *PLHIV* (i.e., person living with HIV), and *AIDS survivor* in reference to themselves. Other account owners did not explicitly label themselves as people living with HIV or AIDS but relied on slang terms such as *poz*, *blood brother*, and *reborn* (usually followed by the date of diagnosis), *proton* (alluding to its positive charge), and *pusit* (Filipino for *squid* and a play on the word *positive*).

### 4.3.2 Maintaining Pseudonymous Identities

A common presencing strategy for this user base was to employ nicknames (e.g., 'Keyser So Slay') or personal descriptions (e.g., 'poz athlete') as their unique identities on Twitter. Froomkin (1995) describes this online practice as untraceable pseudonymity, wherein digital personas are maintained over time without making creators identifiable. Despite their reluctance to reveal their 'real' identities, these users typically presented complete Twitter profiles, including a bio, a profile image, and a header image. Notably, many profile images featured photos of themselves with their heads cropped out or their faces covered by emoji stickers. Figure 5 presents a sample Twitter profile showing the conventions used by users identifying as FMLWH. As a reminder, this profile features artificial intelligence-generated images and omits any identifiers associated with actual Twitter users.

POZZPORRO 🔥  
23.3K Tweets



**POZZPORRO 🔥**  
@pozzporro

Hey Blood Bro | ALUVIA | R18 | 14 ➡ 161 ➡ 247 | U=U | Virgo 🌌  
IG: @bloodbroplus

⌚ Cavite ⌚ t.co/3p7YWSp 📅 Joined March 2012

1,331 Following 2,287 Followers

Not followed by anyone you're following

---

**Note**  
To maintain user confidentiality, the original Twitter profile is not shown, with details changed, images replaced, and the bio reworded.

Figure 5. Sample Twitter profile

While the presented profile does not show explicit disclosure of HIV status, the use of social identifiers such as *poz* in the Twitter handle (i.e., @pozzporro) and *blood bro* in the bio draw on recurring practices of social identifiability enacted by FMLWH on Twitter. Additional HIV identifiers present in this profile are clinical details, including the user's treatment hub (i.e., *RITM*) and meds (i.e., *Aluvia*), as well as HIV biomarkers such as his CD4 count (i.e., 14 ➡ 161 ➡ 247) and undetectable status (i.e., *U=U*). A convention often

followed by Twitter users who identify as FMLWH was to showcase these details set apart by a special character or an emoji.

### **4.3.3 Composing Threaded Tweets**

Some individuals kept their Twitter profile sparse and instead opted to disclose their HIV status by writing an elaborate account of their HIV diagnosis. As a workaround to the 280-character tweet limit, these users fragmented their story by replying consecutively to each tweet they posted. This way, when the reader clicks on the first tweet, the following posts appear in succession beneath it. More often than not, these users would pin their HIV story at the top of their timeline for increased visibility. This raises the question: *To whom are these stories being told?* Threaded tweets typically begin with the user's motive for sharing their story, often aimed at providing fellow FMLWH with insights into their journey from HIV diagnosis to managing the condition. Engagement from other FMLWH—fondly called 'blood brothers' on Twitter—in tweet replies also indicates their interest in these narratives. A sample threaded tweet illustrating these attributes is presented in Figure 6.

← **Post**

 **khalil nas x**  
@AltSquiddy

(1/n)  
It's been two years since I got diagnosed.. thought of sharing my #PLHIV journey to help fellow blood bros.. (A thread)

2:10 PM · Nov 7, 2021

 1   12  

 **khalil nas x** @AltSquiddy · Nov 7, 2021  
(2/n)  
On November 6, 2019 I finally mustered the courage to get tested after putting it off for months.. I had rashes all over my body.. The test came out positive.. I felt like I couldn't breathe..

 1    

 **khalil nas x** @AltSquiddy · Nov 7, 2021  
(3/n)  
But I couldn't afford to take a day off so I still went to work the next day even tho I couldn't process anything.. I was just staring into nowhere all day..

 1    

**Note**  
To maintain user confidentiality, the original tweet thread is not shown, with details changed, images replaced, and posts reworded.

Figure 6. Sample threaded tweet

#### 4.4 Conclusion

This online ethnography is grounded in Lomborg's (2014) genre-based framework for social media, with network composition being one of the four dimensions of analysis. The inaugural study employed a two-stage exploratory sequential mixed-methods design.

The qualitative phase, presented in this chapter, informed the subsequent quantitative analysis (see Chapter 5). The study argued that identifying Twitter users—particularly vulnerable populations facing social stigma—is a crucial step before network analysis can be undertaken. Guided further by the theories of networked publics (boyd, 2011) and visibility management (Lasser and Tharinger, 2003), the study set out to explore how FMLWH negotiate visibility management on Twitter. The qualitative analysis, drawing solely on digital trace data, revealed three noteworthy findings:

1. Self-identified FMLWH users often alluded to their HIV serostatus in their tweets and Twitter bios, while typically maintaining pseudonymous profiles.
2. A central visibility management strategy involved coded talk. Implicit references to HIV serostatus provided a form of cover, allowing users to connect with other PLWH while potentially remaining undetected by others.
3. The study acknowledged the limitations of user control over visibility. Expressions on Twitter are automatically archived and persist unless deleted or privacy settings are adjusted. Platform affordances, therefore, render content searchable, replicable, and scalable.

These initial findings from the analysis of trace data are further enriched by the technobiographies presented in Chapter 6. Meanwhile, Chapter 8 delves deeper into visibility management, integrating insights from the analysis of both trace data and trace interviews. As discussed, processed field notes compiled during the period of online lurking yielded a comprehensive catalogue of linguistic references to HIV and masculinity. The

subsequent chapter details how these signifiers were utilised as search terms to identify Twitter users with indications of being FMLWH.

## CHAPTER 5

### BAND OF BLOOD BROTHERS: NETWORK-BUILDING ON TWITTER

#### 5.1 Introduction

Drawing upon the findings from Chapter 4 on visibility management practices of Twitter users identifying as Filipino men living with HIV (FMLWH), this chapter presents the findings from the second part of Study 1. Employing Lomborg's (2014) genre-based approach to analysing social media, the quantitative phase of this study analysed the composition of Twitter users identifying as FMLWH or 'blood brothers,' aiming to achieve the following specific objectives:

1. *Analyse the socio-technical characteristics of these Twitter users.*
2. *Analyse the connection network of these Twitter users.*
3. *Analyse the conversation network of these Twitter users.*
4. *Cluster these Twitter users into distinct personas based on their socio-technical characteristics and network measures.*

## 5.2 Methodology

### 5.2.1 Research Design

As discussed in Chapter 4, this study was structured as an exploratory sequential mixed-methods design (qual → QUAN). The qualitative phase identified linguistic markers used by Twitter users to express their FMLWH identities, informing the development of a comprehensive search strategy to return matches of Twitter users with indications of being FMLWH. The subsequent quantitative phase analysed the socio-technical characteristics and network metrics of these users, aiming to cluster them into distinct profiles. Figure 7 shows the exploratory sequential mixed-methods design of this study, highlighting the quantitative phase.

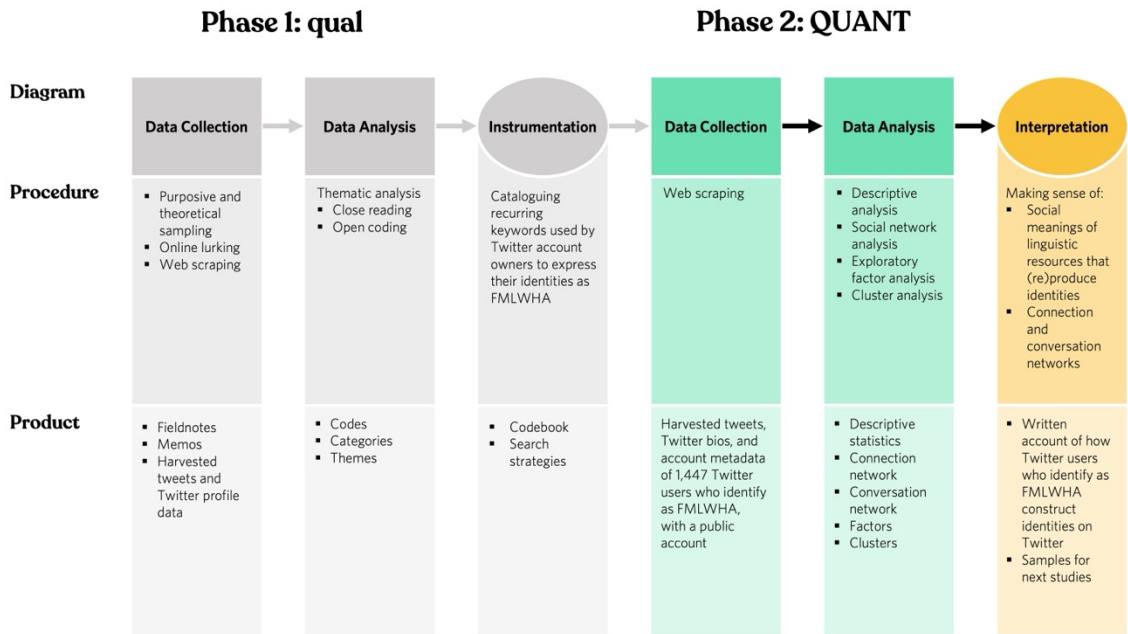


Figure 7. Mixed-methods design of Study 1 highlighting the quant phase

### 5.2.2 Data Collection

Using the keywords culled from fieldnotes, systematic search queries were formulated to identify Twitter users with indications of being FMLWH in their profile bio, Twitter handle, display name, or tweets (refer to Appendix B for sample search strategies used). Ultimately, a total of 1,447 Twitter users met inclusion criteria. Twitter data were unobtrusively collected using the R package *rtweet* (Kearney, 2019). As discussed in Chapter 4, *rtweet* relies on application programming interface (API) access tokens, which are generated through a Twitter developer account. These tokens enable *rtweet* functions to collect data from Twitter's API. Through web scraping, each user's Twitter bio, account

metadata, and up to 3,200 of the most recent tweets posted, as permitted by Twitter's API, were extracted.

### 5.2.3 Data Analysis

The quantitative analysis proceeded through five stages: 1) descriptive analysis; 2) social network analysis; 3) correlation analysis; and 4) exploratory factor analysis; and 5) cluster analysis. Firstly, user data underwent descriptive analysis to characterise the account owners in terms of their principal account characteristics and Twitter usage characteristics. Secondly, Twitter follows and @mentions from the pseudo-population were extracted from the dataset to create adjacency matrices, which were then imported into Gephi (version 0.10). Social network analysis was conducted using this open-source software, resulting in two networks: a connection network derived from follows and a conversation network derived from @mentions. For both networks, network-level measures (e.g., density and centralisation) and individual-level measures (e.g., centralities) were calculated.

Thirdly, Spearman's rank correlation was used to test correlations between the centrality measures generated through social network analysis. Fourthly, exploratory factor analysis was conducted to identify the underlying factors driving Twittering. Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) and Bartlett's tests ensured data suitability. Finally, the Anderson-Rubin method was employed to compute factor scores, which were subsequently used in a K-means cluster analysis to classify FMLWH Twitter users into distinct personas.

### 5.2.4 Sampling

In this study, candidate users were classified as FMLWH if they displayed Filipino nationality (i.e., by posting a tweet in Filipino), HIV signifiers (e.g., *PLHIV*, *poz*), and male identifiers (e.g., *guy*, *pronouns*: *he/him*) in either tweets or their Twitter profile, which includes their bio, Twitter handle, and display name. Moreover, their Twitter account had to be publicly accessible as of 21 April 2022.

Table 1 summarises inclusion and exclusion criteria used in selecting candidate users.

**Table 1. Inclusion and exclusion criteria for candidate users**

INCLUSION CRITERION	EXCLUSION CRITERION
<p>All conditions must be satisfied:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Account set to 'public' at the time of web scraping</li> <li>2. Account owned by a Twitter user who identifies as Filipino based on any one of the following indicators:           <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A. Express statement of Filipino nationality</li> <li>B. Presence of at least 1 tweet written in Tagalog or a combination of Tagalog and English</li> </ol> </li> <li>3. Account owned by a Twitter user who identifies as male based on any one of the following indicators:           <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A. Express statement of male gender identity</li> <li>B. Use of masculine pronouns (e.g., <i>he</i>, <i>him</i>, and <i>his</i>) in reference to himself</li> <li>C. Use of masculine identifiers (e.g., <i>brother</i>, <i>nephew</i>, <i>uncle</i>, <i>boy</i>, <i>boyfriend</i>, etc.) in reference to himself</li> <li>D. Other reference to male identity based on pertinent keywords identified</li> </ol> </li> <li>4. Account owned by a Twitter user who identifies as a PLWH based on any one of the following indicators:           <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A. Express statement of HIV status</li> <li>B. Disclosure of local HIV treatment hub</li> <li>C. Other reference to HIV identity based on pertinent keywords identified</li> </ol> </li> </ol>	<p>Any one of the conditions must be satisfied once the semi-final list of candidate users has been generated:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Account switched to 'protected' at the time of analysis</li> <li>2. Account deactivated or suspended at the time of analysis</li> <li>3. Account created after 21 October 2021</li> <li>4. Account with no tweets from 21 October 2021 to 21 April 2022</li> <li>5. Non-personal account (i.e., one run by an HIV support organisation or clinic)</li> </ol>

Sampling of candidate users was carried out in three phases. Firstly, seed users comprising representative account owners were identified ( $N = 2,245$ ) from a now defunct public Twitter list of self-identified FMLWH. Secondly, seed users were expanded by obtaining candidate users ( $N = 322$ ) from the list of accounts that follow them (followers) and the accounts that they follow (followees). Finally, additional candidate users were identified as suggested Twitter users ( $N = 28$ ) and through active searching ( $N = 211$ ).

Exclusion criteria were employed to refine the preliminary pool of potential candidate users into a more manageable size. Only public accounts accessible on 21 April 2022 were included in the analysis. To ensure a current dataset, the chosen observation period spanned from 21 October 2021 to 21 April 2022, representing the six months leading up to the web scraping date. Accounts created prior to 21 October 2021 and those with no tweets during this period were omitted. With exclusion criteria applied, the final sample resulted in 1,447 Twitter users. To ensure that all inclusion criteria were genuinely satisfied, the researcher conducted manual verification to confirm that Twitter users employed signifiers in the intended context and in reference to themselves. Figure 8 summarises the sampling procedure undertaken in this study.

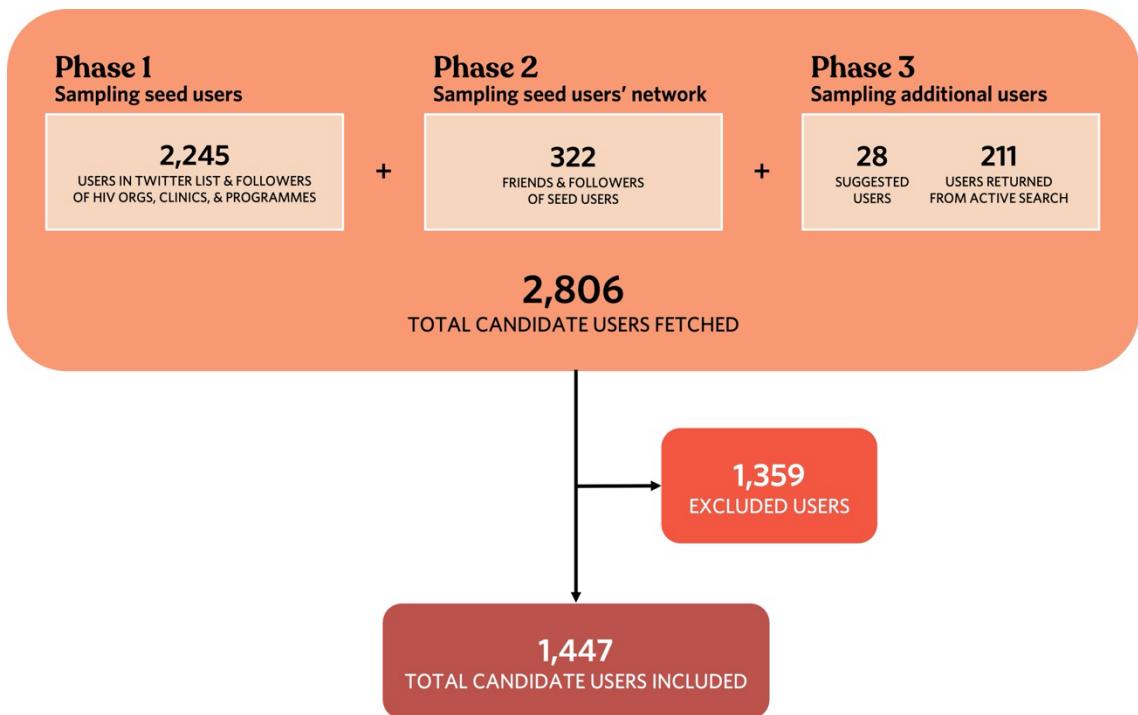


Figure 8. Sampling strategy for Study 1

### 5.3 Findings

The composition of Twitter users identifying as FMLWH is analysed by first examining their socio-technical characteristics derived solely from digital trace data. A significant part of the discussion maps the connections among these users, employing data from Twitter follows and @mentions. Subsequently, results from exploratory factor analysis are presented to highlight the key dimensions of Twittering gleaned from data during the six-month analysis period. These factors are then employed to cluster the pseudo-population of 1,447 Twitter users into distinct personas.

### 5.3.1 Socio-technical Characteristics of Twitter Users Identifying as FMLWH

This section presents an analysis of the socio-technical characteristics of the study's 1,447 Twitter users based on data scraped on 21 April 2022. Firstly, users are profiled based on key metadata obtained from their accounts, including the date of account registration, the presence of a Twitter bio, and their designated geographical location. Subsequently, their Twitter usage patterns are examined, focusing on the volume of original tweets, retweets, and 'favoured' tweets. These socio-technical characteristics, combined with social network metrics detailed in a later section, serve as the foundation for clustering these account owners into distinct Twitter user personas.

***Principal characteristics of account owners.*** The creation dates of the Twitter accounts under study cover a 14-year period with the earliest user joining Twitter on 29 October 2007 and latest user on 21 October 2021. Almost half ( $N = 666$ , 46%) of the accounts were registered between 2019 and 2021 while a little more than two-thirds ( $N = 36$ , 36%) between 2016 and 2018. As of 21 April 2022, these Twitter users have been account owners for an average of four years. However, the considerable standard deviation of 2.69 years highlights the diverse account ages within this population, emphasising the heterogeneity of their engagement in the platform. The analysis of account registration statistics suggests a relatively stable user base in terms of overall prolonged engagement on Twitter. If these registration dates correspond with the time of HIV diagnosis, it is likely

that many of these users have been living with HIV for a substantial period. (In Chapter 6, qualitative findings regarding the motivations behind select participants' Twitter account creation are presented.)

Between 2007 and 2016, the annual count of new Twitter account sign-ups displayed gradual growth, followed by a sharp upswing from 2016 to 2019 (refer to Figure 9). Incidentally, this upward trend is fairly consistent with the rate of HIV incidence among Filipino adults aged 15–49 for most of this period, as seen in Figure 10 (World Bank, 2021). These concurrent trends might suggest that these individuals signed up for a Twitter account—perhaps a new one if they already had an account—after learning about their HIV diagnosis.

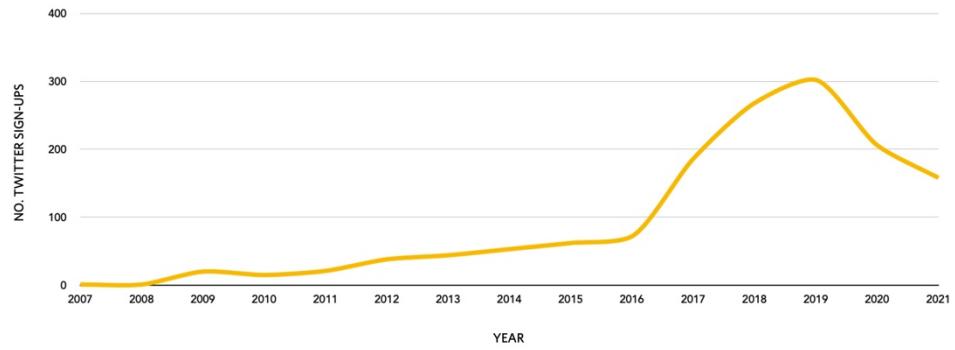


Figure 9. Number of Twitter sign-ups by candidate users

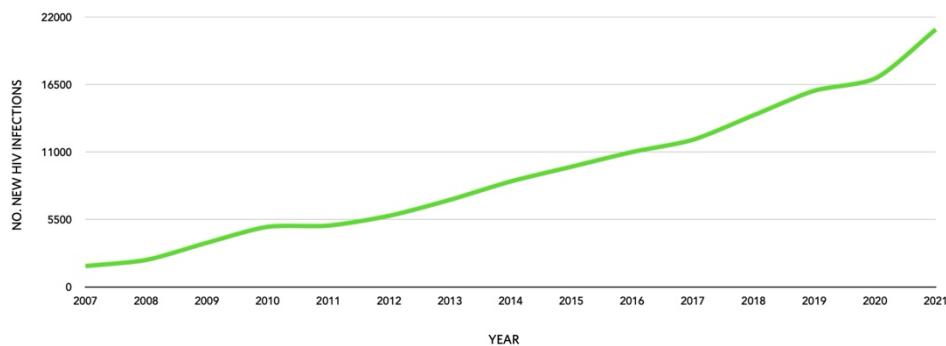


Figure 10. Number of new HIV infections among Filipino adults (World Bank, 2021)

Data from Kemp (2021) suggest a growing interest in Twitter in the Philippines. National Twitter popularity increased from 54% in 2019 to 62% in 2021, and the potential audience reach expanded from 5.08 million users in 2020 to 7.85 million users in 2021. However, this study's dataset interestingly shows a decrease in new account registrations from 2019 to 2021. This pattern can be partly attributed to the application of inclusion and exclusion criteria, which effectively refined the pool of eligible users. Specifically, for 2021, only individuals who registered on Twitter between 1 January and 21 October were included in the count. Had the analysis encompassed the entire year, the total number of account registrations would likely have been higher. Additionally, it is worth mentioning that 192 users who created Twitter accounts between 2020 and 2021 were excluded from the final list of verified candidates due to specific inclusion conditions, particularly related to Twitter activity.

Most of the Twitter users included a bio in their profile ( $N = 1,338$ , 92%), with these bios varying in length. Over a third ( $N = 527$ , 36%) were succinct, consisting of 1–50

characters. A comparable proportion of bios ( $N = 440$ , 30%) was moderately longer (51–100 characters). Despite Twitter bios permitting emoji usage, it was an infrequently adopted practice in the dataset. Over half of the bios ( $N = 818$ , 57%) were devoid of emojis. In contrast, a modest proportion of account owners ( $N = 381$ , 26%) chose to incorporate 1–3 emojis within their profile bio. Further exploration of the specific emoji choices can be found in Chapter 7.

Twitter users identifying as FMLWH exhibited a strong preference for visual profile elements. Uploading a profile picture constituted a near-universal practice ( $N = 1,414$ , 98%), considerably more prevalent than uploading a header image ( $N = 1,063$ , 73%). Conversely, displaying a website link was markedly less popular, with almost all account owners ( $N = 1,348$ , 93%) choosing not to include one. For the small minority ( $N = 99$ , 7%) of profiles with website links, a trend toward personal social media pages was observed; Curious Cat and Facebook were especially common choices. Finally, analysis of metadata indicated that a significant proportion of account owners ( $N = 947$ , 65%) included location tags on their profiles. It is worth noting that the open format of the location field yielded some indeterminate entries, such as *District 4, Panem* (a fictional location), *eh 'di sa puso mo* (translation: in your heart), and *somewhere over the rainbow* (a metaphorical location). Although these entries lack practical use as location markers, they exemplify the humour and casual atmosphere for which Twitter is known (Lomborg, 2014).

Analysis of legitimately tagged locations revealed that at least 862 users (60%) are based in the Philippines. The National Capital Region emerged as the region with the greatest number of users ( $N = 481$ , 33%), followed by Region IV ( $N = 94$ , 6%) and Regions VII and III (each  $N = 39$ , 3%). Incidentally, three of these four regions are home to the greatest numbers of HIV cases in the Philippines (Department of Health- Epidemiology Bureau, 2022). Table 2 summarises the principal account characteristics of the 1,447 Twitter users.

Table 2. Principal characteristics of account owners

CHARACTERISTIC	FREQUENCY (N = 1,447)	PERCENTAGE (%)
1. Creation year of Twitter account		
A. 2007-2009	22	2
B. 2010-2012	74	5
C. 2013-2015	159	11
D. 2016-2018	526	36
E. 2019-2021	666	46
	Total	1,447
		100
2. Number of years on Twitter		
A. Less than 1 year	76	5
B. 1.00-2.99 years	492	34
C. 3.00-4.99 years	504	35
D. 5.00-6.99 years	111	8
E. 7 years or more	264	18
	Total	1,447
		100
3. Provided profile bio		
A. Yes	1,338	92
B. No	109	8
	Total	1,447
		100
4. Number of characters of profile bio		
A. 1-50 characters	527	36
B. 51-100 characters	440	30
C. 101-150 characters	279	19
D. 151-200 characters	92	6
E. N/A (no profile bio)	109	8
	Total	1,447
		100
5. Number of emojis in profile bio		
A. 0	818	57
B. 1-3	381	26
C. 4-6	93	6
D. 7-10	32	2
E. Greater than 10	14	1
F. N/A (no profile bio)	109	8
	Total	1,447
		100
6. Uploaded profile image		
A. Yes	1,414	98
B. No	33	2
	Total	1,447
		100
7. Uploaded header image		
A. Yes	1,063	73
B. No	384	27
	Total	1,447
		100
8. Provided website		
A. Yes	99	7
B. No	1,348	93
	Total	1,447
		100

Table 2 continued on next page...

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CHARACTERISTIC	FREQUENCY (N = 1,447)	PERCENTAGE (%)
9. Type of URL entered in profile bio		
A. Social media	62	4
i. Curious Cat	28	2
ii. Facebook	15	1
iii. Instagram	9	1
iv. Other	10	1
B. Blog or personal site	29	2
C. Other	8	1
D. N/A (no URL entered)	1,348	93
	Total	1,447
		100
10. Included location in profile bio		
A. Yes	947	65
B. No	500	35
	Total	1,447
		100
11. Location tagged in profile bio		
A. Philippines	862	60
i. National Capital Region	481	33
ii. Region IV	94	6
iii. Region VII	46	3
iv. Region III	39	3
v. Region XI	29	2
vi. Region VI	19	1
vii. Region X	12	1
viii. Other	28	2
ix. Unspecified	114	8
B. Overseas	33	2
i. USA	14	1
ii. Other	19	1
C. Indeterminate	52	4
D. N/A (no location tagged)	500	35
	Total	1,447
		100

**Usage characteristics of account owners.** Between 21 October 2021 and 21 April 2022, the 1,447 account owners collectively generated a substantial volume of content, totalling 287,554 original tweets. However, analysis revealed a varied distribution of tweeting patterns, with some users exhibiting extreme behaviours. Notably, over a third of participants were either light tweeters (N = 579, 40%), who posted 1–25 tweets, or heavy

tweeters ( $N = 508$ , 35%), who posted over 100 tweets. The median number of original tweets during this period was 44 (range: 1–3,218), indicating a moderate level of self-generated content creation on Twitter. Conversely, almost half of the participants ( $N = 683$ , 47%) exhibited low retweeting behaviour, posting only 1–25 retweets during the six-month period. A further quarter of participants ( $N = 395$ , 27%) never retweeted at all. The median number of retweets during this period was 4 (range: 0–2722), indicating a low level of user engagement in sharing the content of other account owners. Similarly, the practice of posting quote tweets or retweets with comments was not widely observed. Throughout the covered period, almost half of the users ( $N = 685$ , 47%) refrained from posting any quote tweets, while a little over one-fourth ( $N = 371$ , 26%) limited their engagement to quote-tweeting only 1–5 tweets. Consistent with retweeting norms, the median number of quote tweets from 21 October 2021 to 21 April 2022 remained low at only 1 (range: 0–593).

Overall, the analysis revealed a preference for generating original content over retweeting other account owners' posts. This finding contrasts with datasets from similar studies focused on Twitter events in the Philippines (Bautista and Lin, 2015; David et al., 2016), where retweets outnumbered original tweets. It is important to note, however, that those studies examined tweet corpora on predetermined topics, not Twitter use behaviour in general. Nevertheless, this study suggests that FMLWH users on Twitter prioritise content creation through original tweets over content curation through retweeting or quote tweeting existing content.

The average number of daily tweets per user was calculated by dividing the total number of tweets by the total number of days each account had been active on Twitter as of 21 April 2022. Users were found to tweet an average of 1.71 times per day ( $\sigma=3.37$ ). A daily average of about two tweets might suggest limited Twitter use; however, it is important to acknowledge that some users exhibit bursts of activity followed by periods of inactivity, as detailed in Chapter 6. This cyclical pattern indicates that their Twitter engagement is not strictly confined to daily or even weekly intervals.

The average tweet length was calculated by first analysing the character count of tweets containing only letters and numbers. This value was then divided by the total number of original tweets posted during the analysis period. The average character count for original tweets was 54.83 ( $\sigma=35.85$ ). This value falls significantly below Twitter's 280-character limit, suggesting that these users typically do not utilise the full character allowance. This finding reinforces the notion that brevity remains a dominant characteristic of Twitter updates (boyd et al., 2010).

The study identified distinct patterns in emoji use among Twitter users. The median number of emojis used per tweet was 20, but the range was substantial (0–10,545). Half of the 1,447 users ( $N = 719$ , 50%) tended to incorporate only a few emojis, while a little less than a quarter ( $N = 304$ , 21%) used several. Interestingly, a handful of users ( $N = 214$ , 15%) opted out of using emojis altogether. In Chapter 7, the most popular emojis favoured by Twitter users are presented.

Similar to the findings on Twitter profiles, including URLs in tweets was not a prevalent practice. The median number of links shared during the period 21 October 21–21 April 2022 was 0 (range: 0–628). Over half the users ( $N = 779$ , 54%) did not share any links at all, while a quarter ( $N = 383$ , 26%) shared only 1–5 links. This suggests that for Twitter users identifying as FMLWH, information dissemination primarily occurs through retweeting existing content, which often already contains links. This potentially explains the infrequent use of direct URL sharing.

Hashtags were not a prominent feature in the tweets analysed. The median number of hashtags used during the six-month period of analysis was only 1 (range: 0–3173). Notably, over half the users ( $N = 596$ , 59%) never used hashtags at all, and only a little less than a third ( $N = 436$ , 30%) used them sparingly (1–5 times). Interestingly, despite being more inclined to post original tweets than retweet, Twitter users identifying as FMLWH exhibited minimal social tagging activity. This suggests that information sharing and retrieval within this network does not rely heavily on hashtags.

In contrast to their limited use of links and hashtags, these Twitter users demonstrated a preference for incorporating photos and videos into their tweets. Embedding multimedia content was a common practice, with nearly two-thirds of users ( $N = 865$ , 60%) doing so in over 15 tweets ( $N = 447$ ) or 1–5 tweets ( $N = 418$ ). This preference for visual content aligns with the observation that Twitter users identifying as FMLWH

frequently use profile and header images. Sharing visual elements appears to be a key motivator for their engagement on Twitter.

Twitter lists, which allow users to curate feeds of specific accounts, showed a range of inclusion. A considerable number of users ( $N = 596$ , 41%) did not belong to any list. Some appeared on just one list ( $N = 354$ , 24%) or two lists ( $N = 261$ , 18%). Notably, very few users—likely prominent actors in the network—were included in more than four lists ( $N = 88$ , 6%).

Finally, the average number of daily favourites per user was calculated by dividing the total number of ‘favourited’ tweets by the corresponding number of days each account had been active on Twitter as of 21 April 2022. The results revealed a relatively high propensity for ‘favouriting’ tweets, with users averaging 4.75 favourites per day ( $\sigma=11.48$ ). Twitter users identifying as FMLWH displayed a clearer inclination toward ‘favouriting’ tweets rather than posting them. The average number of tweets authored per day was 1.71 ( $\sigma=3.37$ ), whereas the average number of tweets ‘favourited’ per day was almost three times higher. This difference implies that ‘favouriting’ tweets might be a less laborious task for FMLWH users compared with crafting and publishing their own content. The simplicity of ‘favouriting’ tweets, which involves a single click on the heart icon, may contribute to this preference. The usage characteristics of the account owners in the study are outlined in Table 3.

Table 3. Usage characteristics of account owners

CHARACTERISTIC	FREQUENCY (N = 1,447)	PERCENTAGE (%)
1. Number of original tweets		
A. 1-25	579	40
B. 26-50	185	13
C. 51-75	105	7
D. 76-100	70	5
E. 101 or greater	508	35
	Total	1,447
		100
2. Number of retweets		
A. 0	395	27
B. 1-25	683	47
C. 26-50	112	8
D. 51-75	58	4
E. 76 or greater	199	14
	Total	1,447
		100
3. Number of quote tweets		
A. 0	685	47
B. 1-5	371	26
C. 6-10	105	7
D. 11-15	57	4
E. 16 or greater	229	16
	Total	1,447
		100
4. Average number of tweets per day		
A. 0-0.99	881	61
B. 1.00-1.99	248	17
C. 2.00-2.99	102	7
D. 3.00-3.99	71	5
E. 4.00-4.99	31	2
F. 5.00 or greater	114	8
	Total	1,447
		100
5. Average number of characters per tweet		
A. 1.00-20.99	150	10
B. 21.00-40.99	447	31
C. 41.00-60.99	376	26
D. 61.00-80.99	212	15
E. 81.00 or greater	256	18
	Total	1,447
		100
6. Number of emojis in tweets		
A. 0	214	15
B. 1-50	719	50
C. 51-100	143	10
D. 101-150	67	5
E. 151 or greater	304	21
	Total	1,447
		100

Table 3 continued on next page...

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CHARACTERISTIC	FREQUENCY (N = 1,447)	PERCENTAGE (%)
7. Number of links shared in tweets		
A. 0	779	54
B. 1-5	383	26
C. 6-10	84	6
D. 11-15	38	3
E. 16 or greater	163	11
	Total	1,447
		100
8. Number of hashtags used in tweets		
A. 0	596	41
B. 1-5	436	30
C. 6-10	119	8
D. 11-15	56	4
E. 16 or greater	240	17
	Total	1,447
		100
9. Number of photos or videos posted		
A. 0	378	26
B. 1-5	418	29
C. 6-10	124	9
D. 11-15	80	6
E. 16 or greater	447	31
	Total	1,447
		100
10. Number of Twitter lists belonging to		
A. 0	596	41
B. 1	354	24
C. 2	261	18
D. 3	113	8
E. 4	35	2
F. 5 or greater	88	6
	Total	1,447
		100
11. Average number of tweets favourite'd per day		
A. 0-0.99	593	41
B. 1.00-4.99	541	37
C. 5.00-8.99	140	10
D. 9.00-12.99	66	5
E. 13.00-16.99	13	1
F. 17.00 or greater	94	6
	Total	1,447
		100

### 5.3.2 Connection Network Based on Follows

Social network analysis yielded two distinct directed networks capturing the relationships among the 1,447 candidate users as of 21 April 2022. The first network represents connections based on follows on Twitter, a platform where users can subscribe to others' updates without reciprocity. In other words, edges or ties in this network indicate that one user follows another. The second network focuses on actualised relationships derived from tags. Here, users can tag others (@mentions) in their tweets, though a response from the @mentioned user is not guaranteed. The section following explores the findings from the analysis of 'follow' ties, hereafter called the 'connection network.' This section explores the network's overall structure, followed by an analysis of individual user metrics. To protect the privacy of Twitter users, pseudonyms have been assigned throughout this chapter. All actual Twitter handles and display names have been omitted.

***Network-level metrics.*** The connection network was constructed by identifying the followers of each user within the pool of verified candidate users. For instance, if User A had 500 followers but only 250 belonged to the verified list, only those 250 users were included in User A's network. This means the follower count for a user reflects his connections within the pseudo-population, not his total number of followers on Twitter. The connection network is visualised in Figure 11.

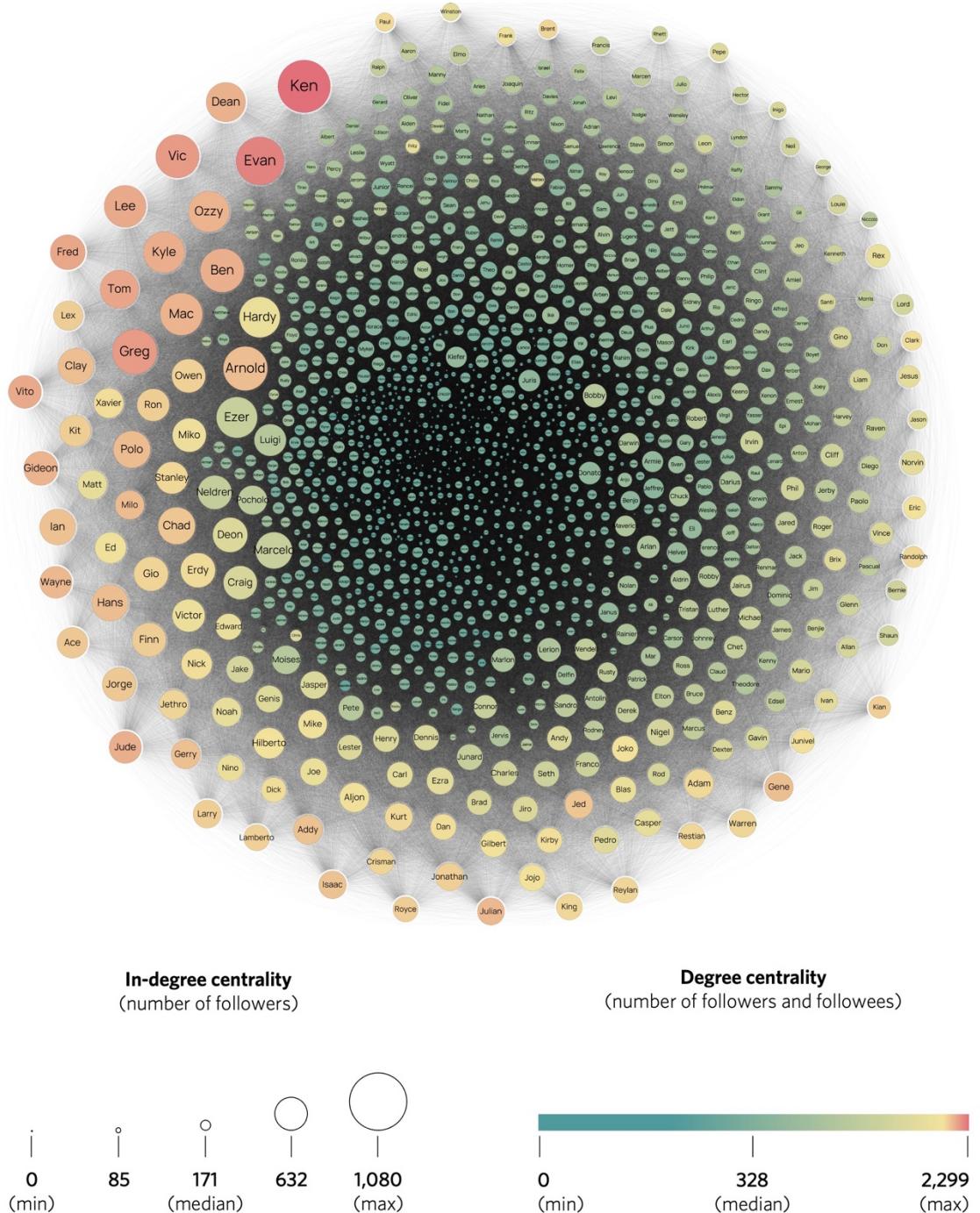


Figure 11. Connection network based on follows

A substantial connection network emerged with 302,934 ‘follow’ ties linking 1,447 Twitter users identifying as FMLWH with a public account. However, the network density of 0.145 indicates a rather loose network structure. Network density is a measure of interconnectedness between nodes, with values ranging from 0 (no connections) to 1 (all possible connections). In this case, the density of 0.145 suggests that these users share only about 15% of the total possible connections within the network. Loose social cohesion is typical of large networks as it becomes increasingly difficult for any given user to follow most other users on Twitter as the network expands (Hambrick and Sanderson, 2013; Khajeheian, 2020). Furthermore, in large social networks, users often connect with a broader range of individuals. Consequently, the Twitter users in this study might follow a variety of accounts, rather than solely focusing on users identifying as FMLWH. Additionally, they might have connections with other FMLWH who, due to having protected Twitter accounts, were not included in the analysis.

The network exhibited moderately low modularity (0.1450), indicating the presence of five communities where users follow each other more frequently within their groups than with those outside. These communities may have overlapping memberships, suggesting that users can belong to multiple clusters simultaneously. High reciprocity (0.6921) further supports this notion by showing that many users follow each other back. A reciprocity score of 0.6921 suggests that roughly 70% of ‘follow’ ties are reciprocated, indicating a network

where a majority of FMLWH users follow each other back. This observation is in lock step with the homophily principle, which suggests a tendency for individuals to connect with those they perceive as similar (Rogers and Bhowmik, 1970). In this context, the shared identity among FMLWH Twitter users might explain the network's high reciprocity rate.

The network's diameter, which indicates the greatest separation between any two users, is only four nodes. While these users might not follow a large portion of other users within the same demographic, a diameter of 4 implies they likely have some degree of awareness, either directly or indirectly, of other account owners within the network. Interestingly, this maximum separation is two steps short of the well-known six degrees of separation theory proposed by Milgram (1967). Furthermore, the average geodesic distance within the connection network is 1.8315, signifying that any user is, on average, only about two nodes away from another one. This translates to a network where Twitter users identifying as FMLWH are positioned near one another. Theoretically, this short distance fosters the rapid transmission of messages across the network. Smaller network diameters are generally associated with faster information flow (Faust and Wasserman, 1994).

Beyond density, reciprocity, and distance, networks may also be described in terms of centralisation—that is, the extent to which connections within a network are concentrated around specific users (Valente, 2010: 94). Centralisation scores span a range from 0 (indicating that all nodes are interconnected) to 1 (suggesting that all nodes connect to only one central node). In this study, the standard deviation of betweenness centrality

scores served as the basis for calculating the network's centralisation. The calculated betweenness centrality score of 0.0016 indicates a highly decentralised connection network. This low variation in scores suggests a widespread distribution of 'follow' connections throughout the network. A decentralised network structure is often associated with open communication channels, efficient resource sharing, and a more peer-to-peer mode of interaction, where information flow is not controlled by a select few.

The network-level metrics discussed in this section are summarised in Table 4.

**Table 4. Summary of metrics of the connection network**

ATTRIBUTE	VALUE
1. Number of nodes	1,447
2. Number of edges	302,934
3. Median in-degrees (followers)	171
4. Median out-degrees (friends)	152
5. Number of sources	16
6. Number of sinks	10
7. Number of isolates	2
8. Diameter	4
9. Average geodesic distance	1.8315
10. Reciprocity	0.6921
11. Density	0.1448
12. Modularity	0.1450
13. Centralization	0.0016

**Actor-level metrics.** Within the connection network of 1,447 users, account owners typically follow a median of 152 other users who identify as FMLWH and have public Twitter accounts (range: 0–1219). Conversely, the median number of followers per account owner is slightly greater at 171 (range: 0–1080). The analysis identified a minimum in-

degree of 0 and a maximum of 1,080. Notably, 14 account owners (1%) have established connections without receiving any in return, making them the ‘sources’ of the connection network (Valente, 2010). Ken emerged as the most popular user with the highest in-degrees (1,080 followers), followed by Evan (987 followers), Greg (922 followers), Arnold (910 followers), and Ben (900 followers).

The analysis also examined out-degrees or the number of users an account owner follows. Here, the minimum was 0 and the maximum was 1,218. Interestingly, there were four users (0.3%) who can be considered ‘sinks’—they are followed by others but have not followed anyone themselves (Valente, 2010). As seen previously, Ken remains the most popular user, with the highest out-degrees (following 1,218 users). He is followed by Evan (following 1,123 users), Vito (following 1,058 users), Fred (following 1,044 users), and Julian (following 1,041 users).

It is worth noting that the analysis identified only two isolated users (0.1%), Colt and Reyner. These users lacked any connections, as evidenced by their 0 in-degrees (followers) and out-degrees (followees). Consequently, Colt and Reyner, though FMLWH users with public Twitter accounts, are not part of the main connection network. However, account metadata suggest they are not inactive users. Both have been on Twitter for a significant time (Colt: five years; Reyner: nine years) and have posted tweets (Colt: 179; Reyner: 9,506). Additionally, they have followers (Colt: 76; Reyner: 352) and follow other users themselves (Colt: 113; Reyner: 592), although these account owners may not be part

of the study's pseudo-population. Two possible explanations exist for their isolation: Firstly, their Twitter activity and network structure may limit their visibility to other users. Secondly, they may follow and be followed by FMLWH users with protected accounts, who are not included in this analysis.

Complete user data on in-degree and out-degree centrality measures are presented in Table 5.

**Table 5. In-degrees and out-degrees based on follows**

CHARACTERISTIC	FREQUENCY (N = 1,447)	PERCENTAGE (%)
1. In-degree centrality		
A. None	16	1
B. 1-200	801	55
C. 201-400	445	31
D. 401-600	136	9
E. 601-800	36	2
F. 801-1000	12	1
G. Greater than 1000	1	0
	Total	1,447
		100
2. Out-degree centrality		
A. None	10	1
B. 1-200	885	61
C. 201-400	352	24
D. 401-600	117	8
E. 601-800	47	3
F. 801-1000	30	2
G. Greater than 1000	6	0
	Total	1,447
		100

Building on Grandjean's (2016) work, the follower-followee ratios within the connection network (detailed in Table 6) were examined. This analysis identified seven user categories, with 'slightly followee-heavy networkers' (N = 429, 30%), 'slightly follower-

heavy networkers' ( $N = 402$ , 28%), and 'micro-connectors' ( $N = 365$ , 25%) constituting the most sizeable segments.

Approximately one-third of Twitter users identifying as FMLWH exhibit a follower-to-following ratio of up to 1:2. These users, categorised as 'slightly followee-heavy networkers,' prioritise establishing connections with other users on the platform, aiming to expand their network. Unlike 'micro-connectors,' who typically maintain smaller social circles (following and being followed by fewer than 100 users), 'slightly followee-heavy networkers' demonstrate a greater ability to build connections, following and being followed by over 100 users on average.

Over a quarter (28%) of users were categorised as 'slightly follower-heavy networkers.' This label indicates that their follower count surpasses the number of users they follow, with a maximum ratio of 2:1. Unlike the 'followee-heavy' categories, these users exhibit a more balanced follower-to-followee ratio. Additionally, they are prominent figures within the network, following a substantial number of other FMLWH users and staying informed about their activities. This distinguishes them from the smaller groups of 'moderately followee-heavy networkers' ( $N = 115$ , 8%) and 'extremely followee-heavy networkers' ( $N = 51$ , 4%) who, while undeniably popular due to their large followings, might not be as aware of other FMLWH users' activities unless they follow more of them.

The final category comprises ‘micro-connectors’ ( $N = 300$ , 25%), representing approximately one-quarter of users. These users maintain relatively small and balanced networks, typically following and being followed by 100 users or fewer. Unlike ‘followee-heavy networkers’ who actively cultivate large followings, ‘micro-connectors’ demonstrate a less intensive approach to information consumption on Twitter.

**Table 6. User categories based on follower-followee ratio**

CATEGORY	FREQUENCY ( $N = 1,447$ )	PERCENTAGE (%)
A. Micro-connectors <i>Follow 100 users or fewer and are themselves followed by 100 users or fewer</i>	365	25
B. Extremely followee-heavy networkers <i>Follow at least four times more users than they have followers</i>	11	1
C. Moderately followee-heavy networkers <i>Follow at least two times more users than they have followers</i>	74	5
D. Slightly followee-heavy networkers <i>Follow up to two times more users than they have followers</i>	429	30
E. Slightly follower-heavy networkers <i>Are followed up to two times more than they follow other users</i>	402	28
F. Moderately follower-heavy networkers <i>Are followed at least two times more than they follow other users</i>	115	8
G. Extremely follower-heavy networkers <i>Are followed at least four times more than they follow other users</i>	51	4

The ratios between the 1,447 account owners’ number of followers and followees within the connection network are visualised in Figure 12. The scatterplot reveals a concentration of users within three distinct categories, each constituting a similar

proportion of the total. While Twitter is classified as a social media platform (Carr and Hayes, 2015), this diagram highlights its utility as a social networking site for users identifying as FMLWHD. Notably, few users appeared to solely follow or be followed by others, with no reciprocation. This aligns with the prior discussion on reciprocity being a norm on the platform.

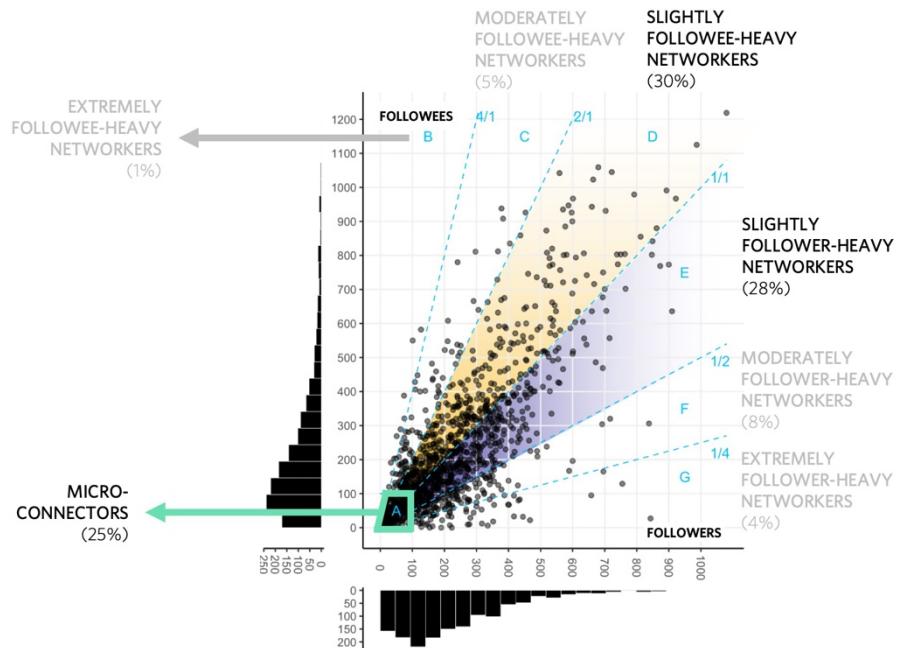


Figure 12. Scatterplot of follower-follower ratios

While in-degree centrality identifies Twitter users with the largest followings, it does not necessarily reflect their influence within the network. That is, a user with many followers might not be the most influential. Therefore, to provide a more nuanced understanding of central actors based solely on follower relationships, this study employed

additional centrality measures, including betweenness centrality, closeness centrality, and eigenvector centrality.

Betweenness centrality gauges a user's influence by measuring their position on shortest paths between other users in the network. As previously discussed, the connection network exhibits a decentralised structure. This is corroborated by the low betweenness centrality scores, with 1,280 users (88%) scoring between 0 and 0.00125. Analysis showed that Ken (0.0239), Evan (0.0203), Greg (0.0170), Arnold (0.0132), and Vic (0.0128) were the five most central actors in terms of betweenness. Interestingly, Ken, Evan, Greg, and Arnold were also the network's four most followed individuals, suggesting an overlap between popularity and betweenness centrality. However, it is important to note that despite their relatively high scores compared to other users, all five scores remain closer to 0 than 1, indicating a limited bridging function within this expansive network.

Closeness centrality, another metric for influence in social networks, reflects a user's relative proximity to all others. The analysis revealed that a substantial majority ( $N = 1,252$ , 87%) of Twitter users exhibited moderate closeness centrality scores between 0.45 and 0.6. This indicates that most users are readily reachable by others within the network, aligning with the previously reported findings of a small network diameter and short average geodesic distance. Analysis showed that the most centrally positioned actors were: Ken (0.7923); Evan (0.7533); Greg (0.7301); Arnold (0.7239); and Ben (0.7202). Notably, four of these users—Ken, Evan, Greg, and Arnold—were also identified as the most influential

based on betweenness centrality. Their high closeness centrality scores (particularly Ken's score of 0.7923) suggest these users occupy strategically central positions within the network, enabling them to efficiently connect with other users identifying as FMLWH. In theory, high closeness centrality translates to greater opportunities for users to interact, collaborate, and exchange goods with others. Notably, less than 10% of the 1,447 users exhibit this high level of centrality. This suggests that a limited number of users hold the most strategic positions for observing activity within the Twitterverse of FMLWH. Therefore, if information about other users is required, these central actors identified through closeness centrality would be the most valuable contacts.

Unlike betweenness and closeness centrality, which focus on shortest paths within the network, eigenvector centrality measures user influence based on the importance of their followers. In other words, this metric identifies users who are followed by influential accounts. The results, mirroring those of betweenness centrality, suggest that only a select few users wield significant influence through their connections. Eigenvector centrality, which values follower quality over quantity, identified Ken (0.0843), Evan (0.0772), Vic (0.0738), Ben (0.0732), and Greg (0.0730) as the most influential users. It is noteworthy that these individuals were also among the top six most followed actors in the network. This overlap suggests their influence stems from both the number and authority of their followers.

Chapter 6 details interviews conducted with Ben, Greg, and Fred, who were identified as notable actors in the connection network. Vic, an influential user, participated in the research in a different capacity, serving as a member of the advisory team (see Chapter 3).

An analysis of correlations (Figure 13) revealed a robust positive relationship between the five centrality measures based on Twitter follows. Notably, some of these measures demonstrated an almost perfect correlation:

- ◆ Closeness centrality and eigenvector centrality (0.9968)
- ◆ Closeness centrality and in-degree centrality (0.9985)
- ◆ Eigenvector centrality and in-degree centrality (0.9963)

The strong positive correlations between the centrality measures highlight a key pattern: popularity and influence are intertwined concepts within this follow-based network. This suggests a consistent pattern: the most followed users (in-degree centrality) were not only the ones with the shortest paths to all other actors in the network (closeness centrality) but also the most important hubs owing to the collective weight of their connections (eigenvector centrality). This overlap is further reinforced by the repeated presence of the same accounts among the network's most popular and most influential users.

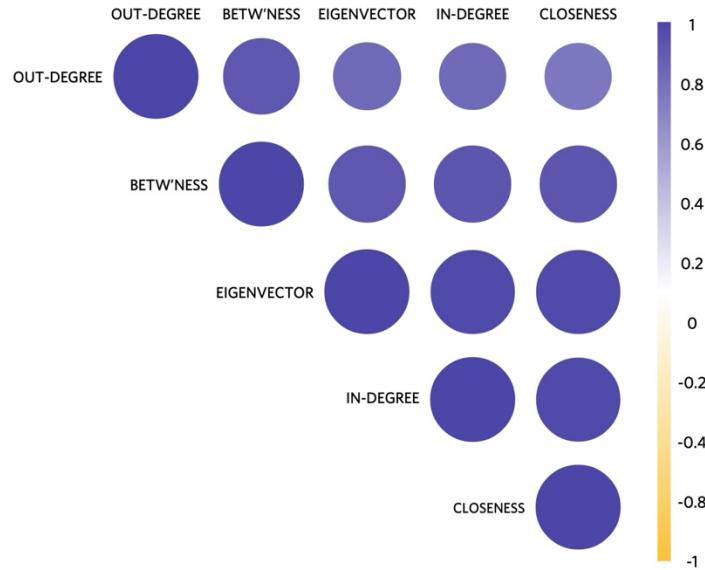


Figure 13. Correlation matrix of centrality measures based on follows

### 5.3.3 Conversation Network Based on Tags

The preceding section analysed the Twitterverse of users identifying as FMLWH using follows to understand their network structure. Now, the analysis focuses on user connections established through tags in public tweets from 21 October 2021 to 21 April 2022. While the prior analysis answered the question “Who follows whom?” it is essential to differentiate these connections from actual information exchange. To address this, a conversation network based on @mentions was constructed, providing insights into the question “Who talks with whom?” Mirroring the previous section, the analysis will first examine the network’s overall structure and then explore metrics associated with individual users.

**Network-level metrics.** The potential for communication exists between users who follow each other. Twitter facilitates interaction through various channels, including timeline conversations, direct messaging, and Twitter Spaces (a platform for live audio discussions). This study's conversation network was limited to timeline conversations, as they permitted access to publicly available tweets containing @mention tags. Figure 14 illustrates how to @mention a Twitter account in a tweet.



Figure 14. Sample tweet showing a @mentioned account

The above tweet was posted by The Museum of English Rural Life (@TheMERL) on 12 October 2022. The first line of the tweet reads: "Today, we and @ReadingMuseum are launching a new campaign..." (The Museum of English Rural Life, 2022). The '@' symbol, followed by the Twitter handle, was used to tag the Reading Museum's account. This tag represents one conversational tie from @TheMERL to @ReadingMuseum. In this study, public tweets @mentioning users within the network were collected to analyse actual interactions that took place during the six-month period of observation. The ensuing

discussion will first examine these interactions as unweighted, revealing the presence of unique conversational ties within the network (Figure 15).

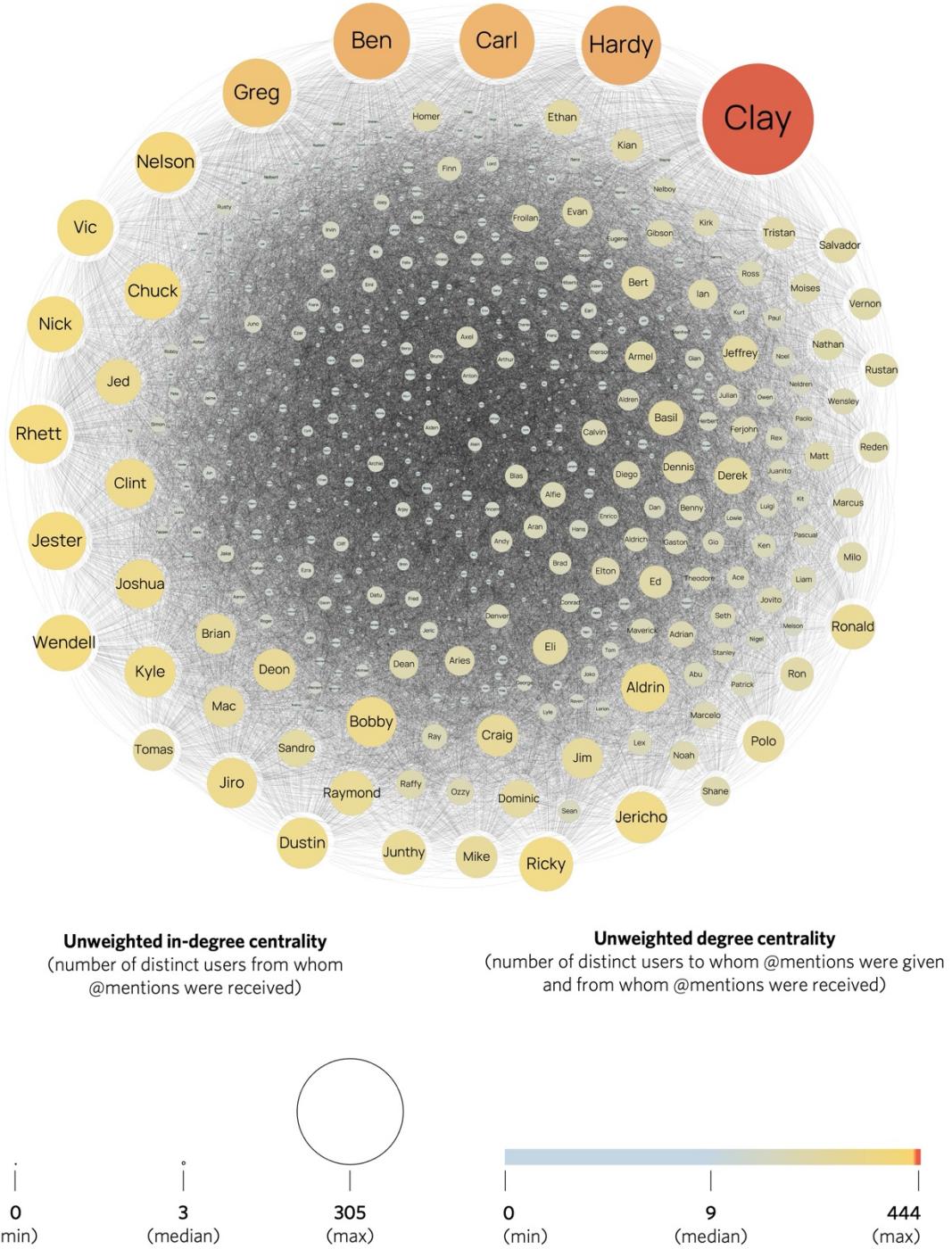


Figure 15. Conversation network based on unweighted tags

Unlike Twitter follows, @mentions can be weighted based on the frequency of interaction between two users. Unweighted degrees simply reflect the existence of a conversational link between individuals, whereas weighted degrees consider the number of interactions. To illustrate, if @TheMERL mentioned @ReadingMuseum 19 times, its unweighted degrees would be 1, signifying a single conversational tie, whereas its weighted degrees would be 19, representing the cumulative interactions. Figure 16 visualises the weighted degrees connecting the 1,447 users within the network, providing an additional layer of detail about their interactions.

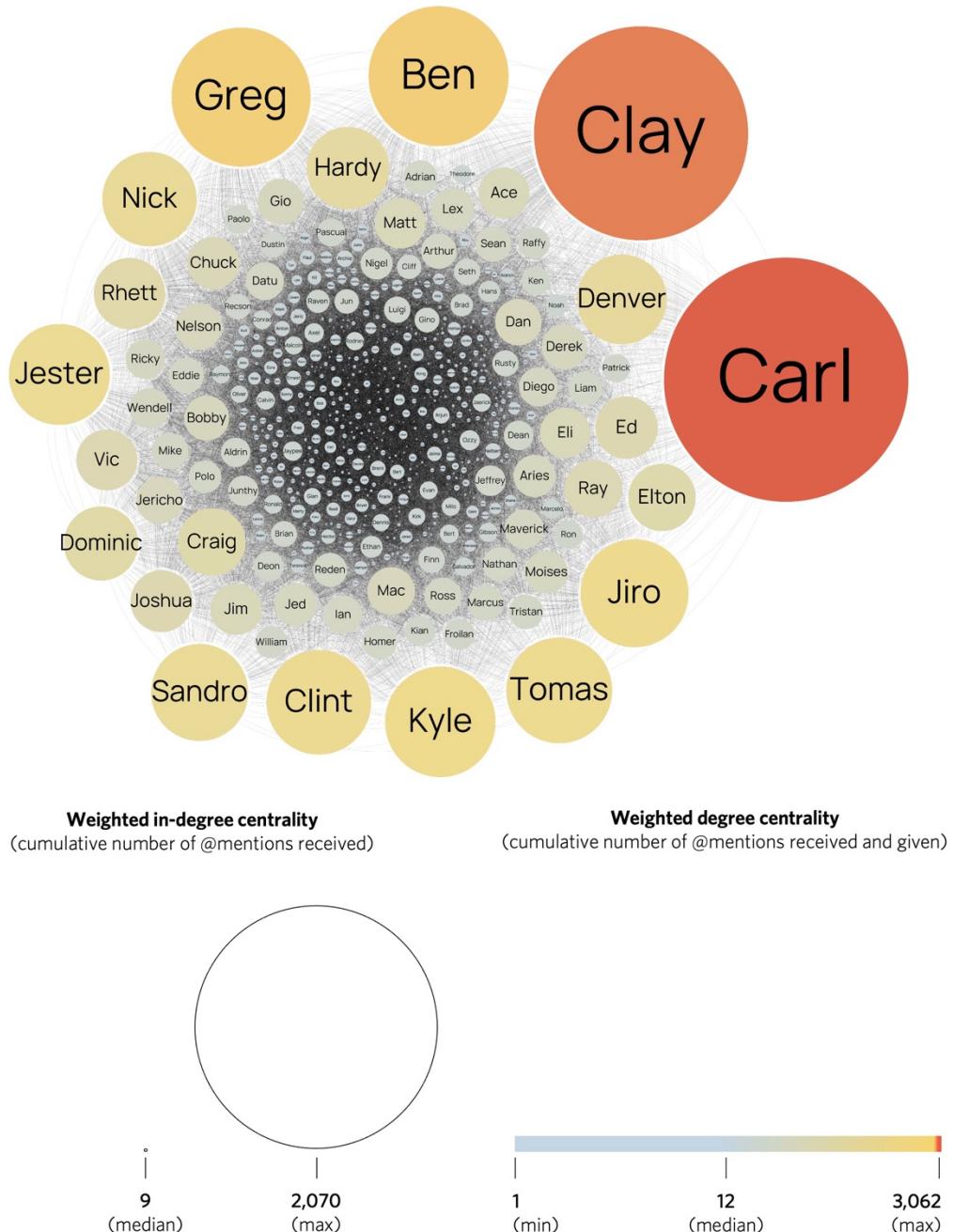


Figure 16. Conversation network based on weighted tags

The analysis of @mentions produced a network of 20,996 tags connecting a substantial proportion ( $N = 1,148, 79\%$ ) of the 1,447 Twitter users identifying as FMLWH. This translates to roughly 21,000 unique conversational ties formed among these users between 21 October 2021 and 21 April 2022. It is important to remember that this figure represents the total number of distinct conversational connections, not the cumulative interactions between the same users. The earlier tweet from @TheMERL to @ReadingMuseum exemplifies a single conversational tie.

Notably, 299 users (21%) were entirely absent from discussions, thereby leaving no conversational footprint within the network. This means they neither @mentioned others nor received @mentions themselves. This number is considerably larger than the two isolated users previously identified in the connection network, highlighting a greater degree of isolation within the conversation network. Furthermore, the very low network density of 0.01 indicates that the captured interactions represent a limited portion of the potential conversational ties among the 1,447 users. These insights suggest that while Twitter account owners within the network tended to form many connections, they engaged in public conversations with only a select few, a point that will be further explored in the discussion of actor-level metrics.

Despite the low network density, reciprocity within the network was moderate at 0.54. This means that while overall conversation volume was low, over half of the conversational tweets elicited replies from tagged users. However, reciprocity based on

@mentions was lower compared with reciprocity based on follows (0.6921). This reinforces the finding that users in this network prefer connections through follows over timeline conversations.

Results showed a substantial presence of 309 communities, indicating that the network of Twitter users identifying as FMLWH is characterised by multiple pockets of conversation taking place during the observation period. These results show that Twitter @mentions create slightly denser clusters compared with follow-based relationships. However, the moderate modularity of 0.3050 indicates that while there is some clustering, the network is not sharply fragmented. Instead, conversational communities overlap, facilitating cross-group interaction.

An analysis of network distances revealed a compact network structure. The farthest-apart users are separated by only six connections. Additionally, the average geodesic distance of 2.62 indicates that tweets would typically travel through roughly three intermediaries between users. Despite the low conversational density, these distance measures imply a significant potential for communication within this network of Twitter users who identify as FMLWH.

Much like the connection network, the conversation network exhibited a high degree of decentralisation. This is reflected in the low betweenness centralisation score of 0.0022, indicating that conversations during the six-month period were spread across numerous

users, rather than concentrated on a select few. A summary of the network-level metrics discussed within this section is presented in Table 7.

**Table 7. Summary of metrics of the conversation network**

ATTRIBUTE	VALUE
1. Number of nodes	1,447
2. Number of edges	20,996
3. Median in-degrees (others @mentioning user)	3
4. Median out-degrees (user @mentioning others)	5
5. Number of sources	431
6. Number of sinks	346
7. Number of isolates	299
8. Diameter	6
9. Average geodesic distance	2.6200
10. Reciprocity	0.5387
11. Density	0.0100
12. Modularity	0.3050
13. Centralization	0.0022

**Actor-level metrics.** During the period of analysis, over three-quarters of the user base ( $N = 1,101$ , 76%) @mentioned other accounts in their tweets. Further analysis showed that 132 accounts (9%) acted solely as ‘sources,’ tagging other users without receiving any @mentions themselves (Valente, 2010). A comparable number of users ( $N = 1,016$ , 70%) were tagged by others in the network in at least one public tweet. Notably, the analysis also identified a small group of ‘sinks’ ( $N = 47$ , 3%), who received @mentions but did not tag others during the six-month period (Valente, 2010).

Timeline conversations within the network were predominantly limited to a small group. The typical user tagged a median of five unique accounts, while receiving tags from

a median of three. Interestingly, the range displayed substantial variation: from 0 to 187 unique accounts tagged by a given user, and from 0 to 305 unique accounts @mentioning a given user. These observations highlight pronounced diversity in tagging practices among Twitter users identifying as FMLWH. While some users received no tags, a minority of account owners @mentioned numerous others.

Based on the number of unique accounts that addressed them in a tweet (unweighted in-degrees), the five most popular users were: Clay (addressed by 305 users); Hardy (addressed by 217 users); Ben (addressed by 209 users); Carl (addressed by 205 users); and Greg (addressed by 187 users). When considering the total number of @mentions received (weighted in-degrees), the top five users were: Carl (2,070 mentions); Clay (1,813 mentions); Ben (1,185 mentions); Greg (1,177 mentions); and Kyle (935 mentions). Interestingly, four users—Ben, Carl, Clay, and Greg—appeared on both unweighted and weighted lists, suggesting they were central figures in conversations exchanged within the network. When comparing Figure 15 and Figure 16, it becomes evident that the size of users' nodes varies depending on whether conversational ties are weighted or unweighted. Notably, Clay's node stands out prominently in Figure 15 because he was tagged by the greatest number of unique users ( $N = 305$ ) during the six-month analysis period. Conversely, Carl's node appears larger than Clay's in Figure 16 due to the substantial number of conversational tweets directed at him ( $N = 1,813$ ).

The analysis highlights a distinction between being widely followed and actively @mentioned in conversations. The user with the most followers (Ken) was not the most frequently @mentioned. Only two users (Ben and Greg) were on both ‘most followed’ and ‘most @mentioned’ lists. Interestingly, Ken ranked much lower for mentions, coming in at 89<sup>th</sup> for unweighted @mentions and 67<sup>th</sup> for weighted @mentions. Furthermore, the most @mentioned users within the unweighted and weighted conversation networks—namely, Clay and Carl—did not occupy top positions in the connection network. Clay, despite being tagged by the greatest number of unique users (305), ranked 20<sup>th</sup> in follower count. Similarly, Carl, despite receiving 1,813 total @mentions, ranked 84<sup>th</sup>.

The analysis identified Rhett (@mentioned 187 users), Jiro (@mentioned 181 users), Jim (@mentioned 173 users), Greg (@mentioned 171 users), and Craig (@mentioned 165 users) as the top five users who tagged the greatest number of unique accounts. This suggests they actively reached out to a diverse set of people within the network. Meanwhile, the most active users who initiated conversations by tagging other accounts were Jiro (1,142 times), Greg (1,042 times), Carl (992 times), Tomas (937 times), and Kyle (845 times). The analysis revealed three key players in network conversations: Craig, Greg, and Jiro. These individuals were at the top of both lists, indicating they were the network's most active conversationalists, even though two of them (Craig and Jiro) did not possess the highest follower counts. Notably, Ken—the account owner with the largest number of followees—ranked only 31<sup>st</sup> in terms of unique accounts he @mentioned and

32<sup>nd</sup> in terms of the @mentions he received. Following Twitter users who identify as FMLWH does not always lead to active interactions in public tweets, as evidenced by the substantial number of isolates ( $N = 299, 21\%$ ) within the conversation network compared with the connection network ( $N = 2, 0.1\%$ ). Table 8 displays the frequency distribution of in-degrees and out-degrees for both unweighted and weighted @mentions.

Table 8. In-degrees and out-degrees based on @mentions

CHARACTERISTIC	FREQUENCY (N = 1,447)	PERCENTAGE (%)
1. In-degree centrality		
A. Based on @mentions from unique accounts (unweighted)		
i. None	431	30
ii. 1-25	779	54
iii. 26-50	111	8
iv. 51-75	61	4
v. 76-100	30	2
vi. Greater than 100	35	2
	Total	1,447
		100
B. Based on total number of @mentions received (weighted)		
i. None	431	30
ii. 1-25	642	44
iii. 26-50	117	8
iv. 51-75	68	5
v. 76-100	44	3
vi. Greater than 100	145	10
	Total	1,447
		100
2. Out-degree centrality		
A. Based on @mentions to unique accounts (unweighted)		
i. None	346	24
ii. 1-25	840	58
iii. 26-50	164	11
iv. 51-75	40	3
v. 76-100	29	2
vi. Greater than 100	28	2
	Total	1,447
		100
B. Based on total number of @mentions given (weighted)		
i. None	346	24
ii. 1-25	686	47
iii. 26-50	138	10
iv. 51-75	84	6
v. 76-100	45	3
vi. Greater than 100	148	10
	Total	1,447
		100

Building on Grandjean's (2016) approach, the analysis divided account owners into user segments based on the ratios calculated from conversational tweets, specifically the unweighted in-degrees versus out-degrees (Table 9). The frequency of @mentions

employed by these accounts between 21 October 2021 and 21 April 2022 yielded two broad user classifications: conversationalists and interactants. As their name suggests, conversationalists were more likely to initiate conversations, as seen in their significantly higher number of @mentions compared with plain interactants. These two broad groups were further differentiated based on the ratios between @mentions given and @mentions received.

The study categorised almost three-quarters of the user base ( $N = 1,058, 73\%$ ) as 'micro-interactants.' These individuals restricted their conversation circles on Twitter to 20 or fewer users. This group of account owners exhibited a generally reserved approach, with minimal public exchanges with other users in the network. The prevalence of this category corresponds to the small median of timeline conversations observed from 21 October 2021 to 21 April 2022. It appears that for a significant number of users identifying as FMLWH, Twitter may not be a primary platform for active public conversation via @mentions.

Two smaller user segments emerged: 'slightly proactive conversationalists' ( $N = 131, 9\%$ ) and 'minimally engaged conversationalists' ( $N = 113, 8\%$ ). These groups displayed a balanced communication style, where the number of @mentions given and received was similar. However, they formed a minority of the total user base.

**Table 9.** User categories based on @mentions given-@mentions received ratio

CATEGORY	FREQUENCY (N = 1,447)	PERCENTAGE (%)
A. Micro-interactants @mentioned 20 people or fewer and themselves @mentioned by 20 people or fewer	1,058	73
B. Extremely proactive conversationalists @mentioned at least four times more users than they have been @mentioned	31	2
C. Moderately proactive conversationalists @mentioned at least two times more users than they have been @mentioned	47	3
D. Slightly proactive conversationalists @mentioned up to two times more users than they have been @mentioned	131	9
E. Minimally engaged conversationalists @mentioned up to two times more than they have @mentioned other users	113	8
F. Moderately engaged interactants @mentioned at least two times more than they have @mentioned other users	35	2
G. Extremely engaged interactants @mentioned at least four times more than they have @mentioned other users	32	2

The scatterplot in Figure 17 presents the ratios of given @mentions to received @mentions. Whereas account owners were more distributed in terms of their follower-followee ratios, they tended to cluster under Category A ('micro-interactants') based on the extent to which they conversed with other users in the network. Generally speaking, Twitter users who identify as FMLWH were not found to be highly engaged conversationalists on the social platform—at least based on their public use of @mentions during the six-month period covered by the study. Few users belonged to Categories D ('slightly proactive conversationalists') or E ('minimally tagged conversationalists'). These user segments

represent active communicators who frequently tag others and are tagged in return with similar frequency.

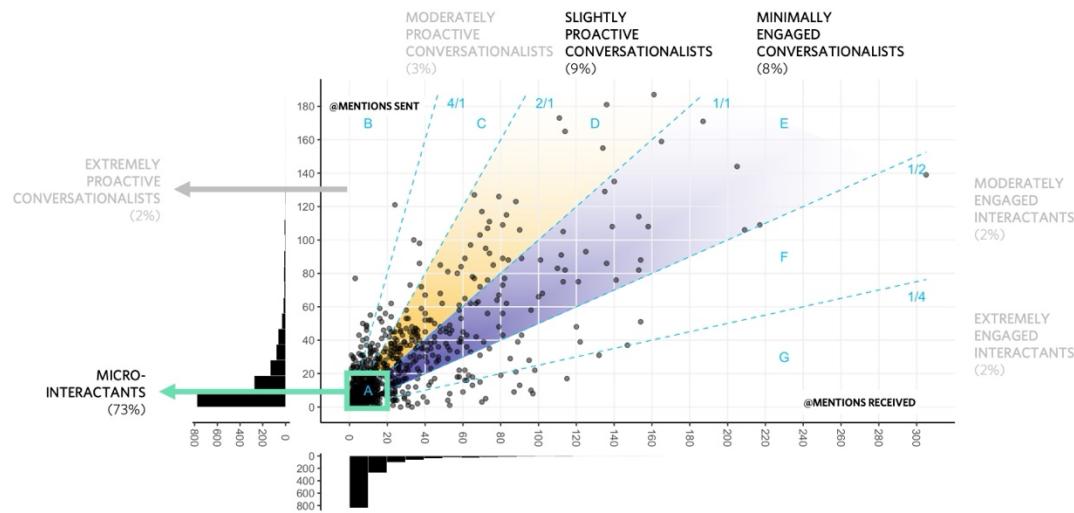


Figure 17. Scatterplot of @mentions given-@mentions received ratios

Like the analysis of the connection network, three additional centrality measures—betweenness centrality, closeness centrality, and eigenvector centrality—were computed. These measures help identify the most strategically positioned conversationalists and allow for a comparison of the most influential users based on both follows and conversations. Betweenness centrality scores identified a small group of influential conversationalists within the network: Clay (0.027); Nelson (0.022); Greg (0.021); Hardy (0.018); Jiro (0.018); and Carl (0.018). In contrast to the majority of users ( $N = 1286$ , 89%) who scored low on this metric, these central actors hold intermediary positions that could be leveraged

to efficiently spread information across user communities. Greg's influence is further amplified by his high ranking in betweenness centrality in the connection network.

The distribution of closeness centrality scores revealed a more balanced spread. Notably, around one-third of users ( $N = 433, 30\%$ ) were not reachable within the conversation network, while another third ( $N = 474, 33\%$ ) exhibited moderate reachability. The conversation network exhibited lower closeness centrality scores, likely because roughly one-third of users were never tagged by others. The analysis identified key central actors: Clay (0.413); Carl (0.39); Ben (0.39); Hardy (0.384); and Greg (0.379), suggesting they possess the most open and interconnected communication channels within the network. It is worth noting that both Ben and Greg were also central figures in the connection network.

Finally, the analysis of eigenvector centrality identified Clay (0.194), Carl (0.169), Ben (0.166), Greg (0.151), and Nick (0.136) as the accounts with the most valuable conversational ties. These individuals act as central figures within the network, frequently interacting with the most influential conversationalists. This position grants them the potential to significantly influence information dissemination across the network. Notably, only Greg appeared among both the top five in eigenvector centrality here and in the connection network. Carl, Kyle, and Nick, who were notable actors in the conversation network, participated in interviews, as outlined in Chapter 6.

Centrality measures based on @mentions exhibited a strong positive correlation (Figure 18), signifying a high degree of overlap between these measures of user influence. The following pairs of variables approached perfect correlation:

- ◆ Closeness centrality and in-degree centrality (0.9844)
- ◆ Closeness centrality and eigenvector centrality (0.9844)
- ◆ Eigenvector centrality and in-degree centrality (0.9737)

These findings mirror the trends observed in follower analysis, suggesting a potential overlap between popularity and influence within the network. When examining user @mentions, the most frequently tagged individuals (high in-degree centrality) also tended to be both well-connected (high closeness centrality) and hold valuable connections with influential users (high eigenvector centrality).

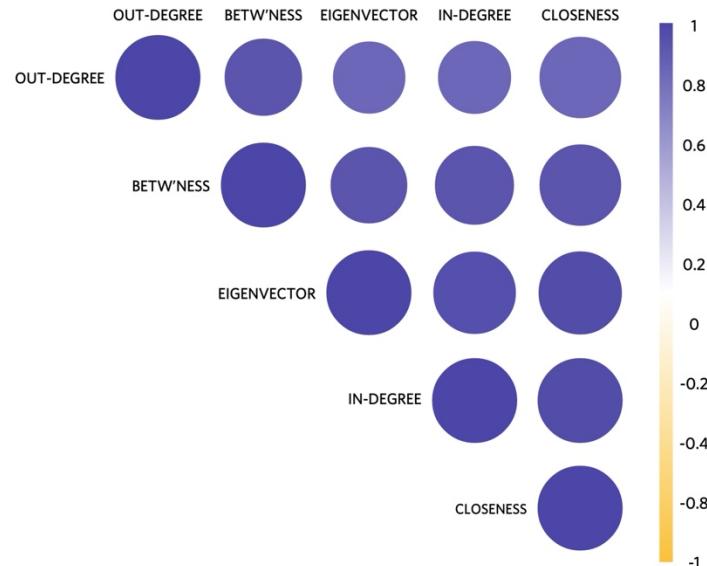


Figure 18. Correlation matrix of centrality measures based on tags

To complete the analysis of network measures, correlations between centrality measures derived from follows and @mentions were tested. Spearman's rank correlation coefficient revealed statistically significant, albeit moderate, associations between the five pairs of corresponding centrality measures. This suggests a partial overlap in the extent to which users engaged with others in the network through follows and @mentions. For instance, users with a large following tended to also interact with others via @mentions. However, the correlation between these measures is moderate, suggesting that these are not perfectly aligned behaviours. Other factors may contribute to this slight difference in Twitter activity.

In addition, closeness centrality based on follows moderately correlated with closeness centrality based on @mentions. This suggests that users with numerous 'follow' connections tended to also have numerous conversational ties within the network. However, the association is not robust enough to definitively claim that users who serve as shortcuts in the connection network also play the same role in the conversation network. A summary of correlations is presented in Table 10.

**Table 10. Correlations of centrality measures in connection and conversation networks**

PAIR OF VARIABLES	CORRELATION COEFFICIENT ( $\rho$ )	INTERPRETATION
1. In-degree centrality based on follows vs. in-degree centrality based on @mentions	0.5516718	Moderate
2. Out-degree centrality based on follows vs. out-degree centrality based on @mentions	0.4303418	Moderate
3. Betweenness centrality based on follows vs. betweenness centrality based on @mentions	0.5060158	Moderate
4. Closeness centrality based on follows vs. closeness centrality based on @mentions	0.5294596	Moderate
5. Eigenvector centrality based on follows vs. eigenvector centrality based on @mentions	0.5066196	Moderate

*All correlation coefficients are significant at  $p < 2.2e-16$ .*

### 5.3.4 Personas of Twitter Users Identifying as FMLWH

This study adopted a two-stage approach to segment the 1,447 Twitter users identifying as FMLWH, similar to previous research (Booth et al., 2020; Maciejewski et al., 2019; Moser et al., 2013). Exploratory factor analysis served to identify a smaller set of underlying factors that explain the correlations observed among the variables analysed earlier. Subsequently, cluster analysis was employed to segment the user base into distinct personas based on these key factors.

***Exploratory factor analysis.*** The analysis of 1,447 Twitter users involved 28 user attributes encompassing socio-technical characteristics and social network measures. Given the large number of variables, a data reduction technique was necessary for effective user clustering. Exploratory factor analysis was employed to identify latent factors that capture

the underlying patterns of correlation among these variables. This resulted in a more manageable set of factors for subsequent cluster analysis.

Prior to factor analysis, data quality was assessed using KMO testing and Bartlett's test for sphericity. Two variables with KMO values below 0.6 (*account age* and *number of lists belonging to*) were excluded due to insufficient sampling adequacy. The remaining 26 variables achieved a satisfactory KMO value (0.82) and significant sphericity ( $p < 0.0001$ ), supporting their suitability for factor analysis. The scree plot (Figure 19) was used to identify the appropriate number of factors to extract. Based on the elbow criterion, three factors were determined to be optimal for explaining the data.

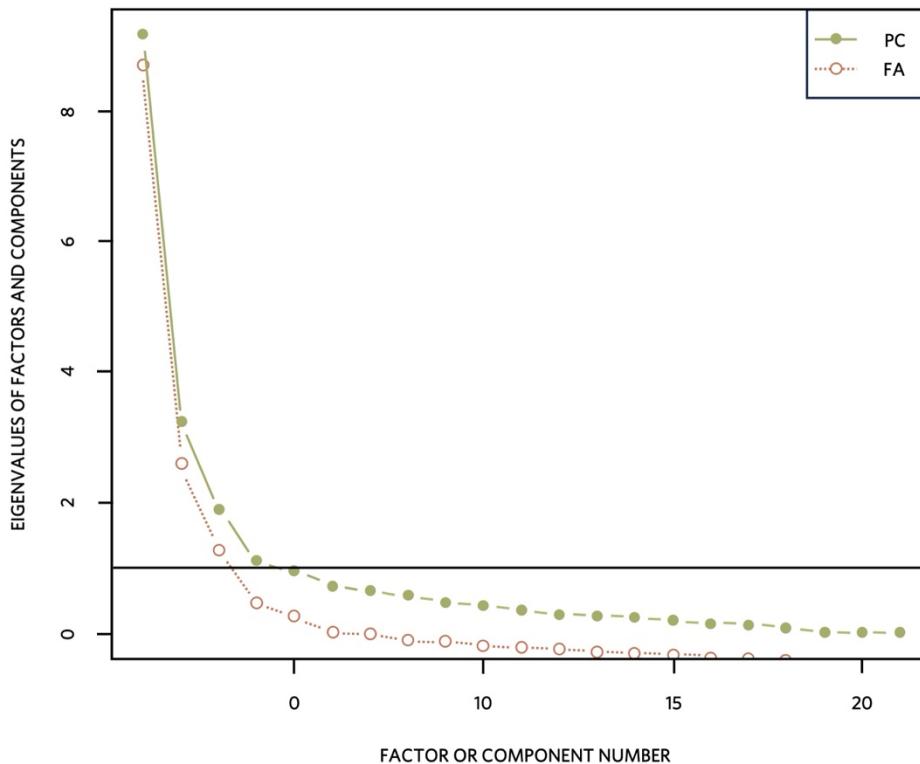


Figure 19. Scree plot for factor analysis

After 29 iterations of exploratory factor analysis, 12 variables were excluded due to high uniqueness or exceeding cross-loadings (above 0.40). This resulted in a three-factor model constructed using maximum likelihood and varimax rotation (details in Table 11). The model comprises 16 items and explains 65% of the total variance in Twitter use. These three factors represent the underlying dimensions of Twittering for users identifying as FMLWH: 1) connectivity; 2) expression; and 3) prestige.

Table 11. Factor loadings

VARIABLE	FACTOR 1: CONNECTIVITY	FACTOR 2: EXPRESSION	FACTOR 3: PRESTIGE
1. Out-degree centrality based on total follows	0.46		
2. Out-degree centrality based on follows within the social network	0.79		
3. In-degree centrality based on follows within the social network	0.96		
4. Betweenness centrality based on follows within the social network	0.68		
5. Closeness centrality based on follows within the social network	0.71		
6. Eigenvector centrality based on follows within the social network	0.97		
7. Number of original tweets		0.92	
8. Number of quote tweets		0.67	
9. Average number of tweets per day		0.56	
10. Number of emojis in tweets		0.67	
11. Number of links shared in tweets		0.51	
12. Number of photos or videos posted		0.75	
13. In-degree centrality based on @mentions within the social network			0.91
14. Betweenness centrality based on @mentions within the social network			0.79
15. Closeness centrality based on @mentions within the social network			0.40
16. Eigenvector centrality based on @mentions within the social network			0.86

Accounting for 26% of the total variance, the first factor comprised six items: 1) out-degree centrality based on total follows; 2) out-degree centrality based on follows within the social network; 3) in-degree centrality based on follows within the social network; 4) betweenness centrality based on follows within the social network; 5) closeness centrality based on follows within the social network; and 6) eigenvector centrality based on follows within the social network. This factor labelled 'connectivity' reflects variables associated with Twitter networking practices, specifically those emphasising following others rather than interacting with them. Connectivity and interaction are distinct concepts; the former signifies simple following, while the latter involves deeper user engagement.

The second factor explained 21% of the total variance and grouped six variables: 1) number of original tweets; 2) number of quote tweets; 3) average number of tweets per day; 4) number of emojis in tweets; 5) number of links shared in tweets; and 6) number of photos or videos posted. These variables encompass both the creation and curation of content, along with the quantity of different content types shared. Consequently, this factor is labelled 'expression.'

The final factor (18% of variance) incorporated four @mention-based centrality measures: 1) in-degree centrality; 2) betweenness centrality; 3) closeness centrality; and 4) eigenvector centrality. Notably, out-degree centrality did not correlate with this group, implying that initiating conversations is not a defining characteristic. This factor reflects

'prestige,' the influence users hold due to frequent @mentions despite potentially lower conversational activity.

**Cluster analysis.** Following exploratory factor analysis, the Anderson-Rubin method was employed to estimate factor scores. To identify the optimal number of user clusters, 26 indices were evaluated. Eight indices suggested that four clusters best captured the data patterns and variation. The K-means algorithm was then employed to generate four clusters, with each cluster's average factor scores used to define its dominant profile (representing distinct Twitter user personas). These profiles are summarised in Table 12.

Table 12. Summary of cluster profiles

CLUSTER	PROFILE	FREQUENCY (N = 1,447)	PERCENTAGE (%)
1. 'Happy to just be on Twitter'	◆ Connectivity (-0.59 = low) ◆ Expression (-0.14 = low) ◆ Prestige (-0.14 = low)	872	60
2. 'Happy to just network'	◆ Connectivity (1.10 = high) ◆ Expression (-0.16 = low) ◆ Prestige (-0.29 = low)	445	31
3. 'Happy to just be tagged'	◆ Connectivity (0.23 = low) ◆ Expression (-0.31 = low) ◆ Prestige (3.13 = high)	76	5
4. 'Happy to just tweet'	◆ Connectivity (0.05 = low) ◆ Expression (4.07 = high) ◆ Prestige (0.26 = low)	54	4

The largest cluster (N = 872, 60%), labelled 'happy to just be on Twitter,' exhibited low scores across all three factors: limited networking activity (connectivity), minimal @mentions by others (prestige), and infrequent posting (expression). These results

suggest overall inactive engagement on Twitter, at least based on publicly observable evidence.

About one-third of the users ( $N = 445$ , 31%) embodied the 'happy to just network' persona. They exhibited the highest connectivity scores, reflecting a focus on following and being followed by others. Centrality measures suggest they are the most active networkers within the Twitterverse of FMLWH. Conversely, these users rated low in expression and prestige. This suggests a focus on accumulating followers without actively tweeting or acquiring influence through @mentions. Their low engagement likely translates to reduced visibility on follower feeds, hindering potential interactions.

The remaining two clusters comprised considerably fewer users. The 'happy to just be tagged' cluster ( $N = 76$ , 5%) showed low connectivity and expression scores but high prestige. These characteristics correspond to the persona of an opinion leader or a well-known personality who is frequently @mentioned in the network. Despite wielding greater influence than others, these users have a noticeably smaller Twitter footprint compared with users embodying the persona 'happy to just tweet.'

The smallest cluster ( $N = 54$ , 4%) was 'happy to just tweet.' These users distinguished themselves by scoring high on expression but lower on connectivity and prestige. This suggests a focus on frequent content creation with minimal interaction or influence within the network. While they might be the most prolific content creators, their

audience reach within the network is limited. A diagram of the four user clusters, scaled proportionally, is presented in Figure 20.

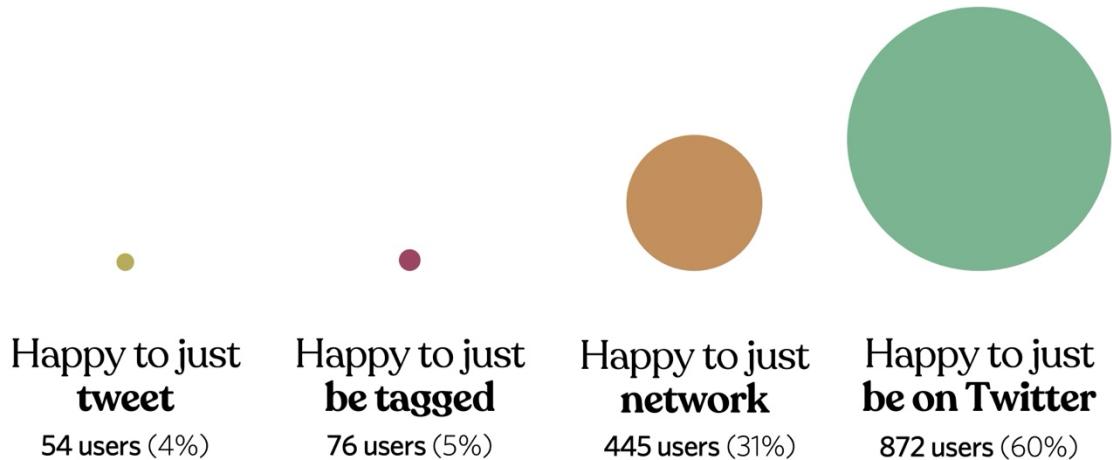


Figure 20. User clusters scaled to proportion

## 5.4 Conclusion

The first step in exploring Twittering as a communicative genre involves defining the user base for analysis. Thus, the initial study within this online ethnography focused on examining the composition of Twitter users identifying as FMLWH. While Chapter 4 presented the qualitative findings from the mixed-methods study, this chapter delved into the quantitative analysis of network composition and the social organisation of communicative practices. By using linguistic references related to HIV and masculinity, thorough searches were conducted to identify Twitter users who met the inclusion criteria. Ultimately, the pseudo-population of this research comprised 1,447 Twitter users

identifying as FMLWH with a public account. From the quantitative phase of the study, the following key findings emerged:

1. Although users identifying as FMLWH showed a tendency toward homophily on Twitter, their structural composition demonstrated a loose network rather than a tight-knit community. The primary mode of network-building appeared to be following other users, with less emphasis on engaging in timeline conversations.
2. Varied levels of activity on Twitter were observed. Exploratory factor analysis yielded three underlying dimensions of Twittering: 1) connectivity, which encompassed variables associated with networking; 2) expression, which captured variables related to creating and curating Twitter content; and 3) prestige, which reflected variables linked to network influence.
3. Utilising the three factors, cluster analysis identified four distinct user personas among the 1,447 Twitter users identifying as FMLWH. The dominant persona, 'happy to just be on Twitter,' comprised the largest user group. The second-largest cluster exhibited the 'happy to just network' persona. A substantially smaller proportion of users were classified as 'happy to just be tagged' and 'happy to just tweet.'

The findings from this initial study are integrated with the results from the subsequent studies in Chapter 8. Within the context of the multiphase mixed-methods design employed for this research, the insights derived from this initial study played a pivotal role in shaping the next two studies:

1. Resulting network measures and activity levels were used to identify the most and least prominent users in the network. This knowledge was crucial for participant recruitment in Study 2, which zeroed in on the pragmatic functions of Twittering.
2. The visibility management strategies identified directly influenced the design of protocols used for interviews and social media elicitation employed in Study 2. They also served as initial findings for the qualitative coding of tweets and Twitter bios in Study 3.
3. The user personas identified through cluster analysis informed the development of a proportionate sampling strategy for content analysis in Study 3. This approach ensured that the sample composition mirrored the distribution of these personas among FMLWH users on Twitter, thereby strengthening the generalisability of the study's findings.

## CHAPTER 6

### “I CAN BE MYSELF HERE”: TECHNOBIOGRAPHIES OF TWITTERING

#### 6.1 Introduction

Seen through a functional-pragmatic lens, genre analysis emphasises both the social practices employed and the social rewards gained by users (Lomborg, 2014). The manuscript thus far has detailed the composition of Twitter users identifying as Filipino men living with HIV (FMLWH) with a public account. Chapter 4 explored their approaches to managing their visibility on the platform, and Chapter 5 examined socio-technical characteristics, network measures, and user personas. The second study in this ethnography explored the pragmatic functions of Twittering through the technobiographies of select participants. The specific objectives of the study were to:

1. *Trace select participants' entry to Twitter and their introduction to the Twitterverse of PLWH.*
2. *Elucidate their communicative practices that define Twittering as a communicative genre.*
3. *Situate the role of Twittering within their lived experiences as FMLWH.*

## 6.2 Methodology

### 6.2.1 Research Design

The study utilised a qualitative case study design, which is apt for answering *how* and *why* enquiries (Yin, 2014). In the context of this research, delving into the pragmatic functions of Twittering necessitated asking *how* Twitter users identifying as FMLWH enact Twittering as a communicative genre, and *why* they do so. Stake (1998) contends that effective cases are specific, unique, and bounded. The subjects of this research comprise a niche population distinguished by three salient characteristics: nationality (Filipino); gender identity (men); and health condition (HIV). Their uniqueness is further manifest in how they are reconfigured as networked publics by the affordances of Twitter (boyd, 2011). Seen thus, these individuals are bounded not by formal organisational structures but by informal networks on Twitter.

Guided by the notion that genre performance is contingent on genre competence (Devitt, 2015), the study centred on ‘Twitter experts’ as focal cases. This involved identifying the most prominent users, who are taken to demonstrate superior knowledge and skills when it comes to enacting Twittering as a communicative genre. However, because cluster analysis findings presented in Chapter 4 showed that the large majority of the users in the network comprised individuals who were ‘happy to just be on Twitter,’ it

was also decided to include the least prominent users. The aim was to deepen understanding of the social achievements related to Twittering, despite the observed low usage, rather than to establish a comparative case (Stake, 1998: 97–98).

### 6.2.2 Case Selection

A systematic two-stage procedure was undertaken for case selection. The first stage, as outlined in Chapter 4, entailed identifying Twitter users with indications of being FMLWH. A total of 1,447 candidate Twitter users with a public account comprised the study's pseudo-population. The second stage involved selecting cases from this pool based on their prominence, covering both the most and least prominent users.

***Measuring prominence.*** The socio-technical characteristics of the 1,447 Twitter users, coupled with their network measures based on follows and @mentions, served as inputs in quantifying prominence. Following the work of Riquelme and González-Cantergiani (2016), prominence was determined through three key metrics, namely, activity, influence, and popularity. Level of activity captured how prolific account owners were on Twitter from 21 October 2021 to 21 April 2022, the period of analysis. Meanwhile, influence and popularity metrics gauged the extent to which they occupied notable positions in the conversation and connection networks, respectively.

Activity is related to managing a sustained presence on Twitter. This may be measured through calculating one's tweet count score, derived from the total number of original tweets and retweets (Noro et al., 2013). Analysis was limited to Twitter posts between 21 October 2021 and 21 April 2022, identifying the most active users as those with the highest tweet and retweet counts during this period.

Besides Twitter activity, prominence may also be gauged by the influence wielded by account owners. Often viewed as an ambiguous concept in network analysis, influence in this study was defined as users' ability to "affect the actions of many other users in the network" (Riquelme and González-Cantergiani, 2016: 960). In this respect, influence is reflected in the level of accessibility within the network, which can be measured by evaluating users' closeness centrality. The study deemed it more suitable to assess closeness centrality measures using @mentions, which stem from actual interactions. Account owners with the highest closeness centrality scores epitomised the most influential users in that they served as the conversation hubs in the network from 21 October 2021 to 21 April 2022.

The third measure of network prominence was popularity, which was determined through simple in-degrees based on 'follow' ties within the connection network of the 1,447 Twitter users identifying as FMLWH. To put it plainly, the most followed actors were also the most popular.

**Selecting the most prominent users.** Actors belonging to the top decile of each of the three markers were extracted, producing a combined total of 408 unique Twitter users (28%). Names appearing in the intersection of these three lists were then obtained, yielding a total of 43 prominent account owners who exhibited genre competence through their combined activity, influence, and popularity scores. As the most prominent actors in the network, they were taken as the most well-rounded sources to interview concerning the social achievements of Twittering. All 43 of the most prominent account owners were invited to take part in the study, with 19 participating.

**Selecting the least prominent users.** The procedure for identifying the least prominent users was opposite to that used for the most prominent users, selecting individuals from the bottom decile instead of the top. Accordingly, 13 users were categorised in the bottom 10% across activity, influence, and popularity metrics. Unfortunately, attempts to recruit participants from this list proved unsuccessful. To address this, the pool of least prominent users was expanded to include those in the bottom quartile of each of the three measures. Among the 82 least prominent users identified, invitations for interviews were extended to only 43 individuals who had enabled direct messaging on Twitter. Five of them were successfully recruited, bringing the total number of study participants to 24. All four personas generated in Chapter 4 were represented in the sample, with all the least prominent users clustered under the persona 'happy to just be

on Twitter' and the most prominent users spread across the other three clusters (see Figure 21).



Figure 21. Pseudonymised case participants clustered by persona

### 6.2.3 Data Collection

Recruited individuals took part in a semi-structured interview that lasted between one to three hours. Conducted over Zoom, each session was aided by an interview guide and a presentation deck. Research instruments underwent pretesting via a pilot interview with a member of the research advisory team, with subsequent adjustments made in response to feedback gathered. Interviews were structured into two parts. Firstly, participants were prompted to discuss their social media engagement, honing in on their experiences with Twitter. The second part of the interview employed social media elicitation, a narrative approach where participants revisited their Twitter timeline to reflect on their past posts (Grant, 2019; Robards and Lincoln, 2017). Specifically, they shared

stories behind select tweets and retweets, along with the emojis and hashtags they most frequently used during the period of observation.

The case study's emphasis on genre enactment was guided by a technobiographical approach. Kennedy (2003: 122) proposes the term 'technobiography' to refer to the method of producing people's stories of their "everyday relationships with technology." In Kennedy's (2003: 122–123) view, technobiography is a valuable means to explore the role technology plays in everyday life and socio-technical relationships, despite the term 'technology' being loosely defined to refer to digital and online media. However, this study placed less attention on the hardware and software utilised for Twitter, given that genres are enacted independently of media platforms (Lomborg, 2011: 60). Rather, a technobiographical approach was employed to understand participants' relationship with and experiences of Twitter as a genre, configured by "communicative practices, expectations, and social purposes" (Lomborg, 2014: 19). Unlike Kennedy's (2003) approach to technobiography involving autobiographical accounts, this study aligned more closely with the work of Ching and Vigdor (2005) and Barton and Lee (2016), which utilised interview transcripts as the primary analytical material.

A technobiographic orientation was necessary to overcome the methodological limitations of descriptive and social network analyses (see Chapter 5) and content and corpus analyses (see Chapter 7). For example, while digital trace data can provide account creation dates, they do not offer insights into users' motivations for joining Twitter.

Similarly, the volume of @mentions captures only interactions in high-visibility spaces, overlooking anticipated low-visibility communication, which is often not readily available to researchers (Malhotra, 2024).

Guided by technobiography, interview questions were designed around storytelling. For instance, an initial prompt posed to participants was: “Tell me how you got started on Twitter.” During the social media elicitation process, a standard enquiry was: “Could you share the backstory to this specific tweet?” The central aim of the technobiographic interviews was to generate stories illustrating participants’ engagement with Twitter.

#### **6.2.4 Data Analysis**

In qualitative research, analysis does not commence only after all data have been collected (Silverman, 2017). During and after each interview, memoing was employed as a strategy to consider how emerging ideas intersected with the theoretical foundations of the research. Following Creswell (1998: 302), analytic memos were written to interrogate the data while self-reflective memos documented reactions to participants’ stories. These memos were then employed to validate emerging codes and categories during the formal analysis of interview data. Interview transcripts were imported to NVivo (version 1.7.1), where coding was performed.

Given the study's focus on technobiographies, thematic narrative analysis was deemed a well-suited approach to explore both the thematic content and narrative structure within the data (Braun and Clarke, 2022: 241). This method facilitates a close reading of the data to capture both the *told* and the *telling* (Riessman, 2008). Transcripts were first subjected to Braun and Clarke's (2022) approach to reflexive thematic analysis, involving multiple readings of transcripts, coding, and developing and revising themes. Structural, *in vivo*, and process coding were performed on transcripts. Structural coding functioned as a categorisation device to label segments of data that corresponded with the research questions (Saldaña, 2016: 98). For example, participants' stories about signing up for a Twitter account were assigned the structural code *getting started on Twitter*, which corresponds to the first objective of this study. Differently, *in vivo* coding employed evocative utterances from interviews to capture the essence of text segments. Using the very words spoken by participants as codes was also seen as a way of privileging their voices and grounding the analysis in their lived experiences (Saldaña, 2016: 71). To exemplify, the *in vivo* code *I can't tweet as me* was used to evoke the reasoning behind creating a supplementary pseudonymous Twitter account. The third type of coding employed was process coding, which centred on labelling actions done by participants and the outcomes that ensued (Saldaña, 2016: 111). With the study's emphasis on *doing* Twitter—as opposed to simply *using* Twitter—process coding was ideal for capturing the array of practices enacted by participants. These activities extended from core Twitter actions, such as creating an account, to practices like exchanging peer support.

The study embraced Lawler's (2002: 242) understanding of narratives as "social products produced by people within the context of specific social, historical and cultural locations." Adopting this view, the use of technobiographies allowed select FMLWH to make sense of their experiences of and with Twittering. However, with the focus of thematic analysis on the *what* of textual data, it proved insufficient for understanding the *how* and the *why*, which technobiographies captured. Therefore, narrative analysis<sup>12</sup> was subsequently conducted to explore the storied form and structure of the data (Riessman, 2008: 12; Saldaña, 2016: 154). This time, coding was tailored to Labov and Waletzky's (1967) classical narrative schema encompassing six elements: 1) abstract; 2) orientation; 3) complication; 4) evaluation; 5) resolution; and 6) coda. The abstract provides a gist of what happened, often told at the outset to frame the storytelling. The orientation section sets the stage for the ensuing parts of the narrative by providing the setting, time, and characters involved. Considered the essence of the narrative, the complication encapsulates a pivotal event that occurred. The significance of this event is conveyed in the evaluation section to underscore the impetus for telling the story. Although Labov and Waletzky (1967) propose that the evaluation mediates between the complication and the resolution, Toolan (2016) argues that it may appear at any point in the story. Tying up the narrative, the resolution tackles the final event that transpired after the complication. Where the abstract is provided

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<sup>12</sup> Traditionally, sociolinguists differentiate between the terms 'narrative,' which encompasses a broader category, and 'story,' denoting a specific prototypical form. Nevertheless, Riessman (2008) embraces modern practices, often using the terms 'story' and 'narrative' interchangeably. This manuscript aligns with Riessman's approach.

at the top of the story, the coda is placed at the end, acting as a bridge to the present moment of the narrative's retelling. Toolan (2016) suggests that the abstract and coda are the least essential components in in Labov and Waletzky's (1967) model.

Altogether, thematic narrative analysis of interview transcripts produced storylines or "stories that transcend individuals, yet are diverse and socially and contextually shaped" (Beuthin et al., 2015: 616). These storylines served to illuminate the pragmatic functions of Twittering evident across cases.

### **6.3 Findings**

To set the context of findings, this section opens with a profile of the participants, covering personal characteristics, typical social media habits, and their specific use of Twitter. The lion's share of this chapter is devoted to interpreting case participants' stories of engaging with Twitter. Firstly, the discussion explores how participants got into Twitter in general and how they landed on the Twitterverse of PLWH in particular. Secondly, attention is drawn to stories of participants' practices that define Twittering as a communicative genre. Lastly, the significance of Twittering is contextualised within their lived experiences as FMLWH. Tweets shown as examples were modified following Bruckman's (2002) heavy disguise techniques and Markham's (2012) fabrication

procedures. All images embedded in tweets are products of artificial intelligence, while assigned Twitter handles were nonexistent as of March 2024.

### **6.3.1 Profile of Participants**

Almost all participants voluntarily shared personal information, such as their age, location, and year of HIV diagnosis. Participants' ages ranged from 23 to 54, with the average age being 34. Although there was notable variability in the dataset ( $\sigma=7.16$ ), the majority were in their early middle adulthood. At the time of the study, three-fourths of the participants ( $n = 18, 75\%$ ) resided in Luzon, specifically the National Capital Region. The remaining participants were based in Mindanao ( $n = 4, 17\%$ ) or overseas ( $n = 2, 8\%$ ). They disclosed living with HIV for periods spanning three to 14 years. Moderate variability in the reported durations ( $\sigma=3.10$ ) suggests that some participants have been living with HIV for significantly longer or shorter durations compared with the average of seven years.

Overall, the profile of participants generally corresponded with HIV-related statistics in the Philippines as of December 2022 based on records published by the Department of Health- Epidemiology Bureau (2022). Notably, majority of them were located in the National Capital Region, consistent with its position as the region with the greatest number of diagnosed HIV cases in the Philippines. Participants' age distribution also mirrored national data, with a slight tendency toward older age groups. Lastly, it is important to consider that these individuals have been living with HIV for a considerable

period, as this might explain how they approach Twittering as a genre. Put another way, newly diagnosed individuals' engagement with Twitter is anticipated to differ from those with long-term experience living with HIV.

Table 13 shows the socio-demographic characteristics of the participants.

Table 13. Socio-demographic characteristics of participants

CHARACTERISTIC	FREQUENCY (n = 24)	PERCENTAGE (%)
1. Age		
A. 23-27	5	21
B. 28-32	4	17
C. 33-37	10	42
D. 38-42	1	4
E. 43 or older	3	13
F. Did not specify	1	4
	Total	24
		100
2. Location		
A. National Capital Region (NCR)	14	58
B. Luzon (outside NCR)	4	17
C. Mindanao	4	17
D. Overseas	2	8
	Total	24
		100
3. Number of years living with HIV		
A. 3-4	6	25
B. 5-6	6	25
C. 7-8	4	17
D. 9-10	5	21
E. 11 or more	2	8
F. Did not specify	1	4
	Total	24
		100

### 6.3.2 Social Media Use

Participants reported using an average of six social platforms. Despite moderate variation ( $\sigma=2.33$ ), the fact that the mean is close to the median and mode (both six)

indicates that the distribution is approximately symmetric. The number of platforms ranging from two to 11 highlights diverse social media usage habits among participants. A total of 23 social platforms were identified, with the top three most used being Facebook ( $n = 24, 100\%$ ), Twitter ( $n = 24, 100\%$ ), and Instagram ( $n = 22, 92\%$ ). Participants have been using Facebook the longest, averaging 13 years ( $\sigma=1.84$ ), followed by Twitter for nine years ( $\sigma=3.18$ ), and Instagram for eight years ( $\sigma=2.93$ ). The lowest variation was found in the Facebook dataset, with the mean, median, and mode all being 13 years. Of the top three social platforms, Facebook showed the most consistency in terms of account age. Table 14 summarises participants' social media usage characteristics.

Table 14. Social media usage of participants

ATTRIBUTE	VALUE
1. Average number of social platforms used	6
2. Number of Facebook users	24
3. Number of Twitter users	24
4. Number of Instagram users	22
5. Average number of years on Facebook	13
6. Average number of years on Twitter	9
7. Average number of years on Instagram	8

Focusing on Twitter usage, the mean values for original tweets (1,186), retweets (270), and quote tweets (67) provide insights into users' engagement levels during the six-month period of analysis. The substantially higher mean for original tweets suggests that users were more inclined to write their own content rather than share posts or engage with others' tweets. However, very wide variability was observed in the standard deviations for these types of tweeting behaviour. While some users were found to be highly active by

consistently sharing and engaging with content, others were less active, resulting in a wide spread of data points around the mean.

Since participants joined Twitter at different times, their average daily tweet count provides a more accurate measure of overall activity compared with the total number of tweets. Case participants posted a mean of nine daily tweets, demonstrating considerably high tweeting activity. Continued high variation ( $\sigma=8.13$ ) underscored diverse tweeting behaviours among users, with average daily tweets ranging from 0.08 to 25.47.

On average, participants managed two Twitter accounts. (Data presented in the study correspond only to the account identified during sampling.) Consistent with the generally high engagement observed, these users estimated spending around five hours a day on Twitter and logging in to the platform an average of 13 times daily. Participants' Twitter usage is summarised in Table 15.

**Table 15. Twitter usage of participants**

ATTRIBUTE	VALUE
1. Average number of original tweets (21 October 2021-21 April 2022)	1,186
2. Average number of retweets (21 October 2021-21 April 2022)	270
3. Average number of quote tweets (21 October 2021-21 April 2022)	67
4. Average number of conversational tweets (21 October 2021-21 April 2022)	349
5. Average number of tweets per day since account creation	9
6. Average number of Twitter accounts	2
7. Average duration (hours) of Twitter use per day	5
8. Average frequency of logging in to Twitter per day	13

### 6.3.3 Stories of Joining Twitter and the Twitterverse of PLWH

In this section, three narrative themes capture how and why case participants joined Twitter and eventually found their way into the Twitterverse of PLWH:

1. *First impressions: “It’s a social media app—that’s it”*
2. *Jumping on the bandwagon: “Being part of the cool kids”*
3. *“Going behind the curtain”: Discovering the Twitterverse of PLWH*

According to the We are Social report on digital connectivity, Facebook enjoyed the highest adoption rate in the Philippines in 2022, with 96% of Filipino users aged 16–64 using the platform (Kemp, 2022: 54). While fewer survey respondents (49%) rated Facebook as their favourite platform, it retained the top position by a large margin (Kemp, 2022: 55). In contrast, Twitter occupied the fifth position on both the lists of most used (60%) and most favourite platforms (5%). Given the Philippines’ Facebook-centric

landscape, the widespread presence of FMLWH on Twitter presented intriguing narrative possibilities.

***First impressions: “It’s a social media app—that’s it”***. All participants had previous social media experience before using Twitter. In fact, when recounting how they landed on the platform, a reference to Facebook was often made. Liam and Marcus recall that Twitter was not as popular as Facebook:

**Liam:** You know, in the province, Twitter isn’t really popular; what is very common is Facebook.

*(You know, in the province, hindi naman uso ‘yung Twitter; ang very common is Facebook.)*

**Marcus:** So way back in 2014, 2015, Twitter is not that, uhm, a common social platform that everybody uses. I mean, uhm, it is, but it’s not like that because we still had Facebook at that time, so, uhm, people were more immersed there.

*(So way back 2014, 2015, Twitter is not that, uhm, a common social platform that everybody uses. I mean, uhm, it is but hindi siya ganoon dahil we still have the Facebook at that time, so mas, uhm, babad ‘yung mga tao doon.)*

At the outset, some participants felt lukewarm about Twitter. Apart from not being as popular as Facebook, its format did not appeal to them. Initially, Carl found Twitter dull because it did not have the visual allure of platforms like Facebook and Instagram. “This is boring,” he remembers thinking moments after installing the app. In addition, the short-form nature of Twitter did not resonate with some users, prompting them to be more active

on Facebook. “It’s, like, you just tweet a short term, like a short sentence, and that’s it,” recalls Winchel. Similarly, Nick did not quite grasp the idea of plainly posting tweets: “It felt somewhat flat to me back then [laughs]. That’s why I was more active on Facebook.” Ben echoed these tepid feelings about Twitter, stating: “It’s a social media app—that’s it.”

These anecdotes reinforce evidence of Facebook’s prominence in the Philippines; to be on Twitter meant that one had to be on Facebook first. The influence of friends also emerged as a recurring theme in participants’ stories, with many citing their peers’ role in introducing them to Twitter and persuading them to join. While some participants had lukewarm feelings about Twitter, many others regarded it as a hip platform at the time of registering for an account. The next theme illustrates how being on Twitter became synonymous with being cool.

*Jumping on the bandwagon: “Being part of the cool kids”*. Beyond peer influence, participants were intrigued by the trendiness of Twitter. Diego conceded to creating an account because of the platform’s hip factor. Interestingly, multiple participants learned about Twitter’s popularity in school. Fred admits that seeing his classmates on Twitter led him to signing up for an account to connect with them. As the statements below show, both Winchel and Jairo joined Twitter because it was seen as a status symbol among students at their prestigious schools in Metro Manila. Being on Twitter, by extension, meant being cool.

**Winchel:** My school was, like, a posh school, so everyone was, like, signing up for Twitter so that's mainly the reason why I signed up for one because they're signing up for it.

**Jairo:** I studied in one of the prestigious schools, uh, in Metro Manila... I think when I started Twitter, it's really for the main purpose of joining that idea of being part of the cool kids, like, "Hey, I have Twitter as well."

*(I studied in one of the prestigious schools, uh, in Metro Manila... I think when I started Twitter, it's really for the main purpose of joining that idea of being part of the cool kids, na parang, "Uy, I have Twitter as well.")*

Participants' accounts highlight that beyond the functional aspects of Twitter, it was the symbolic importance associated with the platform that motivated their participation (Wirth et al., 2008). Although registering for a Twitter account typically incurs no cost<sup>13</sup>, it is noteworthy that Dominic chose to purchase a new phone as his old one lacked a Twitter app. Dominic's case underscores the willingness of certain participants to pay a substantial amount, if only to gain access to Twitter:

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<sup>13</sup> As of March 2024, account owners have the option to upgrade to X Premium for a monthly fee starting at ₱165 (£3), unlocking access to value-added features (X, 2024a).

**Dominic:** Of course, we talk about it, like, each of us has our own phone, so naturally, you hear, "Hey, I tweeted this, etc., follow me on Twitter, etc." So naturally, I got intrigued, "Why doesn't my phone have Twitter?" So I bought a BlackBerry and that's where my Twitter journey began.

*(Siyempre we talk about it, like, may kanya-kanya kayong phone eh parang, siyempre, maririnig mo, "Hoy nagtweet ako ng ganito, kineme, kineme, follow mo naman ako sa Twitter, ganiyan ganiyan." So siyempre ako naintriga, "Bakit 'yung phone ko walang Twitter?" So bumili ako ng BlackBerry tapos doon na nagstart 'yung, ano, Twitter ko.)*

The theme of jumping on the bandwagon ran through most participants' narratives of joining Twitter. Another motivation for signing up for a Twitter account was to stay updated on colleagues' work-related rants. Mike shares that his co-workers considered Facebook unsuitable for venting, leading them to instead use Twitter. As for Sandro, what prompted him to register for a Twitter account was seeing the Twitter handle of Eva Longoria, his favourite celebrity, on the chyron of a TV show she was hosting in 2009. Both scenarios illustrate the practical uses of Twitter beyond its symbolic value. Mike's need to keep up with his co-workers demonstrates Twitter's function as an 'ambient friend-following medium,' highlighting the significance of connected presence among networked audiences (Bruns, 2012; Rogers, 2014). Meanwhile, Sandro's case exemplifies how Twitter provides everyday folk with 'backstage access' to stay updated on the lives of public figures (Marwick & boyd, 2011b).

Most of the case participants had registered for a Twitter account before learning about their HIV serostatus. Therefore, being diagnosed with HIV did not serve as an

impetus for most of them to join Twitter as a first-time user. The subsequent section explores their stories of discovering the Twitterverse of PLWH.

***“Going behind the curtain”: discovering the Twitterverse of PLWH.*** Case participants encountered the network of FMLWH on Twitter through active searching, word of mouth, and algorithmic recommendations. While most of them stumbled upon an expansive network of FMLWH on Twitter, it was not quite the case for Owen. He recounts that when he was diagnosed in 2013, access to online resources regarding HIV was limited. His active search eventually led him to a community of people living with HIV (PLWH) exchanging peer support on Twitter, prompting him to sign up for an account as a new user:

**Owen:** I think during the time when I created my Twitter account, it was also an outlet for me to reach out to people that are living with HIV like myself because during that time, back in 2013, information was very limited... so I researched and they said that there is, like, a very small community on Twitter. So that's how it all started.

*(I think during the time noong ginawa ko 'yung Twitter account ko is also an outlet for me to reach out to people that are living with HIV like myself kasi noong panahon na 'yun, back 2013, sobrang limited 'yung information... so I researched, and they said that there is, like, a very small community in Twitter. So 'yun, that's how it all started.)*

Like Owen, Gio took proactive steps to find local support groups upon learning about his HIV diagnosis in 2017: “I actively looked online on Google. I Googled locales with a community or support group for people living with AIDS.” Having discovered a relevant blog, he contacted the blog owner to seek guidance on how to access support for PLWH.

The blog owner then directed him to Twitter, where Gio began to expand his network. At the time of the study, Gio had amassed almost 4,000 followers, with 705 (49%) forming part of the connection network detailed in Chapter 5.

Owen and Gio's paths to discovering the Twitterverse of PLWH was made possible with active online searching. However, due to their four-year gap in diagnosis, they likely encountered different network structures and community dynamics on Twitter. Owen notes that during his initial years of living with HIV, the community was much smaller, estimated to be under 200 individuals. He recalls the circulation of a Twitter list bringing together Filipinos living with HIV<sup>14</sup>, aimed at fostering connections within the community:

**Owen:** I'm not really sure but I think 2013, 2014, 2015, perhaps there were only less than 200 accounts that were poz back then. I think we have an original list of people where there is a person who compiled all the Twitter accounts back then. He made a list and then he added all of us, so it was like... basically, just follow each other in that list.

*(I'm not really so sure pero I think 2013, 2014, 2015, siguro mga less than 200 accounts lang ang poz noon. I think we have an original list ng mga tao na there is a person na nagcompile ng lahat ng mga Twitter accounts noon na -- he made a list and then parang in-add niya kami lahat so parang... kumbaga, i-follow n'yo na lang 'yung each other in that list.)*

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<sup>14</sup> The Twitter list referenced is the same one used during the preliminary phase of this research (see Chapters 3 and 4).

Some participants learned about the Twitterverse of PLWH through word of mouth rather than actively seeking it out. For instance, Winchel's HIV counsellor informed him about 'alter' accounts, a term referring to pseudonymous users on Twitter. (A later discussion will elaborate on alter accounts within the context of the HIV community on Twitter.) Winchel also credits his counsellor for helping him grasp HIV-related terms, which enhanced his engagement with others in the network:

**Winchel:** ...he's the one who told me that Twitter is a safe space, if I needed something to vent out with. He's not as active anymore but we do have connections in Twitter sometimes. So we still talk a little bit... And he's the one who originally told me that there are alter accounts. I really don't know about those terminologies when I was diagnosed with HIV, and he helped me lot settling down and be able to express myself online.

Greg received his HIV diagnosis in 2013. However, it was not until a year later that he joined Twitter as a first-time user. He recounted revealing his HIV status to a fellow PLWH he was chatting with on PlanetRomeo<sup>15</sup>. In response, the person recommended that he create an anonymous Twitter account to connect with 'blood brothers and sisters.'

Friends also played a role in exposing case participants to the Twitterverse of FMLWH. Seth had been using Twitter for two years before his HIV diagnosis. After being

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<sup>15</sup> PlanetRomeo is a dating app for gay, bisexual, and trans individuals.

introduced to the poz community by friends, he decided to make a separate account to engage with its members. The importance of managing multiple Twitter accounts is explored in a later section.

Like Seth, Fred found his way into the Twitterverse of PLWH thanks to a friend's recommendation. His HIV diagnosis led to depression, leaving Fred uncertain about whom to confide in regarding his condition. He abstained from posting about it on Facebook to prevent revealing his status to his friends and family. One day, in a conversation with a high school friend, Fred learned about the PLWH community on Twitter. His friend recommended he connect with these individuals, spurring Fred to create a second Twitter account in 2016. Fast-forward to the time of the study, Fred had accumulated more than 5,000 followers, with half of them ( $n = 722$ , 50%) being part of the connection network.

Fred's story parallels the Labovan narrative model. His discovery of his HIV status ("so I got diagnosed with HIV...") functions as the complication but what renders this story noteworthy (evaluation) is the aftermath of HIV diagnosis, including his descent into depression ("I felt depressed"), the feeling of isolation he encountered ("I didn't know who to talk to"), and his cautiousness in disclosing his status ("I couldn't post it on my Facebook account because my friends and relatives are there"). The resolution of the story is set in motion when Fred's friend informs him about the presence of PLWH on Twitter ("he sees a lot of people, PLHIVs, there"). It fully materialises when Fred acts on this piece of knowledge by creating another Twitter account to engage with the community ("I thought

to myself, ‘Okay, let me create one to connect with them’”). By way of a coda, Fred transitions from the narrative to the ongoing conversation, summarising his action (“that’s why I made a Twitter account in 2016”).

Interestingly, the most common storyline for discovering the Twitterverse of PLWH was driven by algorithmic mechanisms rather than active searching and word of mouth. Encountering HIV-related content and PLWH on their Twitter timelines prompted Noah, Diego, and Marcus to establish supplementary accounts to engage with the community. Like Owen and Gio’s stories, Noah actively sought information about HIV online. What distinguishes Noah’s case, however, is that his frequent online searches led him to encounter more HIV-related content on social media, particularly Twitter. It was through this platform that he discovered the Twitter account of a ‘blood brother,’ who then introduced him to what he described as the ‘alter poz community.’

Diego, upon being diagnosed in November 2015, lacked connections within the HIV community to seek advice. He was surprised when he stumbled upon an account of a PLWH on his Twitter timeline. Upon examining this user’s lists of followers and followees, Diego discovered the extensive network of PLWH on Twitter. This discovery motivated him to create a dedicated account for interacting with the community.

Echoing Diego’s experience, Marcus had no prior knowledge of the PLWH community on Twitter when he was diagnosed in 2017. Coming across these users

unexpectedly in his timeline piqued his interest, prompting him to establish a separate Twitter account to become part of the community. After being publicly welcomed into the fold through a tweet, Marcus observed a substantial increase in his followers. This motivated him to tailor his content to better connect with his 'blood brothers' on Twitter. At the time of the study, Marcus had approximately 1,500 followers, and 451 (31%) of them were within the connection network in this research.

Like Noah, Diego, and Marcus, Brad discovered the community of PLWH on Twitter post-diagnosis. However, Brad's approach differed: Rather than creating a new account, he transformed his existing alter account into one that identified himself as a PLWH. He then turned to Twitter to seek support from others in the community. Brad clarifies that he continues to maintain a pseudonymous profile on Twitter, akin to Noah's reference to 'alter poz' accounts earlier.

Jairo's story wraps up the theme of discovering the Twitterverse of PLWH. Like previous accounts, Jairo acknowledges Twitter's algorithm for showcasing HIV-related tweets on his timeline. Observing interactions among PLWH on Twitter prompted him to question their choice of platform. He remarks on the pervasive stigma surrounding HIV in the Philippines, compelling PLWH to, in his own words, "go behind the curtain" to veil their interactions with others undergoing similar experiences. Jairo decided to "go behind the curtain" himself by creating a separate Twitter account to engage with fellow PLWH.

"I just want to relate to someone or to a group of people who have experience or who are experiencing the same, uh, scenario that I have," he muses.

In each of these narratives, the pivotal storyline revolves around HIV diagnosis serving as a biographical disruption (Bury, 1982) that eventually led participants to discovering the Twitterverse of PLWH. While some encountered the community through active searching (Owen and Gio), others found out through word of mouth (Winchel, Greg, Seth, and Fred) or were introduced to it by stumbling upon HIV-themed tweets and PLWH on Twitter (Noah, Diego, and Marcus). Subsequently, participants integrated themselves into the network of PLWH with the intention of seeking information and establishing connections with their peers. As demonstrated in the following section, several shared practices define how FPLWH engaged with Twitter.

#### **6.3.4 Communicative Practices on Twitter**

In Chapter 1, a distinction was drawn between merely *using* Twitter as a tool and *doing* Twitter as a sense-making practice. Numerous communicative practices emerged from the analysis, but the discussion that follows highlights the four most common storylines:

1. *Managing multiple accounts: "I can't tweet as me"*
2. *Exchanging peer support: "There's a community that's willing to listen to you"*
3. *Engaging with sexually explicit material: "Just expressing the other side of me"*
4. *Being there: "I'm still active"*

**Managing multiple accounts: “I can’t tweet as me”.** The first step to participating meaningfully on Twitter involves creating an account (O'Reilly and Milstein, 2009). For FMLWH, maintaining multiple Twitter accounts was observed as a common—perhaps even necessary—practice. As discussed, case participants managed an average of two Twitter accounts. Kyle elaborates: “So for Twitter, I maintain two accounts—my legitimate account and then my alter account, which is for ‘blood brothers.’” The distinction between ‘legitimate’ and ‘alter’ accounts is an important one to make.

Case participants shared a common understanding of ‘legitimate’ accounts. Kyle explains his view on legitimacy: “You have nothing to hide. So you post your face, you post whoever you are, and stuff like that.” The absence of anonymity is implied by having nothing to hide. In this regard, Nick describes his Twitter account as ‘legitimate’ because it bears his complete name. Moreover, his ‘legitimate’ Twitter account is linked to his Facebook and Instagram accounts, which also reflect his ‘real’-life identity. Other participants referred to their ‘legitimate’ account by other names, such as ‘personal account,’ ‘official account,’ and ‘real account.’

“I guess you can call it an alter,” Jesson describes the other (i.e., not ‘legitimate’) Twitter account he set up for himself. Another participant, Jerold, refers to his alter account, created in 2017, as an ‘illegal’ account because it bears his HIV status. It was necessary for him to create this supplementary account because he was not ‘out’ as a PLWH and wanted to keep his regular and HIV circles separate:

**Jerold:** The '17 [account] is illegal. It's just labelled as 'illegal' so there... My illegal account shows my [HIV] status. Only my mum, my sister, and my partner know my status. So basically, I'm not out; others don't know... So maybe because I don't want to mix things up or I don't want them to know about [my status] in my legit [account]...

(... 'yung '17 'yung illegal, ayun. Label ay illegal na lang so 'yun... 'yung illegal nandoon 'yung status ko... Ang nakakaalam lang ng status ko is my mom, my sister, and my partner. So basically hindi ako -- hindi ako out, hindi ako -- hindi alam ng ibang tao... So siguro dahil ayaw kong paghaluin or ayaw kong malaman nila na gani -- ganoon 'yung ano ko dun sa -- doon sa legit...)

Jerold's reasoning evokes the issue of 'mixed contacts' involving social encounters between stigmatised and 'normal' individuals (Goffman, 1963). Because mixed contacts can lead to discomfort, Goffman (1963: 12) posits that stigmatised individuals often "arrange life so as to avoid them." Given Twitter's tendency for context collapse, the likelihood of mixing contacts is high. One strategy to mitigate this is by setting up separate accounts intended for specific purposes. Liam acknowledges the multiplicity of identities, to which alter accounts are well-suited: "Sometimes you have this kind of personality; you call it 'alter.' You just want to post something outside of your personality, so you have that second account." Other participants used 'alter poz' to specify the type of alter account they owned. Seth clarifies: "When you say 'alter poz' account... you are a poz account, but you're an alter. You don't show your face. You just show a bit, a glimpse of your, like, face or what, but you don't show your whole face." Dominic shares that despite being able to recover his personal Twitter account, which had been blocked for a considerable period, he still chose to use his 'alter poz' account. His reasoning is basic: "I can't tweet as me."

In his ethnography of the alter community in the Philippines, Cao (2021) associates alter accounts with amateur pornographers. While some participants utilised their alter account for creating and consuming not-safe-for-work (NSFW) content, others employed the description 'alter' to generally refer to pseudonymous accounts. Quoting Sandro: "It's like a new world for me with a different name, with a different persona." Adopting an alter account affords these vulnerable individuals a layer of protection while still being able to participate in Twitter discourses. As Gio puts it, "'alter' for me is a safe space... so we could, you know, look for ourselves and not be -- hopefully, not be judged." Mike shares similar sentiments, viewing Twitter as a 'safe space' where he feels a sense of belonging. He contrasts this to Facebook, noting its unsuitability for sharing his concerns, as he is hesitant to publicly disclose his HIV-positive status there. The anonymity offered by Twitter is what makes it an ideal social platform for him:

**Mike:** I think I belong [laughs], yeah, that's the term so I think I belong on this platform because I have some 'blood brothers,' they're here and I -- I think it's like, uh, a safe space for me since no one knows me unlike if I were to post "hello, I'm HIV positive" on Facebook, what would happen, right, knowing that I have work mates and all so it doesn't seem safe, so there...

*(I think I belong [laughs], yeah that's the term so I think I belong on this platform because I have some 'blood brothers,' nandito sila and I - - I think it's like, uh, a safe space for me since no one knows me unlike if I were that I'm going to post "hello, I'm HIV positive" in Facebook, ano'ng mangyayari, 'di ba, knowing na I have work mates and all so parang hindi siya safe, so there...)*

As detailed in Chapter 4, managing context collapse is a key aspect in the visibility management practices of Twitter users identifying as FMLWH. The use of alter accounts facilitates this by enabling them to adopt a pseudonym and conceal their facial features in their profile image. Alongside managing multiple accounts, some participants shared their practices of keeping their ‘legitimate’ and alter identities separate. Mike achieves this by using two different phones: His iPhone contains his ‘legitimate’ Facebook account while his Android device is dedicated to his ‘alter poz’ account on Twitter. In another approach, Carl keeps his Twitter profiles separate by using a dedicated app for each one. His ‘legitimate’ account is logged in to his iPhone’s native Twitter app, while he uses the Safari browser to log in to his ‘alter poz’ account. This strategy prevents him from accidentally posting a tweet or uploading a photo to the wrong account.

Setting up an alter account was also a strategy to delineate between ‘real’-world and online identities. ‘Clean’ is how Greg describes his Facebook account, which reflects his ‘real’-world persona. He enjoys greater freedom to express himself on Twitter, as he is aware that his family and friends do not follow him on the platform. Because Greg has not disclosed his HIV status to them, he is cautious about sharing content across various social media platforms: “They don’t know about my condition. That’s also one of the reasons why I don’t link my posts on Twitter to Facebook and other social media.”

However, complications arise when one’s online persona is exposed to unintended audiences. Dominic experienced this first-hand during a Zoom meeting. He explains that

each of his Twitter profiles is linked to a separate Zoom account. One time, he inadvertently joined a team meeting with his alter Twitter profile, resulting in confusion regarding the attendee's identity in the meeting room. Dominic quickly logged out, switched to his work account, and re-entered the meeting. His team leader jokingly enquired whether it was his profile that appeared in the meeting room. Consequently, Dominic decided to change his Twitter handle to avoid further association.

Dominic's accidental exposure of his alter profile serves as a fine example illustrating Labov's narrative elements. He opens his story by furnishing details about his Twitter accounts and the event that took place (orientation) and quickly establishes the key event that took place: accidentally logging in using his alter profile (complication). This event caused confusion among his colleagues, who were unaware of his alter account (evaluation). Upon realising his error, Dominic swiftly logged out, switched accounts, and changed his Twitter handle as an added precaution to safeguard his privacy (resolution).

Earlier, the function of algorithmic mechanisms was discussed in connection to how participants stumbled upon PLWH and HIV-themed content on Twitter. While the stories in the previous section emphasised the positive impact of the Twitter algorithm in familiarising newly diagnosed HIV individuals with the Twitterverse of PLWH, some participants also voiced concerns about the algorithm's potential to compromise their 'real'-world identities. To address this, they implemented proactive and preventive measures.

After setting up an ‘alter poz’ account on Twitter, Carl noticed an increase in other poz accounts appearing in his Facebook feed. Carl suspects that these suggestions stemmed from user-provided contact details. Consequently, he made his account private to prevent himself from being suggested to other users. Participants refrained from cross-posting content across platforms to prevent their identities from being made out. Carl recognises that given the small size of the poz and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex communities, individuals within his network could easily identify him if he were to post identical photos on Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook. In Sandro’s case, since he had already announced on Facebook that he was visiting Baguio, an upland town in northern Philippines, he abstained from posting about it on Twitter. This was out of fear that someone might link his ‘legitimate’ Facebook profile to his Twitter alter account. As a last example, Dominic’s header image shows a Pembroke Welsh corgi, implying pet ownership. While Dominic does own a dog, the one in his header image is not his own. He confesses to using a photo sourced from the web instead of displaying an actual photo of his dog, fearing that other users might recognise his pet, and consequently, him.

The algorithm’s ability to render one’s Twitter activity visible was also a source of worry for some participants. When Jairo noticed that HIV-themed tweets were suddenly appearing in his timeline, he promptly realised that this was the work of the Twitter algorithm. This underscores the advantage of maintaining an ‘alter poz’ account, enabling him to search for information about HIV that he would not feel comfortable doing using

his 'legitimate' account, whether on Twitter, Facebook, or Instagram. When he uses his 'legitimate' account, he avoids liking or sharing HIV-related posts, as such actions might inadvertently reveal his HIV status:

**Jairo:** ...having my alter account, it's an avenue for me to also look for some topics that I cannot use for my legitimate accounts, which is, for example, in Facebook or in, uh, Instagram, because I'm afraid that I might share something or I might click on something that would expose what I really, uh, experienced or, uh, expose that I am an HIV-positive person.

*(...having my alter account, it's an avenue for me to also look for some topics that I cannot use for my legitimate accounts, which is, for example, in Facebook or in, uh, Instagram, kasi I'm afraid that I might share something or I might click on something that would expose what I really, uh, experienced or, uh, expose that I am an HIV-positive person.)*

For Fred and Seth, using an alter account concealed their consumption of NSFW content from people who knew them in 'real' life. For instance, Fred indulges in pornographic content using his poz account. He admits he cannot do this using his 'legitimate' account without exposing his pornography habit to his contacts, mostly comprising college and high school friends. In much the same way, Seth found it necessary to create a Twitter account dedicated to pornography consumption. At one point, he discovered that his regular friends had become aware of it when they noticed the NSFW tweets he had marked as favourites, with one friend commenting, "Hey, the tweets you've been liking on Twitter—they're all naked!" After creating a new account for pornographic purposes, he sanitised his main account by un-liking the pornographic tweets he had

previously marked as favourites. Account management, for Seth, is an effort in segregation wherein he simply needs to toggle between accounts to access the type of content he wants at a given time. Later, participants' engagement with NSFW content is elaborated.

Collectively, these narratives illustrate the measures participants took to regulate their visibility within Twitter and across social media platforms, as well as in the 'real'-world. In Chapter 4, the analysis of visibility management strategies centred on self-presentation practices evident in Twitter profiles and tweets. In this study, interviews with FMLWH revealed that they managed multiple accounts to compartmentalise their activities and tailor their performances online. A throughline that connected their stories was the deliberate use of tactics to minimise the risk of inadvertently exposing their 'legitimate' identities to unintended audiences. Creating multiple accounts stood out as a fundamental approach, complemented by actions like blocking contacts, retracting liked tweets, and changing Twitter handles.

***Exchanging peer support: "There's a community that's willing to listen to you".***

Established social networks form the foundation for providing peer support<sup>16</sup> (Dennis, 2003). Summarising the findings from Chapter 5, the network of Twitter users identifying

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<sup>16</sup> In this study, 'peer' support is favoured over 'social' support due to its emphasis on experiential knowledge and social networks. Peterson et al. (2012) suggest that peer support is a subtype of social support.

as FMLWH is expansive, with over 300,000 connections formed through follows. Although low density was recorded, users were found to be connected to an average of 209 users. Moreover, the average geodesic distance of 1.8315 suggests a considerable degree of familiarity or acquaintance among account owners within the network. From interviews with case participants, it was found that the acts of following and being followed back by PLWH were customary in the network, substantiating the high 70% reciprocity rate calculated.

Explaining his decision to establish an ‘alter poz’ account, Jerold offers: “My original purpose is to network, to find people who are the same as I am.” Jerold’s remark resonates with the homophily principle, which posits that individuals are inclined to establish connections with others whom they perceive as sharing similar traits (Rogers and Bhowmik, 1970). The same holds for both Diego and Dong, whose ‘alter poz’ account serves as their lifeline to their fellow ‘blood brothers.’ According to Sandro, the Twitter community of PLWH encourages a culture of mutual support. In contrast, Facebook lacks this sense of altruism: “I don’t believe I can ask for help in Facebook,” he asserts. Sandro values the network he has established on Twitter, believing he can count on the friends he has made should he face a troubling situation: “I’m thinking, what if something bad happens to me, you know? The first ones I will contact are on Twitter, not my family.”

Case participants expressed a felt need to support fellow PLWH, driving their engagement in the network. Unbeknown to Marcus at the time of his HIV diagnosis in 2017, a supportive community of peers was thriving on Twitter. However, the social media

landscape in 2017 stood in contrast to that in 2008, the year Kyle was diagnosed. “The community was probably not existent at that time,” he reflects. Kyle’s motivation for engaging with newly diagnosed individuals on Twitter stems from his desire to ensure that nobody “feels left out or alone.” This spirit of advocacy grew from the lack of support he experienced in the past: “No one did it for me,” he remarks.

During interviews, narratives of peer support narratives emerged naturally, despite participants being provided only with general prompts to share their Twittering experiences. The ensuing discussion organises these stories around three types of peer support that surfaced: emotional; informational; and instrumental assistance.

Participant narratives shed light on Twitter’s role in providing emotional support. This was exemplified by their accounts of using the platform to convey empathy, care, and reassurance (Cohen, 2004: 677). One of the reasons PLWH turn to Twitter is the lack of emotional support available in person. For example, when Nick was going through a rough patch with his ex-partner, he posted a tweet asking for a virtual hug from his network (see Figure 22). Nick feels that HIV-related stigmas prevent him from receiving comparable emotional support from his ‘real’-life circle: “It’s kind of difficult... there’s a stigma about being, uh, HIV positive... So regarding this tweet, it was more of, ‘I hope you don’t ask too many questions about this post, okay?’ I just need hugs. Maybe even virtual hugs would give me some energy.”



Figure 22. Sample tweet asking for emotional support

Emotional support was particularly evident in helping newly diagnosed individuals, fondly called 'newbies.' One unique aspect of the Twitterverse of PLWH is the circulation of tweets officially welcoming 'newbies' into the community. Extending a welcoming gesture to these users, individually tagged in tweets, epitomises the provision of emotional support. Marcus attributes the initial spike in his followers to the 'welcome' tweet in which he was tagged. Meanwhile, it was a 'welcome' tweet appearing in Brad's feed that introduced him to the network of PLWH on Twitter. Brad remembers following these tagged users to widen his circle. Figure 23 shows a sample tweet that employs the generic conventions of a 'welcome' post.

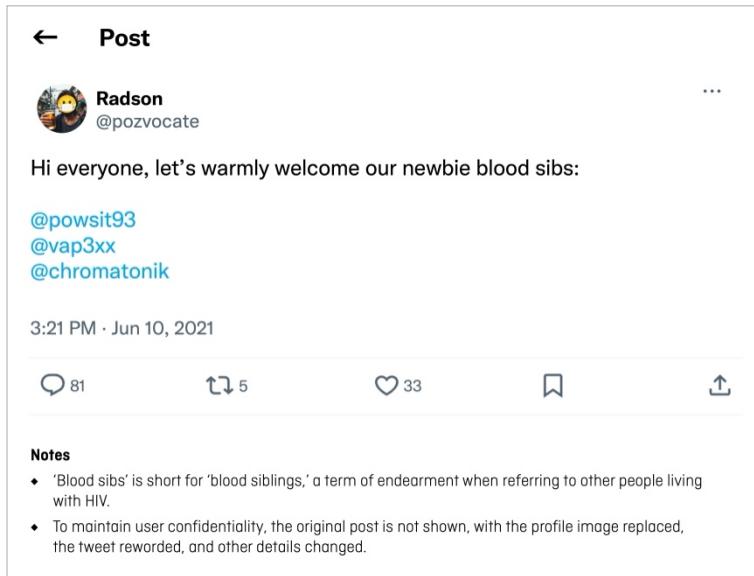


Figure 23. Sample 'welcome' tweet

Participants identified Radson<sup>17</sup> as the community's ambassador who took the lead in welcoming newly diagnosed PLWH into the fold. Ozzy points out that he chooses to follow only blood siblings who have been endorsed by mutual contacts or those acknowledged in 'welcome' tweets by Radson, a trusted figure in the Twitterverse of PLWH. Unfortunately, Radson passed away around the time of the study. Ben, a close friend of Radson, shares that he and a few other prominent members in the network have taken it upon themselves to continue Radson's work on Twitter. According to Ben, supporting newly diagnosed PLWH does not take a grand gesture. Rather, through tweeting

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<sup>17</sup> Radson's 'welcome' tweets were frequently encountered throughout the initial phase of the online ethnography. Unfortunately, the researcher learned of Radson's death through Twitter, preventing his inclusion in the research sample. Despite this, several participants recognised his prominent role in the Twitterverse of PLWH.

and hosting sessions on Twitter Spaces, they can offer guidance to ‘newbies’ on navigating life with HIV. Ben believes that providing a friendly welcome to newcomers is a solid first step in connecting them with other PLWH in their area:

**Ben:** ...that's what we do now with [name redacted for privacy], another, uh, online friend... we're the ones collecting the names of newbies, and then we share them, you know, in one tweet, saying, “welcome, brothers,” and we put them there so that other people would follow them and then they get to connect with other guys, you know, uh, with the right network in their area.

(...that's what we do now with [name redacted for privacy], another, uh, online friend... kami 'yung nagco-collect ng mga newbies, names ng newbies, and then we, uh, share them, 'no, in one tweet, 'no, na, “welcome, brothers,” ganiyan ta's nilalagay namin doon so that other people would follow them and then they get to connect with other guys, you know, uh, with the -- with the right network in their area.)

Another convention in the Twitterverse of PLWH is giving congratulations whenever someone reaches a milestone. Finn says that a common practice in the community is showing updated CD4 count values and congratulating those who have reached undetectable status. Tweets announcing this milestone often receive an outpouring of congratulatory responses. Whenever Ozzy sees an opportunity to boost their morale, even with just a brief congratulatory response, he seizes it: “I make it a point to give them that because they are going through something. For me, a little kindness will always go a long way.” Figure 24 shows a sample tweet thread of congratulatory messages.

← **Post**

**bloodhound (+)**  
@pusitology

GOOD NEWS my ID just called. I'm UD again! Praise God! 🙏  
#PLHIVdiaries

2:20 PM · Jan 7, 2022

12 23

**Nevaeh** @justanotherplhiv · Jan 7, 2022  
Congrats bro! 🎉🎉🎉

**fighter + warrior** @titanium060814 · Jan 7, 2022

**Simplex** @ikigai2017 · Jan 7, 2022  
Happy for you, kapatid! ❤️❤️❤️

**Note**

- 'Kapatid' is sibling.
- To maintain user confidentiality, the original tweet thread is not shown, with details changed, images replaced, and posts reworded.

Figure 24. Sample congratulatory tweet

Nick dedicates time to read tweets from ‘newbies,’ regardless of their length. He believes these individuals may lack other avenues for sharing their HIV journey, hence their choice to turn to Twitter. After reading their posts, he makes sure to offer an encouraging reply or reach out via direct messages, reassuring them that “there’s a community that’s willing to listen to you.”

Responding to the challenges of the pandemic, Finn and his peers arranged weekly online gatherings via Twitter Spaces to provide mental health support for PLWH. For him, these hangout sessions served to connect individuals, particularly those facing isolation during lockdown:

**Finn:** It's kind of a passion project for me and my acquaintances who are the originals in the Twitter community. It became a support group for mental health during the surge of the pandemic. We would meet almost every week, updating each other from time to time... We really schedule this during their off days from work. We set a time limit to discuss topics that we usually don't share on Twitter.

*(...parang passion project din namin 'yan ng mga kilala ko na mga OGs sa -- sa Twitter na naging ano siya, naging support group siya for mental health during the surge of the pandemic. Nag-ano rin kami diyan eh, parang halos -- halos nga every week kami magkausap niyan, parang nag-a-update din from time to time... Naka-schedule talaga kami; 'pag ganiyan kasi naguuusap kami hanggang -- hanggang may limit na time lang or, for example, 'pag, uhm, off lang nila mga ganoon, and then we have certain topics like the topics na hindi namin usually sine-share sa Twitter.)*

Participants recounted multiple instances of offering fellow PLWH informational support by providing advice to help them navigate current challenges (Cohen, 2004: 676–677). Diego follows 'newbies' tagged in 'welcome' tweets because he understands their need for guidance at the early stages of their HIV diagnosis. Besides being a survivor in his own right, his nursing background makes him well-equipped to offer sound advice to these individuals: "I guess I've reached the point in my journey as a PLHIV where I've reached the 'survived' stage so I guess I can share my experiences and pointers with them. I am also a qualified nurse."

Earlier, Finn's use of Twitter Spaces was noted as an example of providing mental health support to PLWH during the pandemic. Similarly, Ben arranged an orientation for newly diagnosed individuals via Twitter Spaces, driven by the surge of messages he received from 'newbies' seeking guidance on navigating life with HIV. The session drew significant attendance, and Ben aims to host regular orientations once he settles into his new job:

**Ben:** Well, actually, this year, you know, when I put up the group chat, uh, with people, uh, people living with HIV, uh, that was when I also set up a Space, you know, for newbies. It's an orientation for newbies, which I intend to do as well once I'm settled in this new job, you know, I'll follow through with it. So, actually, it's a good Space but it seems like it can't be listened to anymore, you know. Uh, a lot of people attended that. Uhm, so I take this also as an advocacy.

*(Well, actually, this year, 'no, when I put up 'yung group chat, uh, with people, uh, people living with HIV, uhm, that was when I also set up a Space, 'no, for newbies. Parang may pa-newbie orientation, ganiyan, which I intend to do rin naman once na settled na ako dito sa bagong work, i-, uh, fa-follow through ko. So, actually, it's a good Space kaya lang hindi na yata puwedeng mapakinggan, 'no. Uh, ang daming umattend noon. Uhm, so parang I take this also as an advocacy.)*

Dong and Mike noticed an uptick in their follower counts after they began sharing information regarding the social services available to PLWH. Mike recalls receiving numerous enquiries from fellow 'blood brothers' seeking advice on accessing social benefits. Whenever possible, he takes the time to respond and impart the insights he has gained. When Mike encountered financial hardships, he took proactive measures to seek aid from the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) and the Social Security System (SSS). Following thorough research and tenacity, he successfully collected a total of

₱45,000 (around £630) within two months. He pondered the circumstances of other financially disadvantaged PLWH, those unable to procure their medication. It occurred to him that many might not be aware of financial aid accessible from DSWD and SSS, prompting him to author a series of tweets with a unique hashtag to disseminate helpful information within his network.

Mike's story stands out as an exemplar of enacting peer support on Twitter. His narrative unfolds with a string of unfortunate circumstances: being swindled out of a significant sum of money; his parents falling ill; and losing his job. This sequence of events functions as the complication of this story, leading him to explore his options for availing financial assistance. Eventually, he found out DSWD and SSS offer social benefits to PLWH, enabling him to gather a considerable sum of money (evaluation). Realising that many PLWH are in dire straits, he wrote a series of posts outlining the process he underwent to claim his benefits (resolution). Altogether, Mike's story demonstrates how his positive experience inspired him to offer informational support to his peers in a spirit of paying it forward.

The COVID-19 pandemic notably intensified the exchange of informational support among PLWH on Twitter. Carl notes that one of their initial challenges during lockdown was acquiring vital updates for the PLWH community, including guidance on highly active antiretroviral therapy (HAART) refill procedures and organising laboratory tests. Through Twitter, he became aware of service continuity measures during the

pandemic, such as the availability of courier services for HAART delivery and the option for teleconsultations with healthcare providers. (The following section provides examples of how Twitter enabled users to provide and receive practical assistance during the COVID-19 pandemic.)

Lastly, Twitter facilitated the provision of instrumental support to the network of PLWH. This involved offering material aid, such as HAART, financial assistance, and other services. Greg, whose day job involves community-based screening, uses Twitter primarily to engage with the Filipino HIV community. Majority of the users he follows are fellow PLWH; his intention is to be easily reachable whenever they require support. Greg willingly retweets posts from PLWH seeking support on Twitter, aiming to amplify their message. Once, Greg received a private message on Twitter from a user enquiring about adult diapers and other necessities. This individual had recently been diagnosed with HIV and was finding it challenging to cope with the news. Greg, in response, turned to his substantial following to rally support for this person in need (refer to Figure 25).



Figure 25. Sample tweet inviting users to help a blood sibling

Instrumental support was especially visible whenever users in the network stepped up to assist a fellow PLWH requesting to borrow medication. In Figure 26, Fred reaches out to his network, enquiring if anyone in Trinoma—a shopping mall in Quezon City, Metro Manila—had extra TLD to spare. Fred was acting on behalf of a stranger who had contacted him with this request. Capitalising on his extensive following of over 5,000, Fred employed Twitter to crowdsource potential leads.

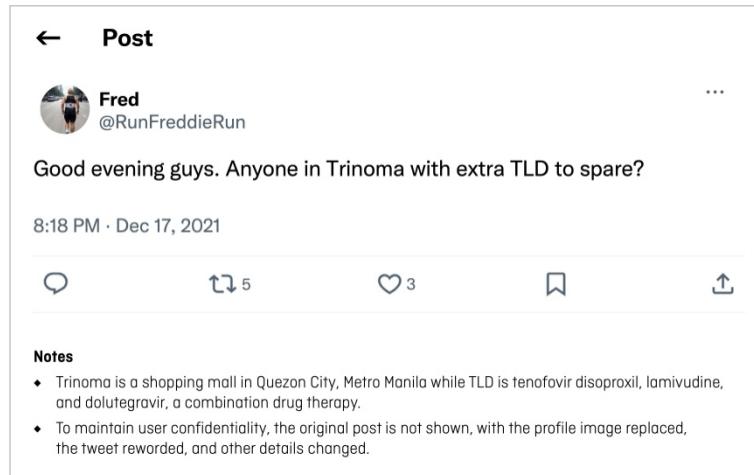


Figure 26. Sample tweet crowd-sourcing for HAART

The habit of borrowing medicine within the network was common knowledge among case participants. While they acknowledged the network's potential to supply emergency HAART to PLWH in need, some raised objections to condoning this habit. For example, Seth responded with a terse "ay sus" (slang for "oh god") to a user seeking to borrow an LTE pill, with a promise to return it the next day. "I have reservations about lending meds. It's not something I encourage, except in emergencies," he reasons. Finn echoes this sentiment, noting that some PLWH neglect to return the medicine they had borrowed from other Twitter users. For his part, he consistently reminds others to have enough HAART on hand when travelling.

Information and communication technologies played a crucial role in sustaining service provision amid the COVID-19 pandemic. In their study, Cebedo et al. (2022) found that Twitter played an important role in connecting clients to service providers. Interviews

with case participants unveiled narratives of pooling resources to offer tangible assistance to PLWH during the pandemic. Once again, Twitter Spaces emerged as a hub for facilitating peer support. Dominic recounts how he initially used Twitter Spaces for socialisation during lockdown. Eventually, he formed a tight circle with the regulars joining his broadcast channel that they decided to transform their get-togethers into purpose-driven events. For example, they organised a Twitter Spaces session to gather donations for a 'blood brother' from Mindanao who had recently passed away. Another occasion saw them hosting an event to collect funds for a young 'blood brother' requiring a laptop for his online classes. Dominic later tweeted a photo of handing over the laptop to the recipient, ensuring transparency about the donation process. Typically, peer support is communicated through tweets on Twitter. Nevertheless, the activities described on Twitter Spaces are remarkable for making use of Twitter's live audio functionality, facilitating the provision of peer support for PLWH.

Dennis (2003) contends that instrumental aid is not a fundamental aspect of peer support in the context of healthcare. Challenging this notion, Peterson et al. (2012) argue that peer support could fulfil an instrumental role, contingent upon the type of relationship between specific peers. For instance, tangible assistance might be shared among friends, family, and partners, but less so among peers communicating remotely. However, stories from this study's participants' show that Twitter functions as a platform that facilitates different forms of peer support, including instrumental assistance, among PLWH.

Providing instrumental support on Twitter underscores the significance of social networks, as prominent users mobilise their connections to obtain crucial leads for specific objectives. Moreover, distance did not impede the exchange of instrumental support, exemplified by Dominic's efforts to raise funds mainly in the National Capital Region for a Mindanao-based PLWH who had passed away. Although the study presented various accounts of interaction via Twitter Spaces, it did not explore its characteristic communication dynamics in detail. This indicates the need for further exploration of live broadcast channels on Twitter.

Overall, narratives of offering peer support were rooted in altruistic intentions. Stories shared by Ozzy, Ben, and Nick highlight the profound impact of an encouraging message in providing emotional support to PLWH, particularly those grappling with a recent diagnosis. Meanwhile, the effectiveness of mobilising one's network was evident in crowd-sourcing and crowd-funding endeavours, as described in the accounts provided by Finn, Dominic, and Fred. These stories highlight Dennis' (2003) contention that peer support stands out from other forms of social support due to its reliance on experiential knowledge and social networks.

***Engaging with sexually explicit material: "Just expressing the other side of me".*** When asked if he checks Twitter at work, Winchel responded without hesitation: "No. Definitely not because the first thing that's going to pop up is, for sure, porn." While participants mentioned various types of content they engage with on Twitter, including politics, memes,

and pop culture, none was mentioned more frequently than pornography. Furthermore, not only did they share anecdotes of consuming pornographic material, but they also recounted instances of posting 'kalat'<sup>18</sup> or sexually explicit content on Twitter.

Jerold set up a Twitter account because of 'the P word,' a subtle reference to 'pornography.' He remembers a co-worker telling him that Twitter was rife with adult media, enticing him to check it out for himself: "True enough, there was porn—lots of it—although the clips were only around two minutes, which was okay anyway." It was also pornography that captured Dong's interest in Twitter. Initially, encountering sexually explicit content as a novice user took him by surprise. "So this is social media," he thought at the time. Realising that he could access pornography directly in his feed, Dong found Twitter to be an 'all-in-one' platform.

According to Seth, Twitter is an excellent medium for consuming pornography for three reasons: firstly, ease of access; secondly, the option to create an alter profile to conceal one's browsing activity; and thirdly, the freedom to consume such content without the oversight of older folks. Regarding the third point, Seth highlights the demographic differences between Twitter and Facebook, noting that Twitter's user base generally lacks parents and grandparents. The absence of parental figures allows younger users more

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<sup>18</sup> The literal English translation of 'kalat' is 'mess.' However, in online spaces, it typically refers to raunchy content.

freedom to engage with adult content as they please. Although he still frequents mainstream pornography sites like Pornhub, what attracts Seth to Twitter is the abundance of up-to-date amateur pornography by local content creators. This aspect is also a major draw for Fred, who finds Filipino pornography more stimulating: “It really sounds sexual but it’s more arousing for me when you hear them speaking in Tagalog<sup>19</sup> compared to, you know, when they speak English… when it’s Tagalog, the impact is different.”

Accessing pornography on Twitter may also serve as an alternative to engaging in actual sexual activity. Pondering the time of his HIV diagnosis when he believed he could no longer participate in sexual encounters, Dominic resorted to Twitter for pornography as a means of sexual gratification. Likewise, Liam confesses that when he is not in the mood for hook-ups, he turns to pornography on Twitter for a quick release. “After watching it, okay, you’re good,” he reflects.

Apart from simply consuming pornography, some participants confessed to also posting their own erotic content, ranging from the softcore to the hardcore. Reflecting on his own Twitter practices, Fred observes that sharing revealing photos drives engagement. “Show a little bit of skin for people to interact with you,” he recommends. Illustrating his

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<sup>19</sup> The Philippines designates Filipino, a language based on Tagalog, as its official language. Tagalog itself is primarily spoken in the central and southern Luzon regions.

point, he once posted a self-portrait wearing only a jockstrap, which garnered attention on Twitter. Fred also observed an increase in followers after he started posting NSFW photos. Despite referring to himself as 'chubby,' Noah admits to a penchant for partial nudity, stating: "If you see me on Twitter, I tend to be unclothed." What makes Noah's account noteworthy is his commitment to advocating for body positivity, with his HIV status being less emphasised in his tweets. Noah promotes what he describes as 'body positivity with a touch of raunchiness' through the revealing photos he shares. He believes that this unique brand has been instrumental in attracting numerous followers.

In line with the Labovan approach, Noah's story starts by describing himself, highlighting two characteristics: 'chubby' and 'PLHIV' (orientation). However, his HIV status is only secondary to the content of his tweets, which primarily showcase physical activities like working out and playing volleyball (complication). By sharing semi-nude images of himself, Noah promotes 'body positivity with a touch of raunchiness' (evaluation). He asserts that this personal brand resonates authentically with his followers, resulting in increased engagement (resolution).

Account management becomes crucial for participants posting erotic content. Liam shares that because his sibling follows him on his 'legitimate' account, posting nude photos there is out of the question. Instead, he reserves explicit photos of himself for his alter account: "This is going to sound funny, but there are times when I can be raunchy. On my legit account I would drop subtle hints of my vulgarity, but it's not as graphic compared to

the other account.” Liam shares that he has published only a handful of explicit photos of himself, always with his face unseen. He admits that it does not come naturally to him to expose himself in this manner. “It’s just expressing the other side of me,” he laughs.

Where Greg’s main account is focused on HIV advocacy, his alter account showcases his collection of personal erotic videos. “That’s where I unleash my libido,” he explains. Meanwhile, Owen confesses to managing an alter account in the early 2010s: “I had an alter account way, way before it became alter-mainstream.” There he would post videos of his sexual encounters with his partners, for the enjoyment of his more than 11,000 followers. “I was quite famous,” he admits. However, he found it challenging to maintain separate profiles for his ‘clean’ and alter identities because it was inevitable for some of his thoughts to cross over from one account to the other. Owen realised that there might come a point where his ‘true’ identity would be compromised, or that others might link the two accounts he manages. Consequently, he decided to give up his alter account.

Overall, participants’ engagement with explicit content shows alternative uses of Twitter going beyond its conventional functions as a medium for sharing news, ambient affiliation, messaging, friend-following, and event-following (O’Reilly and Milstein, 2009; Rogers, 2014; Zappavigna, 2011). In contrast to most other social platforms, Twitter adopts a lenient stance toward posting sensitive content, restricting it only from profile and header images (X, 2024c). Users are responsible for flagging posts as sensitive, and once flagged, graphical content is blurred with an accompanying warning label (refer to Figure 27).

Beyond these measures, Twitter users can freely engage with NSFW content, which only used to be possible on mainstream pornography sites.

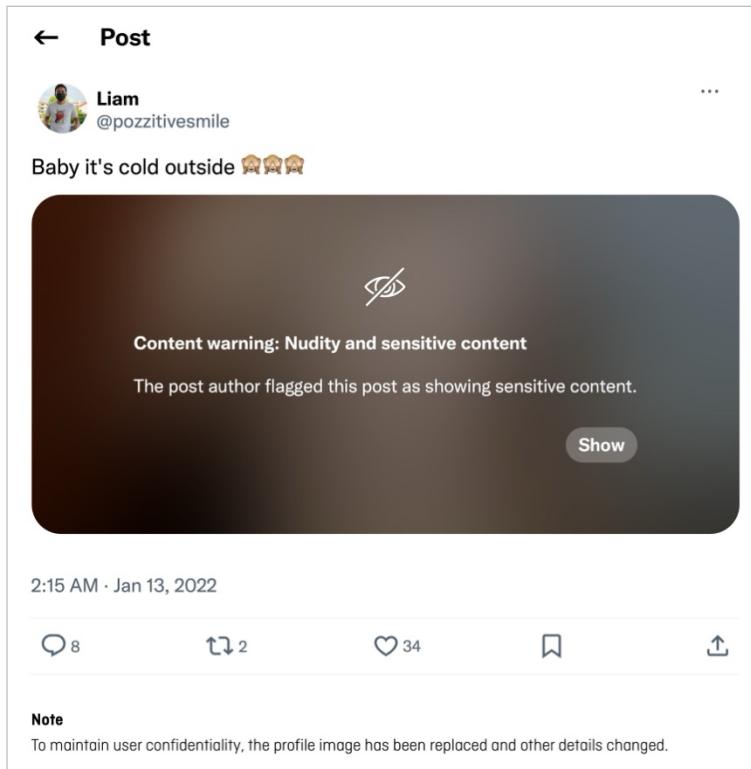


Figure 27. Sensitive media blurred out on Twitter

***Being there: “I’m still active”.*** Usage statistics presented earlier indicate generally high Twitter engagement, with users spending about five hours per day on the platform and visiting it an average of 13 times daily. Several prominent users acknowledged their Twitter addiction. For example, Sandro shares that ever since his HIV diagnosis, he has been an active Twitter user: “My finger instinctively goes to the Twitter icon on my phone.” Meanwhile, Carl admits that the platform has interfered with his sleep habits, prompting

friends to wonder if he still gets enough rest: "My sleeping patterns are intermittent... when I wake up, it's Twitter, Twitter, Twitter, like, like, like, like." Similarly, Mike attributes his under-eye bags to his frequent use of Twitter, noting that his phone begins buzzing with notifications as early as eight in the morning: "I would wake up to around 205 messages. That's per day, all right? Yes, 205." Likewise, Ben claims that he is often sucked into the 'rabbit hole' that is Twitter. Except when he needs to do focused work, he finds himself logged in throughout the day: "It consumes me more than I consume it, I think."

In the spectrum of Twitter usage, these stories represent extreme levels of activity. However, results of cluster analysis outlined in Chapter 5 show that majority of the 1,447 Twitter users in the network ( $N = 872$ , 60%) scored low in terms of connectivity, expression, and prestige, and were subsequently clustered under the persona 'happy to just be on Twitter.' Therefore, it was deemed necessary to also explore the reasons behind minimal Twitter activity during the six-month period of analysis. Five case participants embodying the persona 'happy to just be on Twitter' shared their stories of maintaining a presence on the platform despite their relatively low level of engagement. Some prominent users also reflected on how their Twitter activity tapered over time.

Owen used to be active on Twitter, regularly posting about his HIV journey and reaching out to people in the community. Over the years, however, his Twitter activity decreased due to the demands of his work. At the time of the study, he would spend only about 30 minutes a day on the platform, usually at night before going to bed: "On average,

really, it's just maybe around 30 minutes a day... when I'm getting sleepy, that's it. If I'm not too sleepy yet, I extend by listening to Spaces or something like that. But during the day, since I'm busy with my real life, I don't use it much." Marcus describes his Twitter usage as variable, noting increased activity during the analysis period due to his night shift schedule: "I wasn't that busy with my work yet and I was still on the night shift, so it was really tiring. I found myself diverting my attention by talking to those whom I chatted with before."

In contrast to Owen and Marcus, whose Twitter activity fluctuated based on their work arrangements, Jesson attributes his reduced engagement with the platform to its increasing toxicity and the declining activity of his friends. Jesson was active on Twitter in high school: "It became my personal diary [laughs]... If I have something funny to share during my day, I would tweet about it. If there was a current event that drew a lot of attention and people were talking about it, then I'd also share my opinion about it." However, as time passed, he observed a decline in his friends' Twitter activity, thereby reducing the platform's value to him. Coupled with the prevalence of cancel culture<sup>20</sup> on

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<sup>20</sup> Cancel culture is defined by Ng (2022: 1) as "comprising both cancel practices (canceling) that involve actions against a cancel target, which may be an individual, brand, or company, and cancel discourses, which is commentary about cancelling." In this context, Jesson's account refers to cancel practices.

the platform, Jesson chose to step back: "Oh, I don't want to be part of this," he remembers thinking at the time.

Moreover, reduced engagement with Twitter may be attributed to the presence of friends available for conversation in 'real' life, leading participants to prioritise familiar interactions over engaging with strangers on the platform. Jerold considers himself fortunate that he has friends he can confide in: "I get to recharge my social battery when I converse with the people close to me." However, he recognises that not all PLWH have the same support system, driving their engagement on Twitter. Jerold humorously remarks: "My friends are my social media." Similarly, Jesson favours genuine conversations with people he knows over casual interactions with strangers on Twitter:

**Jesson:** ...if I have an opinion to share, I can share it with my friends; I can share it with people that I really know. You know, we can have a proper conversation because they would know me on a personal level, why, uhm, my stand on these things is like this rather than having anonymous -- not really anonymous, random people conversing with me, exerting their stand on the issue that I was tweeting about.

*(...if I have an opinion to share, I can share it with my friends; I can share it with people that I really know. You know, we can have a proper conversation because they would know me on a personal level, why, uhm, ganito 'yung stand ko on these things rather than having anonymous -- hindi naman anonymous, random people conversing with me, exerting 'yung kanilang stand on the issue that I was tweeting about.)*

Some participants leaned toward using Twitter solely for consumption. Jairo, for instance, acknowledges having built a network on the platform but self-identifies as a lurker.

Out of the trio of social media platforms in his repertoire—Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter—Jairo reveals that he accesses Twitter the least. Typically, he only engages with Twitter when notifications alert him to activity on his account. Much like Jairo, Dong maintains a low-key presence on the platform, describing himself as a ‘silent user.’ Although he acknowledges the supportive environment Twitter offers for PLWH, Dong’s involvement on the platform remains largely self-directed. Moreover, he expresses reservations about publicly discussing his condition:

**Dong:** So we are silent [sic] fighting through what we’re going through now and this platform has really become popular for us because this is where we can communicate. Here we are sort of brought together to somehow share our thoughts, share our knowledge, but it’s like we’re focused on ourselves. Like, we won’t give our 100% effort or 100% of ourselves to others. Like, we’re just here to -- our own selves are here to observe, to share something... maybe the fear of opening up about what we’re going through to the public is still there.

*(So we are silent fighting doon sa pinagdadaanan namin ngayon and naging patok talaga siya sa amin, itong platform na ito, kasi dito kami nakakapag-communicate. Dito kami parang pinagsama-sama to somehow share our thoughts, share our knowledge, pero ‘yung tipong focused kami sa sarili namin. Kumbaga hindi namin ibibigay ‘yung 100% namin na effort or 100% namin sa iba. Kumbaga, nandito lang kami to -- ‘yung sarili namin andito to observe, to share something... siguro andoon pa rin ‘yung takot na pag-open up namin sa public ‘yung pinagdadaanan namin.)*

Jesson observes that passive consumption is a prevailing behaviour among Twitter users, including those managing alter or ‘alter poz’ accounts. He argues that many users prefer not to send their tweets out into the ether. Although Marcus asserts that he tweets less frequently now, he contends that Twitter activity extends beyond tweeting. He insists,

"I'm still active," pointing to his habit of reading tweets on his feed to stay updated on the accounts he follows. Although he rarely engages in conversations, he consistently likes others' tweets:

**Marcus:** Maybe I'm not as active in posting and all, but I still read from time to time and get updates as well for [sic] those that I've been following, especially when there are trending topics... So I'm still active in such a way that I... read. I still like some posts but not to the extent that I exchange conversations anymore. If someone would reach out via DM, uhm, that's okay.

*(Siguro hindi na 'ko ganoon ka-active to post and all but I still read from time to time and get updates as well for those that I've been following, especially kapag may mga alam mo na trending... So active pa rin ako in such a way that I... read. I still like some posts but not to the extent na I exchange conversations anymore. If someone would reach out via DM, uhm, 'yun, okay naman.)*

Marcus' nuanced take on Twitter activity provides valuable insights into Twittering practice. Being active on Twitter is not tantamount to tweeting. Simply being present on Twitter can involve activities like scrolling and reading, which are less visible and leave no discernible traces of activity on the platform. According to Lomborg (2014: 16), genre knowledge informs how user-generated content is produced and received, creating a common understanding and facilitating interaction between participants. Despite usage data and interviews pointing to mostly nonparticipative engagement with Twitter, the significant presence of FMLWH and the extent of their connections indicate an understanding of how to negotiate the platform and make sense of texts produced. However, for most of them, sustaining a high level of engagement with Twitter was not

essential. Occasionally scrolling through their feed and reading posts were reasons enough for them to remain active on the platform.

### **6.3.5 Role of Twittering**

The final section of this chapter situates the role of Twittering in the lived experiences of FMLWH. In addition to elucidating participants' practices, it was imperative to uncover the meanings they ascribed to Twittering. Four overarching themes surfaced from their narratives:

- ◆ *Twittering as a shifting practice*
- ◆ *Twittering as community*
- ◆ *Twittering as sexual reclamation*
- ◆ *Twittering as freedom*

It is important to frame the discussion by noting that participants have been living with HIV for an average of seven years, with durations ranging from three to 14 years. As such, the role of Twittering is contextualised in light of significant experiences with living with HIV.

***Twittering as a shifting practice.*** Participants' narratives consistently demonstrated an awareness of how their practices on Twitter have evolved over time. Changes in

Twittering practices were evident in two storylines; firstly, advancing in life with HIV; and secondly, coming out of the sero-closet.

Mike recounts how his single Twitter account shifted in purpose as time passed. As discussed, his Twitter usage initially revolved around monitoring his co-workers' rants. However, in 2018, he transitioned to using Twitter as a news aggregator, particularly to stay informed about developments involving then President Rodrigo Duterte. His curiosity about national politics arose from two friends holding divergent political perspectives. When Mike was diagnosed with HIV in 2019, he shifted his personal account to an 'alter poz' account by changing his name and blocking his contacts, including his former co-workers. Before, his account was primarily focused on keeping up with his colleagues and staying informed about national politics. Now, it serves the purpose of aiding other PLWH by offering them useful information:

**Mike:** ...that account is just to help other people, that's it. I don't really have anything to offer. I cannot offer my body, you know, like others... I cannot offer fame... all I have is that I'm there -- there is this willingness on me [sic] that I can help other people and that's through Twitter, that's it.

*(...that account is just to help other people, 'yun lang. Wala naman ako kasi ma-offer. I cannot offer my body, 'di ba, like others... I cannot offer fame... ang mayroon lang ako is that I'm there -- there is this willingness on me that I can help other people and that's through Twitter, 'yun lang.)*

Winchel's story of transitioning from one account to another is somewhat complex. After being diagnosed in 2015, he decided to establish a separate 'alter poz' account,

following the advice of his HIV counsellor. The decision to set up a different account stemmed from the need to dissociate his persona as a PLWH from his 'legitimate' account. Winchel elaborates: "I'm afraid that if I started posting stuff in there and liking stuff in there, people would see it, especially people who know me personally would see it and would correlate those likes and those comments as, you know, in connection with HIV." As time passed, Winchel grew accustomed to sharing HIV-related content on his 'legitimate' account to the extent that maintaining a separate one no longer seemed necessary. At the time of the interview, Winchel had not used his 'alter poz' account in a year.

Turning to another case, Owen explains that in his early days on Twitter, he would share tweets regarding coping with his diagnosis and progressing in life with HIV. However, he noticed a shift over time: He now tends to tweet less about HIV and more about politics. His present tweets related to HIV primarily focus on celebrating life with the condition. In fact, he no longer dwells on it; he has come to terms with HIV being a part of his life. The only reminder of his status is the necessity to take his daily medication:

**Owen:** It's not as if it's a one-trick pony wherein all my tweets are about being poz, because now I see it more as a mouthpiece for what I want to say... It's evolved into politics, current events, and real-life situations, so it's not solely focused on being poz anymore... Now it's more about celebrating life because everything feels normal now. I hardly think about it anymore. The only reminder is I need to drink my meds every day, but other than that, everything is normal. It's back to normal for me.

*(...hindi lang din siya parang one-trick pony na lahat ng tweets ko is about being poz because I think now it's more of being, 'yun nga, kumbaga it's like a mouthpiece na kung ano 'yung gusto kong sabihin... nag-evolve na siya into politics; nag-evolve na siya about current events; nag-evolve na siya about real life situations, so kumbaga parang hindi na siya nakafocus na it's all about poz... now it's just more about celebrating life kasi ngayon, kumbaga, parang everything is normal na. Parang, I don't actually think about it anymore ngayon. Kumbaga, the only thing that reminds me is I need to drink my meds every day but other than that, everything is normal. It's back to normal for me.)*

Echoing Owen's experience, Sandro established an 'alter poz' account to reach out to 'blood brothers' after receiving his diagnosis in 2017. Reflecting on his Twitter engagement with this account, Sandro estimates that he mainly utilised it for peer support purposes during the first three years. Subsequently, he redirected usage to follow Filipino pornography stars, recognising that this deviated from the account's original intention:

**Sandro:** So it was like I saw porn, porn stars who are Filipino. I followed them even though this was not really the initial purpose why I created that account. There's like a switch of purpose, I would say? [Laughs] It changed.

*(So parang may nakikita na akong mga porn, porn stars na parang mga Pinoy lang din. Fina-follow ko siya kahit hindi naman talaga 'yung, parang, initial purpose why I created that account. There's like a switch of purpose, I would say? [Laughs] Nag-iba na siya.)*

One reason for this shift in Sandro's Twitter activity is that he had already formed bonds with other PLWH on the platform. Through these friendships, group chats emerged where they exchanged valuable HIV-related information. Consequently, Sandro's reliance on his Twitter feed to obtain information decreased. Several other participants acknowledged the importance of group chats, both on Twitter and other platforms, in connecting with PLWH. For instance, Brad reveals his participation in a Twitter group chat comprising over 40 members. This form of communication proved beneficial during the pandemic, especially while working from home. Through this group chat, they maintained contact with one another and organised future gatherings. Likewise, Ben initiated a group chat dedicated to PLWH on the Telegram app and designated certain peers as administrators. He describes the group chat as "an extension of Twitter."

Similarly, Nick relies on group chats with fellow PLWH to discuss important issues he encounters on his Twitter feed. For instance, conversations in this group chat verified reports that a certain Twitter user was pretending to be in need to scam money from others. Consequently, Nick took the initiative to expose this individual's fraudulent actions on Twitter. On a lighter note, Nick points out that, unlike open exchanges on Twitter, group chats provide a setting where he and his fellow PLWH can be obscene and partake in friendly arguments:

**Nick:** ...in the group chat, you can be direct and vulgar; you can, like, engage in friendly arguments... So we can send these kinds of messages in the group chat.

(...'*pag sa GC parang direct na parang puwede kayo magbalahuraan, na puwede kayong mag ano -- mag-away na friendly away lang... talunan lang...* So puwede naming isend 'yun sa GC.)

The final storyline for this theme concerns adapting one's Twitter profile to publicly disclose one's HIV status. Although 'alter poz' accounts are customary for FMLWH, select participants have 'come out of the sero-closet,' to borrow an expression by Philpot et al. (2022). Two case participants managed a single Twitter account—a 'legitimate' one—where they openly identified themselves as PLWH. Some years before this research, Ozzy was given the opportunity to come out as a PLWH on national television. Prior to this event, he had been maintaining a private Twitter account. However, recognising the reach of social media, Ozzy made his account public to "be a contact person" and to "help the community." Whereas Ozzy switched from a private to a public profile, Finn shifted from an 'alter poz' to a 'legitimate' account. According to Finn, he previously handled multiple accounts on Facebook and Instagram, and realised that maintaining multiple accounts on Twitter would be too burdensome. To streamline his engagement with Twitter, he utilises a single account to connect with both his 'real'-life friends and PLWH, effectively mixing contacts. However, this does not concern Finn, who asserts that he no longer cares about others' opinions: "I'm done with that. It's hard to pretend too. Let's not pretend; it's 2022." Other participants echoed this sentiment, as will be illustrated in the forthcoming stories.

Like Finn, Nick also transitioned from an 'alter poz' to a 'legitimate' account. What sets Nick apart is his maintenance of a second private account where he shares his rants. "So when I no longer want to rant on this public account, I use the private account," he explains. His public account, where he had recently unveiled his 'true' identity, continues to serve as his main account. Nick shares that his gradual disclosure did not sit well with his ex-partner. Yet, he felt strongly about his decision to come out, believing that PLWH should be visible. For him, this demonstrates self-acceptance, and Twitter serves as a platform where he can raise HIV awareness:

**Nick:** It became an issue [to my ex] why I was showing my face. I said it's my choice. Why, am I not allowed to show my face because I'm part of the PLHIV community? Can't we show ourselves? Because personally, I've created a certain acceptance; I've accepted myself as a PLHIV. Number two, [if] you want to do something, like create social awareness via Twitter, why not, right?

*(Naging issue siya na bakit daw ako nagpapakita ng mukha. Sabi ko it's my choice na parang gusto ko na -- parang bakit -- bakit, hindi ba puwede na magpakita pa ng mukha dahil ba sa -- dahil ba sa, uh, part ako ng PLHIV community? 'Di ba -- di ba puwede na magpakita tayo? Kasi kung -- kung sa 'kin, sa sarili ko nag-create ako ng certain acceptance, tanggap mo, mm-hmm, tanggap mo 'yung sarili mo bilang isang PLHIV. Number two, you want to do something, 'yun nga, mag-create ka ng social awareness via Twitter, why not, 'di ba?)*

As discussed in Chapter 4, Twitter users identifying as FMLWH were found to upload profile images of themselves with their faces censored or cropped out entirely. In Fred's case, he used to post photos of himself with a black strip covering his eyes. Reflecting on this, he finds it amusing because merely covering his eyes could not have effectively

concealed his identity. Eventually, he decided to post uncensored photos of himself. “There’s no point in covering my eyes just to be mysterious,” he chuckles. Fred credits his newfound boldness to Republic Act 11166 or the Philippine HIV and AIDS Policy Act, which protects PLWH in the country. Meanwhile, authenticity is key for Noah. What initially began as an alter account has now developed into a ‘semi-alter’ account. Nowadays, he uploads uncensored photos of himself and posts about his work and hobbies. For Noah, this practice conveys the message that PLWH can be open about their status: “This shows authenticity because who would’ve thought that this person with an illness is open to showing his face?” It is this kind of authenticity that he feels his more than 3,000 followers appreciate.

As a final example, Seth shares that he ultimately converted his ‘alter poz’ profile into his main Twitter account. Apart from the high engagement it enjoys, he also made more friends with his contacts there. By designating it as his primary account, Seth felt it was appropriate to reveal his ‘true’ identity. The *why* that grounds his decision to go public is his intent to “end the stigma.” Seth recognises that many PLWH have been living in the closet for years, afraid of the stigma that awaits them if they were to publicly disclose their status. When he contemplated, “hey, no more hiding,” and unveiled himself on his formerly ‘alter poz’ account, his following surged. With almost 3,500 followers at the time of the study, Seth strives to set an example that PLWH can lead normal lives.

Seth's account represents a well-structured narrative illustrating four narrative elements in the Labovian model. Seth sets the context by sharing that he had set up an 'alter poz' account in 2020 (orientation). Later, he mulled over the idea of transforming this 'alter poz' account into his primary one due to its substantial engagement (complication). This shift would entail unveiling his 'true' identity. Despite the risk, he opted for transparency, seeing it as an opportunity to combat HIV stigmas and showcase to other PLWH that they can lead a 'normal' life in spite of their condition. Consequently, his decision led to a boost in followers (resolution).

The practices uncovered thus far demonstrate the varied ways in which participants engaged with Twittering. Moreover, their narratives highlight that these practices undergo changes over time, shaped by their needs and circumstances. As participants progressed in their journey with HIV, their Twitter activity shifted from seeking to providing peer support. Moreover, they found themselves tweeting less about coping with HIV. Initially, their Twitter feed served as a vital canvas for obtaining information about HIV and connecting with others in the community. However, it now takes a secondary role to private communication channels, where they maintain interactions with fellow PLWH. These stories are crucial because they offer insights into alternative spaces where PLWH interact. Malhotra (2024) describes these channels enabling private communication as 'bounded social media places.' Within this study, two notable examples that surfaced are Twitter

Spaces and direct messages, including group chats<sup>21</sup>. Interactions within these ‘bounded social media places’ and beyond the Twitter feed may provide insight into the loosely interconnected conversation network described in Chapter 5.

While the Twitterverse of PLWH is replete with ‘alter poz’ accounts, a handful of individuals have ‘come out of the sero-closet’ as well. These individuals perceived their public disclosure of their HIV status as a way to connect with a wider audience in the community and to promote authenticity in their representation. Coming out also serves as a powerful declaration of self-acceptance, challenging stigmas linked to HIV.

***Twittering as community.*** While cultivating meaningful friendships on Twitter is not unprecedented (Chen, 2011; Gruzd et al., 2011), the formation of such ties among PLWH on this platform presents a unique dynamic. These connections usually do not develop organically in other settings where these individuals gather, such as HIV treatment hubs. Jesson regards his clinic solely as a facility for obtaining his HAART and undergoing laboratory tests, rather than a space for social interaction and seeking support. Brad and Marcus deliberately enrolled in a distant treatment hub even though they could have well chosen one closer to their place of residence. For Marcus, this decision was a way to

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<sup>21</sup> In 2013, Twitter introduced direct messaging functionality, enabling private communication between users (Simpson, 2013). Two years later, in 2015, the platform expanded direct messaging to include group chat capabilities (Twitter, 2015).

minimise the chances of running into people he knows: “I’m from Rizal but my hub is in Alabang, so it’s really at the far end from east to south. I really did that on purpose because I don’t want to be seen in my community. That’s why I opted for a faraway clinic.”

‘Secretive’ is how Brad describes PLWH registered in his clinic. “Even if we happen to run into one another for laboratory tests or medicine refills, we really don’t talk,” he observes. Brad also notices that some patients visit the hub wearing a cap, sunglasses, and a jacket, as if trying to disguise themselves. He attributes these evasive behaviours to stigmas associated with HIV, prompting these individuals to maintain a discreet presence in settings where they could be potentially tagged as PLWH. Although Brad is now personally acquainted with some of the patients in his treatment hub, he acknowledges that he first connected with them through Twitter.

PLWH often find it easier to form connections on Twitter. Ben actively seeks out friendships with users in his network, aiming for his interactions with them to extend beyond mere peer support: “So my friendship with them... it’s not limited to, ‘Hey, this person needs new meds,’ ‘Hey, can you retweet this?’ It’s more than that.” Similarly, Dominic shares that the ‘blood brothers’ he encountered on Twitter Spaces during the pandemic eventually became his travel buddies. They began gathering on weekends as soon as travel restrictions had been lifted.

It was also through Twitter that Gio formed his social circle: "I've found my community. I managed to create some online friends; some friends crossed over to real life." When Gio set up his 'alter poz' account, his primary objective was to connect with fellow PLWH who had been diagnosed for more than five years. His motivation was to understand their coping mechanisms and, crucially, to integrate those strategies into his personal experience with the condition. Eventually, Gio took the lead in forming a support group by inviting friends he had met on Twitter to gather at his residence. Although some have come and gone, Gio is content having established a core group with whom he regularly interacts.

**Gio:** So I wanted to have a support group, you know, in real life so I invited friends to a hangout... I don't smoke; I don't drink. My thing is, you know, eating: "Let's eat. I'll host here at home; let's eat." I tried hosting for a couple of times, and it was only after a few tries, maybe after a year, that it stuck and we really became friends. I've met some other folks who, you know, I guess they're looking for other things but this group, we clicked and so we've been constantly talking and meeting up for several years now.

*(So I wanted to have a support group na, ano, sa totooong buhay so I -- nag-invite ako, 'yung ano, 'yung hangout, ganiyan... I don't smoke; I don't drink so ang ano ko is, ano, kain: "Kain tayo. Magho-host ako dito sa bahay; kain tayo." I tried hosting for a couple of times, and it was only itong pang-ilang tries ko na, siguro after a year, na nagstick na naging -- naging friends na talaga kami. I've met some other pusits, na you know, I guess they're looking for other things pero itong grupo na ito, nag-gel kami and so we've been constantly talking and meeting up and, ano, for several years now.)*

Organising in-person get-togethers is common within the network. Participants identified Vic<sup>22</sup> as the coordinator of out-of-town getaways exclusively for PLWH. Vic's events would be announced with great fanfare, including publicity materials, online registration, and raffle draws. Gio shares that he was able to attend of these trips that brought together around 50 participants. "It was fun to see a lot of the poz people [from] different walks of life and shapes and sizes," he reminisces. However, some case participants expressed general hesitation to attend any type of get-together organised on Twitter. Brad remembers that one of the events in which he was invited gathered a diverse group of attendees, including both PLWH and non-PLWH. The thought of finding out who the participants were only at the meetup made him uncomfortable, fearing that he might recognise someone in the group, and vice versa. Nevertheless, Brad is glad to have joined the event: "Face-to-face encounters are better. We had good conversation, and we also got to bond."

*Twittering as sexual reclamation.* When Dominic was diagnosed with HIV in 2018, he wondered whether he could ever live a sexually satisfying life again. "Oh, I can't do sex" was one of his realisations post-diagnosis. Over time, however, he came to see Twitter as a '*landi* channel,' which can be understood as both a channel where users can flirt with others

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<sup>22</sup> Although Vic emerged as a prominent user in the network, he was ineligible to be recruited as a case participant since he served as a member of the research advisory team (see Chapter 3).

and one where they can find sexual release. Dominic also credits Twitter as the platform where he met his significant other, whose Twitter handle is nestled between two heart emojis in his Twitter bio.

Dominic's account illustrates that beyond fostering friendships, Twitter serves as a platform for users to establish intimate connections. Noah discloses that when his followers spiked, many Twitter alters reached out to him, expressing that they were 'open to collab.' This phrase is understood within the alter community as an invitation to team up with another Twitter user to engage in amateur pornography. Noah admits that although he is open to casual sex, he is unwilling to film their encounters to be circulated on Twitter. This is unlike some participants, whose stories will be shared shortly.

"Of course I have sexual needs," confesses Ben, noting that Twitter is a suitable platform for screening users who match his preferences. In fact, when seeking intimate encounters, Twitter is his platform of choice: "Twitter is the new Grindr<sup>23</sup>, as they say." Ben shares that he rebrands himself annually; in 2022, he embraced a 'daddy image' and frequently posted about 'baby boys' aged 20–26 years old with whom he had sexual encounters. Ben deliberately restricts his sexual connections to a small pool, stating "I don't

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<sup>23</sup> Grindr is a geosocial dating app designed for men who have sex with men.

want to jump from one bed to another." Furthermore, he ensures that his sexual partners are aware of his HIV status at the outset.

Like Ben, Gio compares Twitter with Grindr, confessing, "I get hook-ups from Twitter." When he receives a sexual advance via direct message and is interested, he sets up a meeting. What makes Gio's case different from Ben's is that Gio is in a relationship, and a serodiscordant<sup>24</sup> one at that. He admits to cheating on his partner, stating: "What he doesn't know won't hurt [him]." Despite having an undetectable HIV status, Gio experiences discomfort during sex with his partner due to ongoing worries about transmission. Consequently, he seeks sexual partners from the FMLWH community on Twitter. By doing so, Gio alleviates the mental strain of transmission concerns and avoids potential unease associated with having sex with FMLWH.

Before, Gio used Grindr but found it less appealing, recalling that his hook-ups tended to be rather transactional encounters. Nowadays, Gio uses Twitter to hook up exclusively with FMLWH: "The way I look at my hook-ups with [FMLWH], you know, it's a brotherhood." Gio asserts that he has reached an age where he no longer seeks sex as a form of release. By hooking up with 'blood brothers,' he fulfils the need for a specific physical touch and experiences mental satisfaction from engaging in sex with someone who

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<sup>24</sup> In a serodiscordant relationship, one partner is HIV-positive while the other is HIV-negative.

understands his situation. Gio's narrative exemplifies Labov's narrative structure, with his hesitation to have sex with his HIV-negative partner serving as the complication and his decision to engage in sexual activity with fellow PLWH as the resolution.

Collectively, these stories reaffirm the role of Twitter in fulfilling interpersonal needs among FMLWH, this time with a focus on sexual connection. Firstly, Twitter plays a role in facilitating intimate encounters with other users, a topic that has been explored in previous literature (Cao, 2021; Piamonte et al., 2020). Secondly, Twittering opens discourse on sexual possibilities for PLWH, as reflected in Dominic's realisation that HIV diagnosis is not synonymous to a sexually unfulfilling life, and Gio's choice to engage in sex with fellow PLWH, motivated by the fear that he might infect his HIV-negative partner.

It needs to be clarified that participants' practices of hooking up with other Twitter users and engaging with sexually explicit content on Twitter are not exclusive to FMLWH. These accounts support earlier research, indicating that Twitter serves as a platform where individuals feel comfortable expressing their sexuality and emotions they may otherwise suppress (Cao, 2021; Piamonte et al., 2020). These practices also align with Wignall's (2017: 25) notion of 'socio-sexual networking sites,' acknowledging Twitter's role in fostering communication while also providing opportunities for sexual engagement. Moreover, these stories may be read as 'counteracting narratives,' which challenge dominant perspectives of living with HIV (Squire, 2013). For instance, these narratives refute the notion that an HIV diagnosis equates to a life without intimacy (Treichler, 1999: 12) and

that PLWH struggle with negative body image (Alexias et al., 2016; Tate and George, 2001). Overall, these stories illustrate the role of Twittering in providing an avenue for PLWH to find sexual contentment and confidently showcase their bodies to their extensive online audience.

***Twittering as freedom.*** Building upon participants' narratives of how they stumbled upon Twitter, the activities they undertake on the platform, and its significance in their lives, a common thread running through their accounts is that Twittering offers them a sense of freedom. Therefore, this theme underpins the other pragmatic functions that Twitter serves FMLWH. Participants associated the feeling of liberation they experienced on Twitter with their performance of identities, the nature of content they share on the platform, and their perception of how imagined audiences would react to their tweets.

Participants with an 'alter poz' account find that the anonymity provided by Twitter allows them to engage more openly on the platform. Greg captures this idea succinctly: "Even if you're an alter, when you tweet, no one knows it's you." Owen is more candid on Twitter because he has carefully protected his 'real'-life identity on the platform. "I have the mask of anonymity," he explains. Owen also likens Twitter to a microphone that allows him to broadcast his authentic thoughts, stating "The things I can't say... as my real self, this is the platform that I can express it." Similarly, Dong believes that Twitter enables him to reveal aspects of himself that he cannot display elsewhere: "This is where I bring out my other personality that I don't show to the general public or to the people around me." For

Ozzy, who maintains a single 'legitimate' Twitter account, anonymity is a key affordance of Twitter that appeals to PLWH, allowing them to "unload their emotions, their opinions, without being judged."

Many participants found it inevitable to refer to Facebook when discussing the role of Twitter in their life. Specifically, the presence of family and friends on Facebook restricts the thoughts they share on the platform and the extent to which they share them. Nick contends that PLWH are more engaged on Twitter because HIV-related stigmas are prevalent on Facebook. Drawing from his own experience, he recognises the persistent need to debunk HIV misconceptions with his parents, who are part of his Facebook network. These include misconceptions that sharing utensils and undergoing facial treatments could lead to HIV transmission:

**Nick:** ...the certain stigma is still there that you still need to inform your parents that it's okay to share plates and utensils here, that [HIV] is not contagious through saliva; you need to, uhm, remind them from time to time. Sometimes... you don't know if it's because they're old or they haven't really absorbed that it's okay, that it's no problem, that it's okay to get a facial... the needle is for one-time use only; needles used cannot be recycled... you need to educate them that you can live a normal life.

*(...andoon pa rin 'yung certain stigma din na kailangan mo pa rin i-inform 'yung parents mo na okay lang mag-share ka ng kustara't tinidor dito, na hindi siya nakakahawa through saliva, na kailangan mo siyang, uhm, pagsabihan from time to time. Kasi minsan... hindi mo alam kung dahil matanda na o hindi pa niya masyado ma-absorb na okay lang 'to, walang problema, na okay lang magpa-facial ka... one time use 'yung needle diyan, hindi puwedeng i-recycle ang needles diyan... kailangan mo siyang educate na you can live a normal life, ang ganitong tao.)*

Engaging with Twitter acts as a way for FMLWH to disconnect from Facebook and, by extension, individuals who may not be as receptive to HIV-related content. Noah recounts that Twitter was the platform where he openly shared his journey with HIV, starting from his diagnosis to his journey toward recovery. Kyle echoes Noah's sentiments on projecting a curated image on Facebook, attributing this behaviour to the close-minded views of some Facebook users toward living with HIV. "I can't be my 100% authentic Twitter self on Facebook," he admits. While Kyle's immediate family and close friends know about his condition, others do not, thereby limiting his Facebook posts to "only the funny stuff, only the sanitised stuff." Further, because "Facebook is a different kind of beast," Kyle confines his HIV-related posts to Twitter.

The practice of curation was also apparent in other participants' stories. For instance, Jesson confesses to maintaining a cleaner image on Facebook: "I'm reserved on Facebook because a lot of family members are following [me]." Diego finds that he is more expressive on Twitter, stating "I can say everything I want." However, he opts to be less vocal on Facebook due to the anticipated negativity from family members. Meanwhile, Ben reveals, "if there are things that I want to savour, very important, very significant things, uh, that I don't my friends and my relatives to know, I put them on Twitter." Ironically, this approach keeps these individuals ostensibly in his inner circle unaware of his personal milestones. In much the same way, Fred feels that Twitter is an 'escape' where he does not

feel compelled to be discerning about his posts, primarily because he encounters fewer individuals from his 'real'-life circle on the platform:

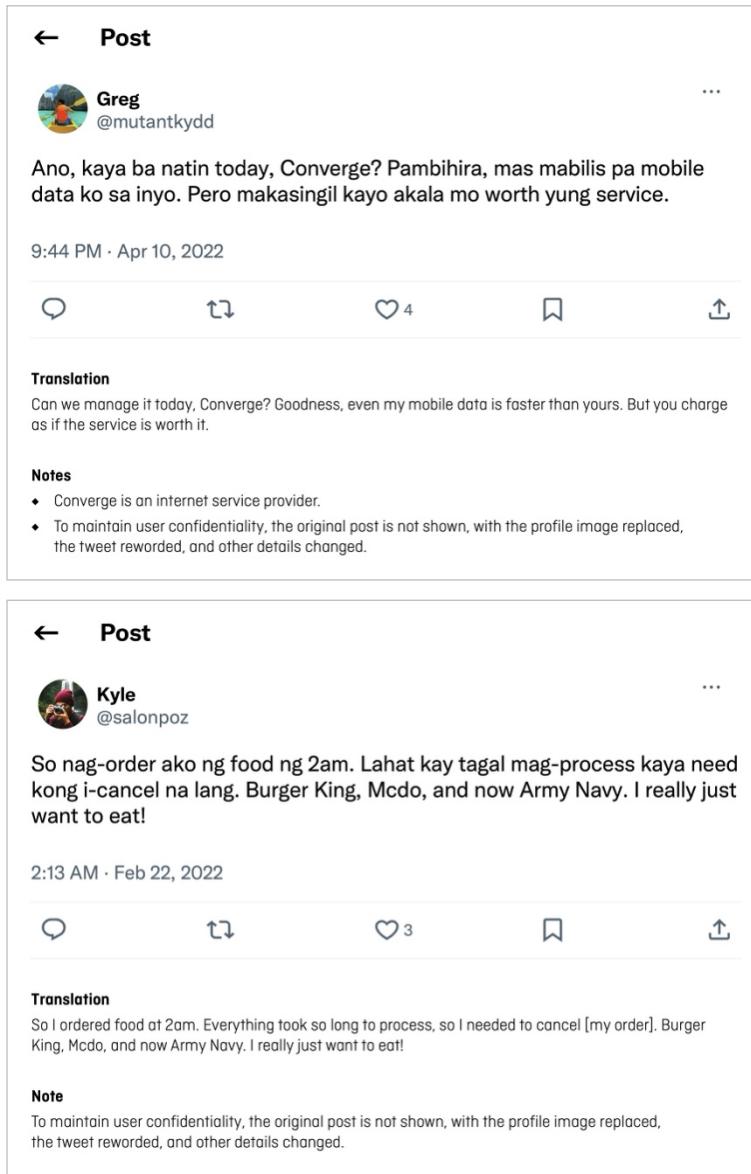
**Fred:** Twitter tends to be my escape. It's where I can truly be myself because on Facebook, my friends there are a mix, like, I have relatives, church mates, previous friends from grade school, high school, college, and friends from [redacted for privacy] and all that. So I tend to curate what I post on Facebook compared to what I post on Twitter, where I feel like I can tweet what I want.

*(Twitter tends to be my escape eh. It tends to be where I can be who I really am kasi on Facebook, halo-halo rin yung friends doon, like, I have friends there na relatives ko, friends there na church mates, previous friends from grade school, high school, college, and 'yung friends -- mga naging friends ko sa [redacted for privacy] and all that. So parang I tend to curate what I post on Facebook compared to what I post on Twitter na I feel like I can tweet what I want.)*

Participants championed Twitter as a platform that encourages freedom of expression. Dong asserts, "You can be what you want to be" while Jairo maintains, "You just post what you want to say." With Twitter allowing FMLWH to be, as Gio puts it, 'less filtered,' what topics do they tend to tweet about? Several participants confessed to posting rants on Twitter. Jesson explains that ranting is cathartic: "When I was at my lowest point, I just really wanted to, like, you know, vent it all out, express what I was feeling through words without having to talk to anyone." When asked what he accomplishes by ranting on Twitter, Jesson laughs: "Most likely nothing. I just want to share."

For Noah, Twitter serves as an outlet to rant about the government. Other participants like Greg and Kyle took to Twitter to express their frustrations with subpar

service from local businesses (refer to Figure 28). Recalling a time when he was experiencing connectivity issues, Greg called out his internet service provider on Twitter. “I was so annoyed because the WiFi kept disconnecting. They have the nerve to charge so much, but the service is terrible.” Meanwhile, Kyle’s inability to order fast food for delivery drove him to vent on Twitter: “I ordered from Foodpanda at that time and because I was on a night shift, it was okay to wait. From 2am, I tried those three fast food joints, not at the same time but one after the other. After one hour and thirty minutes of unsuccessfully trying to order, I just had to cancel it. I lost my appetite.” When asked why he did not tag Foodpanda or the fast-food chains he named in his post, Kyle elaborates that the social media managers of corporate accounts rarely respond to customer complaints. In this case, the intention behind his tweet was not to call the attention of these companies but to simply share his experience: “I just turned it into a punchline,” Kyle explains.



**Post**

**Greg** @mutantkydd

Ano, kaya ba natin today, Converge? Pambahira, mas mabilis pa mobile data ko sa inyo. Pero makasingil kayo akala mo worth yung service.

9:44 PM · Apr 10, 2022

Translation: Can we manage it today, Converge? Goodness, even my mobile data is faster than yours. But you charge as if the service is worth it.

Notes:

- Converge is an internet service provider.
- To maintain user confidentiality, the original post is not shown, with the profile image replaced, the tweet reworded, and other details changed.

**Post**

**Kyle** @salonpoz

So nag-order ako ng food ng 2am. Lahat kay tagal mag-process kaya need kong i-cancel na lang. Burger King, Mcdo, and now Army Navy. I really just want to eat!

2:13 AM · Feb 22, 2022

Translation: So I ordered food at 2am. Everything took so long to process, so I needed to cancel [my order]. Burger King, Mcdo, and now Army Navy. I really just want to eat!

Note:

To maintain user confidentiality, the original post is not shown, with the profile image replaced, the tweet reworded, and other details changed.

Figure 28. Sample tweets showing rants

Besides venting, participants expressed that they felt free to share trivial events on Twitter without facing judgment from others. Liam stresses that participating on Twitter is guided by the unwritten rule “walang pakialamanan,” roughly translating to “mind your own business.” Gio contends that mundane, slice-of-life moments are better suited to

Twitter than Facebook and Instagram. When someone attempted to reset his password on Twitter, he promptly tweeted about it without any second-guessing. “I’m still anonymous so, I just expressed it. I just threw it out to the universe. Most of my posts, I just throw out to the universe. They are not intended for anybody else,” he elaborates. Meanwhile, a single-word tweet Ben posted in April 2022—‘pagodt’<sup>25</sup>—bore more weight than anticipated. This Filipino word for ‘tired’ encapsulated his emotional turmoil post-breakup. Ben narrates: “I had developed intense emotions about leaving that relationship. We broke up as early as January but then we became on and off, back and forth. I was positively drained.” Like Gio’s reasoning earlier, Twitter served as an outlet for Ben to express his heightened emotions in the moment. However, what distinguishes Ben’s approach is that he did not feel compelled to elaborate on his feelings; a concise tweet was enough. Gio and Ben’s tweets showing slice-of-life content are presented in Figure 29.

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<sup>25</sup> The actual Filipino term for ‘tired’ is ‘pagod.’ However, youngsters on social media have popularised the practice of appending the letter ‘t’ to words ending in ‘d’ for emphasis. Other examples are ‘sadt’ for ‘sad,’ ‘cancelledt’ for ‘cancelled,’ and ‘boredt’ for ‘bored.’

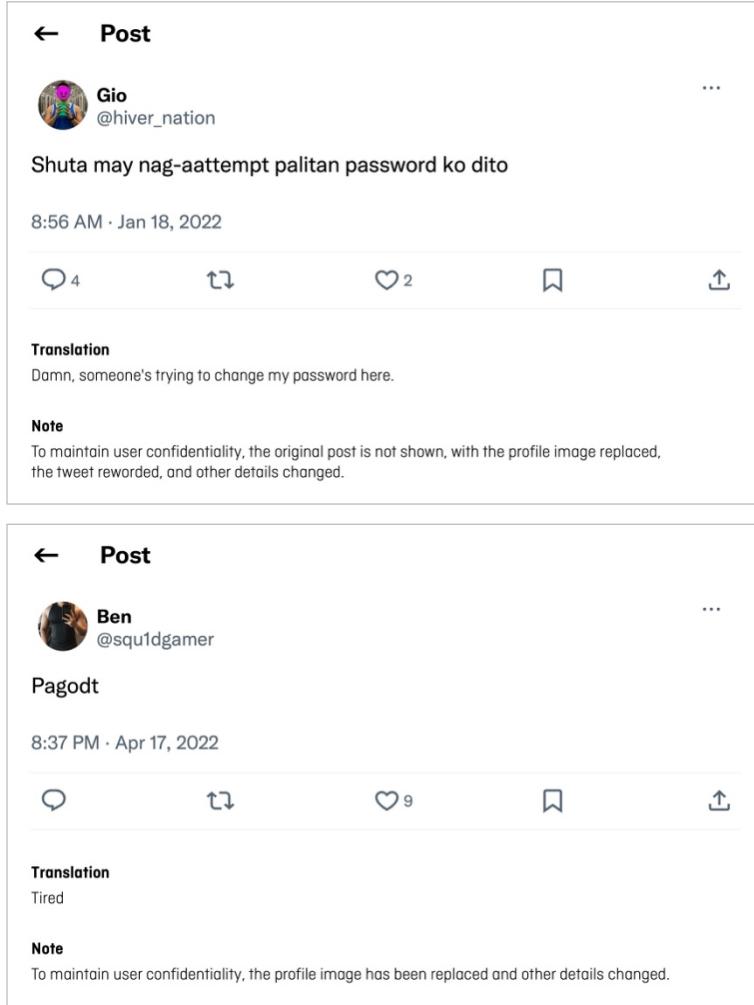


Figure 29. Sample tweets showing slice-of-life content

Much more than just serving as an outlet for their thoughts, participants repeatedly described Twitter as a ‘safe space’ where they felt comfortable expressing themselves to the network they have established. As an example, Dong believes that Twitter audiences are much more engaged than those on Facebook. Additionally, he does not feel anxious about expressing his thoughts on Twitter: “For me, on Twitter there’s no hint whatsoever of, what do you call this, panic? That maybe, I said something wrong, and I might hear something

unpleasant from someone." Similarly, Sandro regards Twitter as the 'safest space' for sharing stories that might not be received well on Facebook. He feels that the friends he follows and those who follow him simply grasp the contents of his posts. Despite his limited Twitter activity during the period of analysis, Winchel acknowledges Twitter as a space where he can inform others that he is adhering to HIV treatment, maintains an undetectable status, and is thriving in life as a PLWH. For him, what makes Twitter a safe space is the community of PLWH that it hosts. "It is the only platform that I can be an HIV-positive person and not be afraid of people knowing about it," he comments. Furthermore, he considers the PLWH community on Twitter to be a haven, where members are open to content that would likely provoke unfavourable reactions on platforms like Facebook or Instagram:

**Winchel:** I've found out that the connection between 'blood brothers' in Twitter is really strong, in a sense that there's no bias regardless of what content you post. It doesn't matter if you post, like, nudity stuff on Twitter or you just post updates on Twitter; you won't get the prejudice that you would get if you posted it in, like, Facebook or Instagram. I think that's mostly the reason why I say that it's a safe space is because of that exact reason right there.

As Fred recounted his engagement with the platform since his HIV diagnosis, he could not help but ponder the vital role Twitter plays in his life. "I wouldn't think that I would survive my day-to-day life without Twitter," he recognises. It was through Twitter that he was able to interact with other users without any barriers to expressing his 'true' self. In Fred's words, "I felt freedom on Twitter, thinking 'oh my god, I can be myself here.'"

Ultimately, the core ideal of freedom underpinned participants' social practices surrounding Twittering. Freedom was most evident in three key aspects. Firstly, Twitter, unlike Facebook with its familiar social circles, functioned as a platform for open and stigma-free conversations regarding HIV. Secondly, Twitter, in contrast to Facebook's emphasis on curated profiles, allowed participants to present a more authentic version of themselves. Thirdly, the platform's anonymity, along with its perception as a 'safe space,' empowered participants to express themselves openly without anticipating negative consequences. As Noah articulated, "we created this account to be free," succinctly capturing this sentiment shared by participants about Twitter.

#### **6.4 Conclusion**

In this chapter, the results of the second study conducted for this online ethnography were outlined. Drawing insights from the technobiographies of 24 participants—encompassing both highly prominent and less prominent users—the study honed in on the pragmatic functions of engaging with Twitter, as proposed by Lomborg (2014) in her genre-based framework for social media. Thematic narrative analysis revealed a rich tapestry of stories, documenting participants' entry points to Twitter and their discovery of the online community of Filipinos living with HIV. The study further examined their communicative practices on the platform, highlighting the role of Twittering in their

lived experiences as FMLWH. The following recurring narratives emerged from the analysis:

1. Pre-existing Twitter accounts were common, with a secondary 'alter poz' or pseudonymous account created post-HIV diagnosis to connect with other Filipinos living with HIV. They primarily engaged with Twitter to interact with similar users.
2. Twittering emerged as a dynamic practice, evolving with the participants' HIV journey. Initially, peer support was a primary function, but over time, the focus shifted toward social connection and potentially, intimate relationships, within the 'alter poz' space.
3. Participants' narratives surrounding Twittering revolved around the pursuit of freedom. They viewed Twitter as an escape from the negativity associated with Facebook, as well as their family and friends who were active there. Twitter also functioned as a 'safe space,' allowing them to express themselves openly without the fear of stigmatisation. Furthermore, Twitter fostered connections with fellow PLWH, offering a unique platform for relationships that might not have developed in conventional settings like their treatment centre.

These technobiographies illuminated the continuous negotiation of meaning through Twittering, a techno-social practice that has become embedded in the lives of FMLWH. The third and final study in this ethnography, centred on Twitter content, is detailed in Chapter 7.

## CHAPTER 7

### CONNECTED PRESENCE IN 280 CHARACTERS: TEXTUAL FEATURES AND CLASSIFICATION OF TWITTER CONTENT

#### 7.1 Introduction

Following the analyses of user composition (Chapters 4 & 5) and pragmatic function (Chapter 6) within Lomborg's (2014) genre-based framework for social media, this chapter shifts its focus to the content and style of Twitter content generated by users identifying as Filipino men living with HIV (FMLWH). An exploratory sequential mixed-methods study was undertaken to analyse two aspects: firstly, the thematic orientations of tweets and Twitter bios; and secondly, the stylistic qualities characterising communication on Twitter among FMLWH. The specific objectives of the study were to:

1. *Describe the textual features of Twitter content.*
  - a. *Twitter bios*
  - b. *Original tweets*
2. *Uncover how these users describe themselves in their Twitter bio.*
3. *Classify these users' Twitter bio content based on the framework developed.*
4. *Uncover the types of tweets posted by these users.*
5. *Classify these users' tweets based on the framework developed.*

## 7.2 Methodology

### 7.2.1 Research Design

Similar to the study on composition, this content analysis was designed as an exploratory sequential mixed-methods study (QUAL → QUANT). In this type of design, mixing methods is done in chronological fashion wherein findings from the qualitative component inform the subsequent quantitative study (Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2009: 137). The dearth in literature on social media profile work and tweet content classification necessitated the implementation of this type of mixed-methods design. During the qualitative phase, a small sample of tweets and Twitter bios was analysed to draw out categories. After which, qualitative findings were used to develop two codebooks, which were then pilot-tested and revised before being employed in the ensuing quantitative study. This time, independent coders performed directed content analysis on a larger sample of tweets and Twitter bios. A diagram of the study's exploratory sequential mixed-methods design is shown in Figure 30.

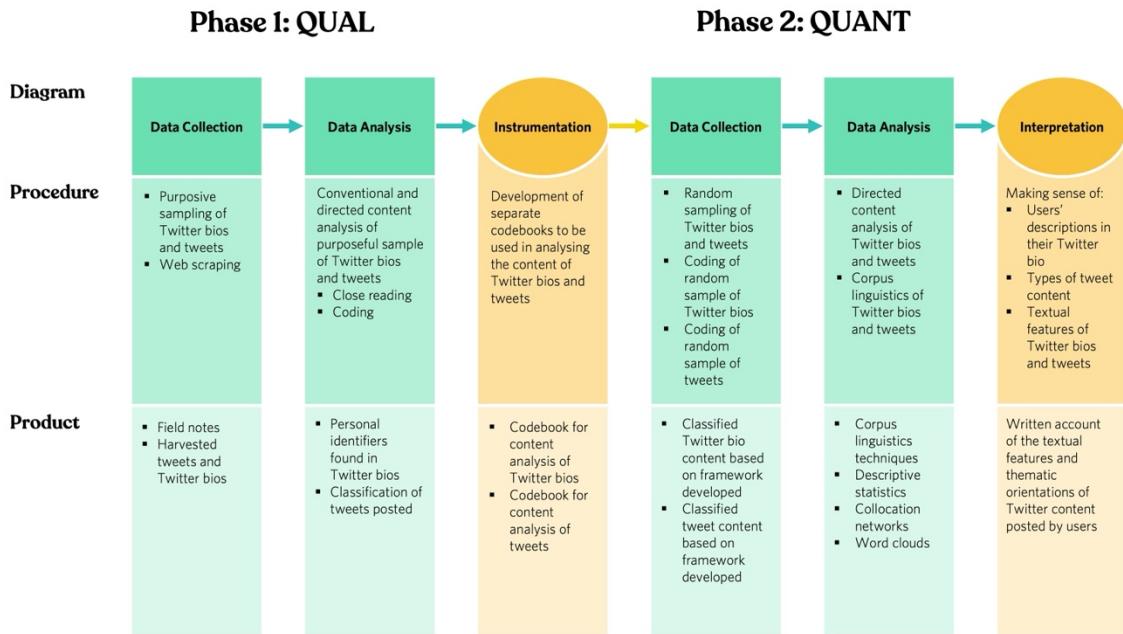


Figure 30. Exploratory sequential mixed-methods design of Study 3

A generally accepted procedure for content analysis involves five key steps: 1) formulation of the research problem; 2) selection of sample; 3) definition of categories; 4) training of coders; and 5) analysis and interpretation of data (McMillan, 2000). The subsequent discussion details the procedures undertaken for steps 2–5.

## 7.2.2 Selection of Sample

For this content analysis, the sampling strategy was aimed at obtaining a statistically significant sample of tweets and Twitter bios posted by users representing each of the four

personas identified in the composition study. In this regard, sampling was done in two phases: firstly, sampling Twitter users, and secondly, sampling tweets and Twitter bios.

**Sampling Twitter users.** For both qualitative and quantitative phases, eligible Twitter users were screened against inclusion and exclusion criteria. Primarily, these users must have been listed among the 1,447 verified candidate users identified in the first study. Exclusion conditions included actions like switching from a public to a protected Twitter account, account deactivation, and disabling direct messaging. For detailed information on inclusion and exclusion criteria, please refer to Table 16.

**Table 16. Inclusion, exclusion, and withdrawal criteria for sampling Twitter accounts**

<b>INCLUSION CRITERION</b>	<b>EXCLUSION CRITERION</b>	<b>WITHDRAWAL CRITERION</b>
<p>Both conditions must be satisfied:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Must be a Twitter user with indications of being FMLWH in his profile bio, Twitter handle, display name, or tweets</li> <li>2. Must have a public account</li> </ol>	<p>Any one of the conditions must be satisfied:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Account switched to 'protected' at the time of contacting user</li> <li>2. Account deactivated or suspended at the time of contacting user</li> <li>3. Account with direct messaging disabled at the time of contacting user</li> <li>4. Account of member of research advisory team</li> <li>5. Account already sampled for qualitative analysis</li> <li>6. Declines request to analyse Twitter profile and timeline</li> <li>7. Unresponsive to request after two attempts of reaching out</li> </ol>	<p>Twitter user voluntarily withdraws his Twitter timeline and profile from analysis up to one week after obtaining initial consent.</p>

Like Study 2 (pragmatic function), purposive sampling was done for the qualitative study, with genre competence being the criterion for sampling Twitter users. The most prominent users were targeted, as they were deemed the most knowledgeable in the practice of Twittering, capable of “enacting the genre competently, according to already established conventions” (Lomborg, 2014: 22). Owing to their popularity, activity, and prestige metrics, these ‘genre experts’ were considered authoritative sources of Twitter content in the form of tweets and Twitter bios. From October to November 2022, the 43 most prominent users identified in the composition study were contacted to obtain their permission to include their Twitter bio and a small sample of their original tweets in the content analysis. In total, 25 account owners provided their informed consent.

For the quantitative study, the sample size of Twitter users was computed using the following formula:

$$n = \frac{Z_{\alpha/2}^2 PQ}{e^2 + \frac{Z_{\alpha/2}^2 PQ}{N}}$$

Where:

- $Z_{\alpha/2}^2$  is the abscissa of the standard normal distribution given a 95% confidence interval;
- N is the population size;
- P is the proportion of a major characteristic of interest;
- Q is  $1 - P$ ; and
- e is the margin of error.

To achieve a conservative estimate of population variability, the sample size was computed with  $P$  set to 0.50. Given the exploratory nature of this study and considering that these Twitter users comprised a hard-to-reach population, a level of precision of 10% was deemed acceptable, yielding a sample size of 91 Twitter users. With the sample size determined, the next step was to draw a proportionate number of Twitter users from each of the four personas generated in Study 1 (composition). To review, the four personas are:

1. 'Happy to just tweet' ( $N = 54$ , 4%), comprised of users who rated high in expression but low in connectivity and prestige
2. 'Happy to just be tagged' ( $N = 76$ , 5%), comprised of users who rated high in prestige but low in expression and connectivity
3. 'Happy to just network' ( $N = 445$ , 31%), comprised of users who rated high in connectivity but low in expression and prestige
4. 'Happy to just be on Twitter' ( $N = 872$ , 60%), comprised of users who rated low in expression, connectivity, and prestige

Because achieving a 100% response rate is rare, Bryman and Bell (2019) recommend adjusting the computed sample size based on the predicted non-response rate. The non-response rate for this study was ascertained by considering the sample size allocation per cluster and insights obtained from participant recruitment in the earlier study (see Chapter 6). It was noted that a substantial proportion of the sample was to be comprised of the least prominent Twitter users exhibiting the persona 'happy to just be on Twitter.' In the previous study, recruiting participants from this cluster proved challenging, evident in a

response rate of only 9%. To substantially increase the likelihood of enlisting the target number of Twitter users, the initial sample size of 91 was quadrupled to 366, a manageable number of account owners that could be contacted within a two-month period.

Samples were drawn using a random number generator. From May to June 2023, identified users were contacted via direct messaging on Twitter to request permission for the inclusion of their Twitter bio and a small sample of their original tweets in the content analysis. A total of 146 Twitter users—approximately 60% more than the original sample size of 91—consented to having their Twitter bio and a sample of their tweets content-analysed. The following list shows the final allocation of Twitter users per cluster:

1. ‘Happy to just tweet’ ( $N = 54$ , 4%): 9 Twitter users
2. ‘Happy to just be tagged’ ( $N = 76$ , 5%): 7 Twitter users
3. ‘Happy to just network’ ( $N = 445$ , 31%): 55 Twitter users
4. ‘Happy to just be on Twitter’ ( $N = 872$ , 60%): 75 Twitter users

***Sampling tweets and Twitter bios.*** As discussed in Chapter 5, Twitter data belonging to the 1,447 users identified were scraped by accessing the Twitter API through the R package *rtweet*. For this study, data collection mainly entailed culling tweets and Twitter bios from the archive. The content analysis included solely the Twitter content posted by users who had consented to the study.

The primary focus of this study was on original tweets authored by verified candidate users. With the aim of highlighting more substantive content, it was decided to exclude retweets, quote tweets, and conversational tweets from the analysis. Table 17 shows the inclusion and exclusion criteria applied in sampling tweets.

**Table 17. Inclusion and exclusion criteria for sampling tweets**

<b>INCLUSION CRITERION</b>	<b>EXCLUSION CRITERION</b>
Tweet posted by verified candidate user between 21 October 2021 and 21 April 2022	Any one of the conditions must be satisfied: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Tweet posted by member of research advisory team</li> <li>2. Duplicate tweet</li> <li>3. Tweet that contains no text</li> <li>4. Tweet written in a language other than English or Tagalog</li> <li>5. Retweet</li> <li>6. Quote tweet</li> <li>7. @reply to other Twitter user/s</li> <li>8. Tweet posted by user who has since withdrawn from the study</li> </ol>

A complete enumeration of available Twitter bios belonging to the sampled users was extracted: 25 for the qualitative study and 142 for the quantitative study. Although all 146 account owners posted tweets during the period of analysis, four of them did not include a bio of themselves in their Twitter profile. Despite this, they were retained as part of the sample because the absence of a Twitter bio was not treated as an exclusion condition.

Meanwhile, 10 randomly sampled original tweets were pulled from each Twitter user in the sample. If users authored fewer than 10 tweets meeting inclusion criteria, all their

tweets were extracted. In the qualitative phase, 248 tweets were sampled, and in the subsequent quantitative phase, the dataset expanded to 1,268 tweets. To circumvent the Hawthorne effect<sup>26</sup>, only posts published before the recruitment period were considered, comprising tweets posted from 21 October 2021 to 21 April 2022 and Twitter bios as of 21 April 2022.

In summary, the sampling strategy for the quantitative phase of this content analysis was done in two stages (see Figure 31). The first stage involved the selection of Twitter users, while the second stage focused on sampling tweets and Twitter bios. A total of 146 Twitter users provided their consent to include their Twitter bio and 10 random tweets they had posted in the analysis. The final corpus for analysis consisted of 142 Twitter bios and 1,268 original tweets.

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<sup>26</sup> The Hawthorne effect describes how the behaviour of human subjects may be affected when researchers make their presence known (O'Reilly, 2012: 93).

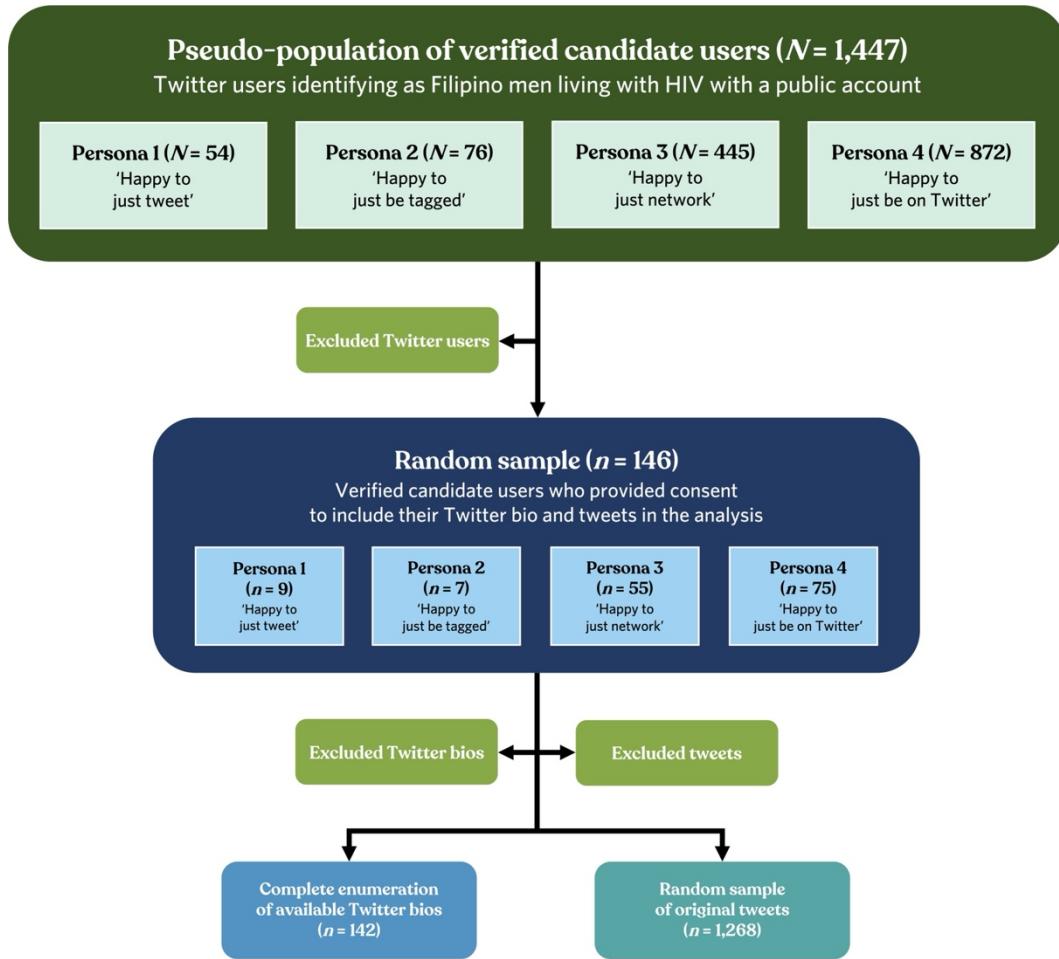


Figure 31. Sampling strategy for Study 3

### 7.2.3 Definition of Categories

Prior to analysis, the coding and context units were defined. The coding unit is the tiniest content segment subjected to counting and scoring, while the context unit refers to the material encompassing this coding unit (Budd, Thorpe, and Donohew, 1967, as cited in McMillan, 2000). Given that the Twitter content to be analysed consisted of naturally

occurring verbal data, it was logical to segment each language stream into t-units, defined by Geisler and Swarts (2019: 73) as “the smallest group of words which can make a move in language.” In genre analysis, a move is a rhetorical unit “that performs a coherent communicative function in a written or spoken discourse” (Swales, 2004: 228). Swales (2004) adds that because a move may be expressed in as short as a clause or as long as a paragraph, it constitutes a functional rather than a formal unit of language. In this respect, a t-unit is regarded as a linguistic element that not only imparts information but also carries out a communicative action (Wood and Kroger, 2000).

In this content analysis, each t-unit was regarded as a coding unit, with the tweet or Twitter bio functioning as the context unit. At the time of the research, tweets had a maximum character limit of 280, while Twitter bios were capped at 160 characters. Treating each t-unit as the coding unit was imperative, as tweets and Twitter bios could encompass multiple t-units.

To illustrate, while a single tweet may serve as a self-contained t-unit (Figure 32), it may also be segmented into multiple t-units, as can be seen in Figure 33. Here, the tweet features two distinct utterances, each one highlighted for emphasis. The first utterance (*Hi blood brothers!*) functions as a ceremonial greeting addressed to the user’s followers. Meanwhile, the question that follows (*Anyone here been out of the country lately?*) operates as

an information-seeking statement. Because it serves a different purpose, it is treated as a distinct t-unit to be subjected to coding.



Figure 32. Sample tweet with one utterance



Figure 33. Sample tweet with two utterances

#### **7.2.4 Training of Coders**

Four independent coders were recruited for the quantitative phase of the content analysis. In selecting coders, Krippendorff (2004: 128) underscores the importance of attending to coders' background and competence in reading texts. Considering this, the coders were chosen deliberately, considering shared characteristics such as: 1) male gender; 2) age group; 3) graduation with a Bachelor of Science degree in Development Communication; and 4) current employment in the development sector. Opting to recruit male coders was a purposeful decision, taking into account that the tweets and Twitter bios earmarked for coding were produced by Twitter users who identify as men. Even with the application of a standardised coding manual, the recruitment of coders exclusively from a male demographic with a background in communication and development work was deemed beneficial for enhancing code consistency. For practical considerations, a team of three coders was assigned to handle each dataset. Specifically, Coders 1, 2, and 3 handled the coding of Twitter bios, while Coders 1, 2, and 4 undertook the coding of tweets.

Firstly, the coders attended an orientation on HIV, which was facilitated by an HIV Counsellor from the Philippine Department of Health. This session served to equip the coders with basic knowledge on HIV transmission and treatment, the state of the HIV epidemic in the Philippines, and common terminologies associated with living with HIV. Following this, the coders received training on using the draft codebook. Furthermore,

supplementary orientation videos were produced to guide the coders through the revised iterations of the coding manuals.

### **7.2.5 Analysis and Interpretation of Data**

*Qualitative phase.* Individual PDF files containing tweets and Twitter bios were imported into NVivo (version 1.7.1) for hand-coding. Utilising reflexive thematic analysis, tweets and Twitter bios were described and organised into categories. Specifically, Braun and Clarke (2022) approach to thematic analysis provided a roadmap for examining Twitter content. At the preliminary juncture of this mixed-methods study, thematic analysis was undertaken to “explore and develop an understanding of patterned meaning across the dataset” (Braun et al., 2019: 848). Given the sparse literature on the analysis of Twitter content in general and, more specifically, content generated by a vulnerable population, Braun and Clarke’s (2022) framework was well-suited to the ‘theme-ing’ of Twitter posts. Said authors’ thematic analysis approach consists of the following six steps: 1) familiarising oneself with the data; 2) coding; 3) generating initial themes; 4) developing and reviewing themes; 5) refining, defining, and naming themes; and 6) writing up the analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2022: 45–46). Overall, flexibility was a key feature of Braun and Clarke’s (2022) approach, offering guidelines instead of strict rules in the thematic analysis of qualitative data.

Coding during the qualitative phase was not an end in itself, as the resulting coding scheme was intended to be used as a framework for directed content analysis in the ensuing quantitative phase. According to Saldaña (2016: 72), coding in mixed-methods studies must pay attention to how qualitative data may be transformed into measurable units fit for quantitative analysis. Considering the study goals of uncovering how Twitter users describe themselves in their Twitter bio and the types of tweets they post, thematic analysis focused on provisional, descriptive, and process coding.

For practical reasons, provisional coding was performed first on tweets and Twitter bios using existing frameworks on categorising Twitter content. According to Saldaña (2016: 169), provisional coding is appropriate for qualitative studies that seek to build on or validate insights derived from previous related research. For the coding of Twitter bios, an initial coding scheme was drafted by drawing upon the analysis of social identities done by Pathak et al. (2021) and Priante et al. (2016). Alongside this, Twitter content classification systems formulated by Dann (2015), Lee et al. (2014), and Shaffer et al. (2013) guided the preliminary round of coding tweets. With the goal of ascertaining how well the corpus of Twitter content aligned with established classification frameworks, provisional coding was performed via directed content analysis. In this type of approach, analysis follows a systematic process, employing coding based on categories derived from existing theories or prior research (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005: 1281).

This first round of coding showed that existing frameworks were generally adaptable to Twitter content generated by users who identify as FMLWH. For instance, *personal descriptors* and *affiliations* (Pathak et al., 2021) were found to be fairly stable categories in analysing Twitter bio descriptions. Similarly, the broader categories in Dann's (2015) Twitter content classification system were represented in the types of tweets in the corpus. Nevertheless, a considerable quantity of descriptions in Twitter bios and utterances in tweets did not fit neatly within predefined categories. A plausible explanation is that the classification frameworks that served as a basis for coding emerged from an analysis of English- and Spanish-written content. The limitations of these schemes became apparent when applied to tweets written in Filipino and a combination of Filipino and English. Additionally, cultural nuances related to self-presentation on social media and microblogging could have imposed constraints on the extensive utility of these frameworks. Considering these findings, conventional content analysis was necessary to allow unique categories to emerge from the corpus of Twitter data.

During conventional content analysis, descriptive and process coding augmented the provisional codes used in the preliminary round of classifying tweets and Twitter bios. Descriptive coding was undertaken as an exercise in aboutness by determining the topic of Twitter content. Meanwhile, process coding focused on human actions rather than topics (Saldaña, 2016: 102 & 111). Where descriptive coding answered the question, "What is this utterance about?" process coding addressed the query, "What is the intended function of

this utterance?" Descriptive coding was primarily employed in the examination of Twitter bio content, while process coding took a more central role in the analysis of tweets. Coding was conducted iteratively until a stable coding scheme was reached for the subsequent quantitative analysis.

***Quantitative phase.*** A central aim of the content analysis was achieving substantial intercoder reliability, defined by Riffe et al. (2024: 118) as "consistency among coders in applying a protocol to categorize content." To generate reliable data, the study adhered to good practices put forth by Krippendorff (2004: 217), including the definition of coder selection criteria, independent coding work, and the use of a comprehensive coding manual.

As discussed, a three-member team of independent coders performed directed content analysis on a larger sample of tweets and Twitter bios. In so doing, these coders utilised coding manuals developed from the previous qualitative phase. Reliability was assessed twice for the coding of Twitter bios and thrice for the coding of tweets. Testing was conducted initially on a small sample of tweets and Twitter bios and subsequently on the complete set. Krippendorff's alpha ( $\alpha$ ) was chosen as the reliability measure for its applicability to any number of coders, to a range of sample sizes, and to different levels of measurement (Krippendorff, 2004: 222). Krippendorff's  $\alpha$  is expressed in the following basic formula:

$$\alpha = 1 - \frac{D_o}{D_e}$$

Where:

$D_o$  is the measure of observed disagreement; and

$D_e$  is measure of the disagreement that can be expected due to coincidence (Krippendorff, 2004: 222).

In a pilot test, coders independently examined a sample of 30 Twitter bios and 100 tweets. After which, intercoder agreement was computed to test the reliability of the coding schemes. After the pilot test, threats to reliability were addressed by improving code definitions, collapsing and merging codes, and retraining the coders. A final reliability test was conducted after the coders had finished examining of the full sample of tweets and Twitter bios. Krippendorff's  $\alpha$  values of 0.8 or higher were considered indicative of strong reliability, whereas values falling between 0.667 and 0.8 were considered to suggest tentative reliability (Krippendorff, 2004: 241–242). Values below 0.667 were deemed unreliable and dropped from the final analysis (Neuendorf, 2012: 266). A discussion of the reliability results and codebook construction is detailed in the findings section of this chapter.

Finally, to complement traditional coding, corpus linguistics techniques were employed to describe the textual features of Twitter content. According to Baker (2010: 93) corpus linguistics involves the use of computer software for analysing large volumes of

electronically stored texts. Given that corpus linguistic methods aim to reveal linguistic patterns from human-generated texts, they are particularly suitable for revealing the linguistic features of Twitter content. The same samples of 142 Twitter bios and 1,268 tweets served as the corpora to be analysed.

Analysis followed a four-phase sequential process, which comprised pre-processing the text, calculating basic statistics, creating word clouds, and generating concordances and collocations. Firstly, tweets and Twitter bios underwent pre-processing procedures, including text cleaning (e.g., removal of punctuations, hashtags, and Twitter handles), lemmatisation (e.g., *run* for *running*), removal of stop words (e.g., *is*, *the*, *by*), basic spelling correction (e.g., *vaccine* for *vaxxine*), and standardization of terms (e.g., *account* for *acct*). Following the text cleaning process, basic statistics were computed for each corpus; these included word frequencies and averages, among other metrics. Resulting word frequencies were then visualised through the creation of word clouds. Finally, concordances were generated to understand the context of usage for the top words and emojis while collocations were identified based on co-occurring words.

This study utilised a suite of R packages for analysis, including *dplyr*, *stringr*, and *tidytext* for general text processing, *spacyr* for tokenisation and lemmatisation, *stopwords* and *tagalogstop* for removing stop words, *tm* for calculating word frequencies, *wordcloud2* for

creating word clouds, *rwhatsapp* for extracting and categorising emojis, and *ggraph*, *igraph*, *quanteda*, for generating concordances and collocations.

## 7.3 Findings

The discussion of findings first examines the textual features of Twitter bios and tweets using corpus linguistics. Following this, the results of qualitative content analysis are presented to reveal user descriptions in Twitter bios and the types of tweets in the sample. These frameworks were then respectively employed to classify Twitter bio content and tweets.

### 7.3.1 Textual Features of Twitter Bios

**Basic corpus attributes.** The corpus of bios totalled 1,720 words, with an average Twitter bio length of 12 words. Of the sampled account owners, 59 (40%) incorporated at least one emoji into their bio, resulting in a combined total of 152 emojis. Bios ranged from a minimum of three words to a maximum of 156 words. With a substantial standard deviation ( $\sigma=38$ ), there is considerable dispersion around the mean bio length of 68 characters. Despite the 160-character limit, FMLWH users on Twitter wrote concise, primarily text-based bios, often using abbreviated or shortened identifiers, thus not

requiring the full space for self-description. Table 18 presents the basic statistics of the corpus of Twitter bios.

**Table 18. Basic attributes of corpus of Twitter bios**

ATTRIBUTE	VALUE
1. Number of users sampled	146
2. Number of users with bio	142
3. Number of bios with at least one emoji	59
4. Number of unique words excluding stop words in bios	556
5. Number of unique emojis in bios	93
6. Total number of words in bios	1,720
7. Total number of characters in bios	9,624
8. Total number of emojis in bios	152
9. Average number of words per bio	12
10. Average number of characters per bio	68
11. Average number of emojis per bio	1

**Top words in Twitter bios.** Excluding stop words in English (e.g., *are*, *of*, *the*) and Filipino [e.g., *at* (*and*), *ng* (*of*), *para* (*for*)], a total of 556 unique words were extracted from the corpus of Twitter bios. As can be seen in Table 19, almost all the top words in Twitter bios pertained to living with HIV. The most frequently recurring word was *UD* (undetectable), with *CD4* (amount of white blood cells) and *LTE* (a combination drug therapy) following at a distance.

Table 19. Top words in Twitter bios

WORD	FREQUENCY (n = 142)	PERCENTAGE (100%)	KEYWORD IN CONTEXT
1. UD	60	42	◆ UD since [date] ◆ UD   CD4 [values] ◆ UD   [treatment hub]
2. CD4	32	23	◆ CD4 [values] ◆ CD4 [date] ◆ CD4 [HAART]
3. LTE	29	20	◆ LTE baby ◆ LTE   UD ◆ LTE   CD4 [values]
4. HIV	26	18	◆ Living with HIV since [date] ◆ HIV positive since [date] ◆ HIV counsellor
5. PLHIV	23	16	◆ PLHIV since [date] ◆ PLHIV [date] ◆ PLHIV   Dx [date]
6. I	16	11	◆ I am a [predicate nominative] ◆ I am [adjective]
7. Dx	17	12	◆ Dx [date]
8. TLD	14	10	◆ TLD   UD
9. Baby	11	8	◆ LTE baby
10. Poz	10	7	◆ Poz since [date] ◆ Poz   UD

## Key

- ◆ Baby: A term of endearment often appended to one's medication or treatment hub
- ◆ CD4: Amount of CD4 or white blood cells
- ◆ Dx: Diagnosed
- ◆ HIV: Human immunodeficiency virus
- ◆ LTE: Efavirenz, lamivudine, and tenofovir, a combination drug therapy
- ◆ PLHIV: Person living with HIV
- ◆ Poz: Positive
- ◆ TLD: Tenofovir disoproxil, lamivudine, and dolutegravir, a combination drug therapy
- ◆ UD: Undetectable

The substantial presence of HIV-related terms among the top words points to a consistent pattern of how these users described themselves as PLWH in their Twitter bio (see Figure 34). However, it is worth clarifying that the most frequently occurring words

appeared in fewer than half of the Twitter bios in the random sample. In this context, word frequency does not necessarily indicate prominence. Rather, recurrence implies consistency, with these terminologies emerging as stable signifiers of HIV identities within the network of users who identify as FMLWH. At the same time, a variety of words unrelated to HIV was extracted, including relational roles (e.g., *friend, lover*), occupations (e.g., *registered nurse, counsellor*), and personality type (e.g., *INFP, ENTJ*). Although occurring less frequently across the sample, this assortment of words suggests that these users portrayed themselves as more than just PLWH in their Twitter bio. A later discussion is dedicated to a comprehensive classification of Twitter bio content.

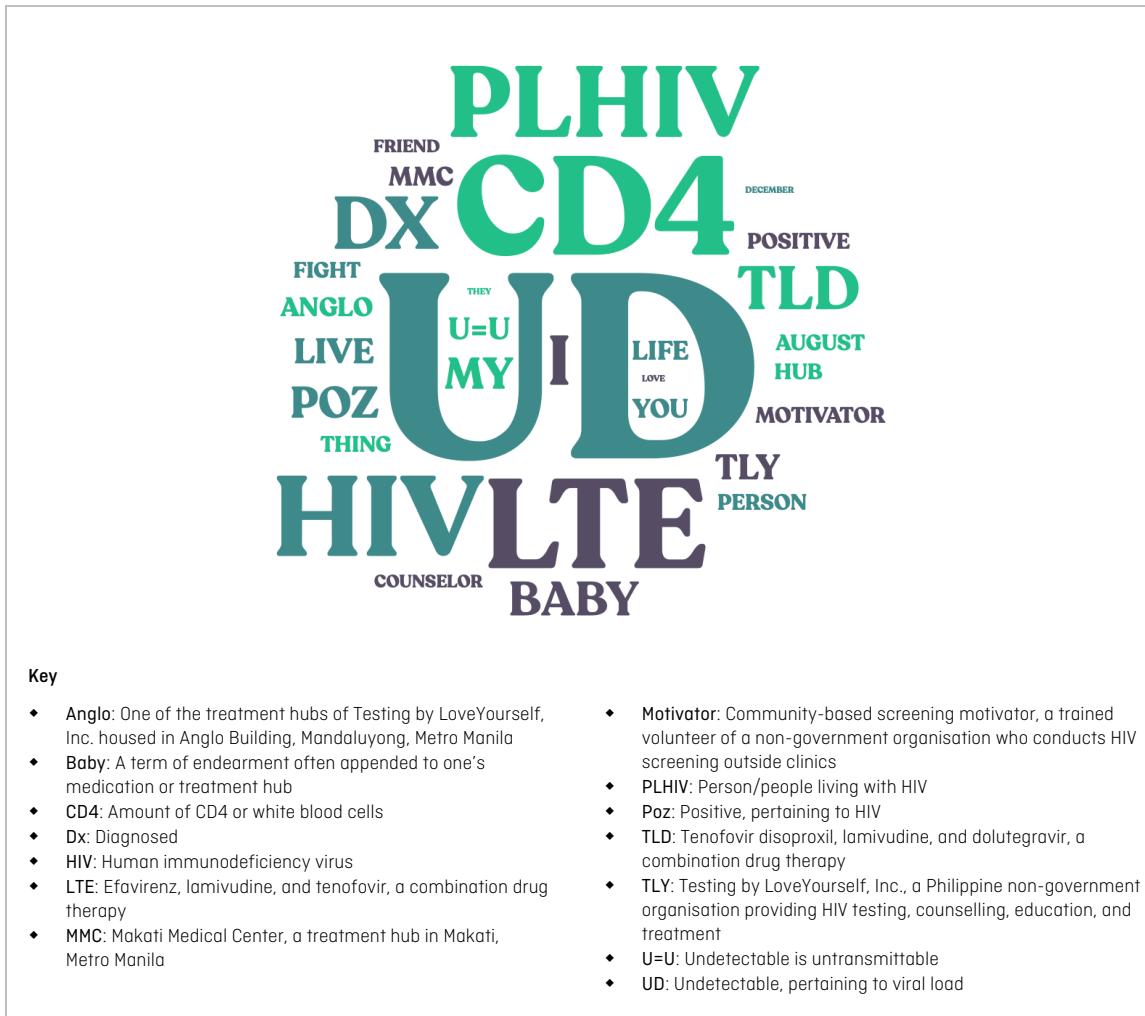


Figure 34. Word cloud of top words in Twitter bios

**Collocations in Twitter bios.** Collocations or co-occurring words were extracted to establish linguistic patterns of self-description on Twitter. Owing to the relatively small sample size and the fragmented style of self-description in Twitter bios, only 14 word pairs were found to occur at least thrice. Emerging as the most common collocations were the bigrams *LTE* and *baby* ( $n = 8$ ), *UD* and *since* ( $n = 7$ ), *PLHIV* and *since* ( $n = 6$ ), and *TLY*

and *Anglo* ( $n = 6$ ). *LTE*, a combination drug therapy, was often employed on its own, usually set within text separators (e.g., *CD4: 510 | LTE | UD*). Interestingly, several users attached the word *baby* to *LTE*, seemingly as a whimsical way of indicating their prescribed HIV medication. Essentially, referring to oneself as an ‘LTE baby’ is akin to stating one is taking *LTE*. *UD*, which is short for ‘undetectable,’ was most frequently used as a standalone descriptor. However, some users contextualised it by appending a *since* phrase to convey how long they had been virally suppressed, as in *UD since August 2018*. It was unsurprising that *TLY* and *Anglo* emerged as collocates, as one of the clinics of Testing by LoveYourself, Inc. (TLY) is housed in Anglo Building, Mandaluyong, Metro Manila. As a side note, the term *CD4*, an HIV biomarker, always co-occurred with a numerical value or a series of values, such as *CD4 442*, and sometimes a period, as in *CD4 190 @ 2019, 450 @ 220, 530 @ 2021*. However, because the word *CD4* did not appear next to the same figure twice, it did not emerge among the collocated words found in Twitter bios.

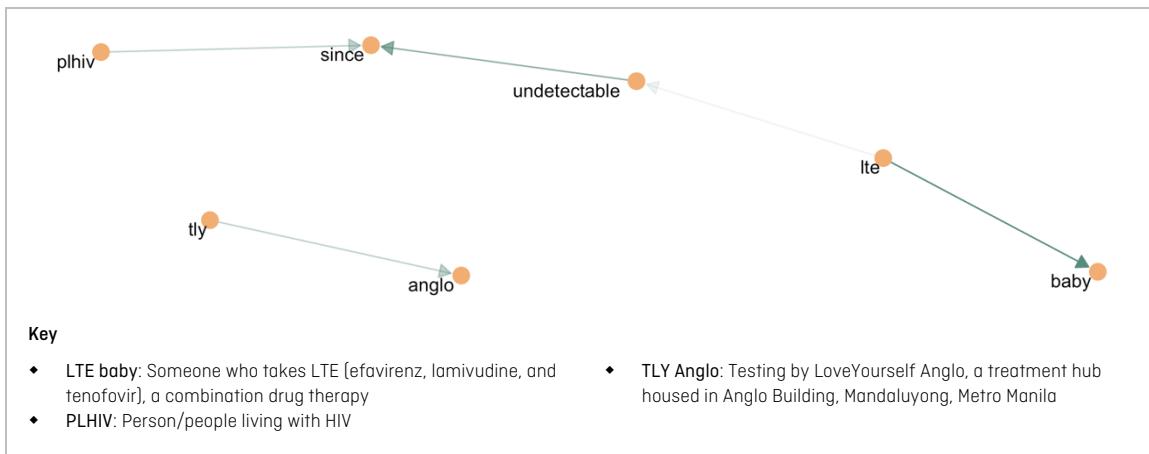


Figure 35. Collocations in Twitter bios

**Emojis used in Twitter bios.** Emojis may be categorised into nine groups, ranging from *activities* to *flags*. Analysis showed that all categories of emojis were represented (Table 20). The corpus featured a total of 152 emojis, of which 93 were distinct. Despite the overall modest use of emojis in Twitter bios, emoji selections were found to be fairly diverse. FMLWH users on Twitter employed the greatest number of emojis from the group *smileys and emotion* ( $n = 37, 24\%$ ), followed by *symbols* and *travel and places* (each  $n = 20, 13\%$ ).

Table 20. Emoji groups present in Twitter bios

EMOJI GROUP	EXAMPLE	FREQUENCY (n = 152)	PERCENTAGE (%)
1. Smileys and emotion	😊 😢 ❤️	37	24
2. Symbols	🚫 🌏 🚚	20	13
3. Travel and places	🚗 ✈️ 🌈	20	13
4. Objects	💉 💊 💔	19	13
5. People and body	💪 💤 💞	19	13
6. Animals and nature	😺 💐 💐	13	9
7. Activities	✨ 💃 💔	11	7
8. Flags	🇵🇭 🏳️ 🇰🇷	9	6
9. Food and drink	🍽️ ☕ 🍷	4	3

When used in Twitter bios, emojis mainly served a referential or illustrative purpose by helping provide the context of a message (Danesi, 2017: 101). One example is by emphasising a written description, such as placing the glasses emoji (👓) beside the adjective *bespectacled*. There were also instances wherein these electronic graphic symbols served as standalone signifiers, as in the use of the Philippine flag emoji (🇵🇭) to denote one's location or nationality.

Due to the fairly small sample size of bios, few co-occurrences between emojis and keywords were found in the corpus. Notably, the pill emoji (💊) appeared next to HIV medication, such as *LTE* and *TLD*. Another example is the hospital emoji (🏥), which preceded account owners' mention of their HIV treatment centre, such as RITM (short for 'Research Institute for Tropical Medicine') and Clinic 1276. In addition, the plus sign emoji (➕) was collocated with the terms *dx* and *since*, as if to convey the ideas 'diagnosed positive'

and ‘positive since [date],’ respectively. These examples demonstrate ‘calquing’ or the practice of using emojis to substitute for words (Danesi, 2017: 77). For instance, the pill emoji (💊) and the hospital emoji (🏥) are graphical symbols that stand in place for the terms ‘medication’ and ‘treatment centre,’ respectively. Although intended as a mathematical symbol, the plus sign emoji (➕) has been appropriated by Twitter users identifying as FMLWH as a marker of HIV-positive status. Table 21 shows the most used emojis and corresponding adjacent terminologies used in Twitter bios.

Table 21. Top emojis in Twitter bios

EMOJI	FREQUENCY (n = 142)	PERCENTAGE (%)	SAMPLE ADJACENT WORD
1. ❤️	8	6	Partnered, U=U, YOLO
2. 💊	5	4	LTE baby, TLD
3. ➕	4	3	Dx, since
4. 🏥	4	3	RITM, Clinic 1276
5. 😊	4	3	Positive outlook, think positive
6. 🩺	4	3	Dx, vaxxed
7. 🇵🇭	4	3	Cebu City, isko
8. ✨	3	2	UD, tarot
9. ♋	3	2	Libra
10. 🏳️	3	2	N/A
11. 🌈	3	2	N/A

Key

- ◆ **Cebu City:** A city in Cebu Province in the southern part of the Philippines
- ◆ **Clinic 1276:** An HIV treatment hub at St. Lukes Medical Center, Taguig, Metro Manila
- ◆ **Dx:** Diagnosed
- ◆ **HIV:** Human immunodeficiency virus
- ◆ **Isko:** Scholar, usually referring to a student of the University of the Philippines
- ◆ **LTE:** Efavirenz, lamivudine, and tenofovir, a combination drug therapy
- ◆ **LTE baby:** Someone who takes LTE
- ◆ **RITM:** Research Institute for Tropical Medicine, an HIV treatment hub in Muntinlupa, Metro Manila
- ◆ **Tarot:** A type of cartomancy using a deck of 78 cards
- ◆ **TLD:** Tenofovir disoproxil, lamivudine, and dolutegravir, a combination drug therapy
- ◆ **UD:** Undetectable
- ◆ **U=U:** Undetectable is untransmittable
- ◆ **Vaxxed:** Vaccinated, pertaining to COVID-19
- ◆ **YOLO:** You only live once

### 7.3.2 Textual Features of Tweets

**Basic corpus attributes.** The analysed corpus comprised 1,268 randomly sampled tweets totalling 21,058 words. Excluding stop words, these tweets incorporated 3,413 unique English and Filipino terms. Posts averaged 89 characters, approximately one-third of the 280-character limit. This supports the earlier finding that users identifying as FMLWH tend to favour brevity when sharing content on Twitter. Of the 1,268 tweets, only 517 (41%) featured at least one emoji, also mirroring the proportion of account owners with an emoji in their Twitter bio. With these figures in mind, it appears that this user base exhibits only a moderate level of style affect, as reflected in their minimal use of emojis (Moser et al., 2013: 555). Table 22 provides relevant statistics for the corpus of tweets.

Table 22. Basic attributes of corpus of tweets

ATTRIBUTE	VALUE
1. Number of tweets sampled	1,268
2. Number of tweets with at least one emoji	517
3. Number of unique words excluding stop words in tweets	3,413
4. Number of unique emojis in tweets	178
5. Total number of words in tweets	21,058
6. Total number of characters in tweets	112,240
7. Total number of emojis in tweets	1,219
8. Average number of words per tweet	17
9. Average number of characters per tweet	89
10. Average number of emojis per tweet	1

**Top words in tweets.** Both English and Filipino pronouns dominated the list of most frequently used words in tweets. Along with articles and prepositions, pronouns are parts of speech traditionally classified as stop words. Considering the breadth of Twitter content types emerging from qualitative analysis, including pronouns in the word count was deemed necessary. It must be pointed out that majority of the randomly sampled tweets did not contain any of the top words listed in Table 23. In fact, the top five pronouns used appeared in only about 10–20% of the tweets. Moreover, the random sample did not demonstrate a tendency for most users to gather around similar topics for discussion. In much the same way, these users employed a variety of words, possibly indicating a diverse array of tweet types.

Interestingly, four of the top five pronouns used were self-referential. With 249 occurrences (20% of tweets), the Filipino pronoun *ko*—‘my’ in English—was most frequently used. For context, two common statements featuring *ko* in tweets were *ayaw ko na* (“I do not want”) and *share ko lang* (“I just want to share”). Ranking a close second was the pronoun *I* ( $n = 233$ , 18%), which usually appeared alongside a linking verb and the adverb *not*, as in *I am not* and *I have not*. Similarly, *ako*—the Filipino pronoun for ‘I’—trailed behind with 182 occurrences (14%). Verbs usually preceded the mention of *ako*, such as *papunta ako sa* (“I am going to”) and *kumain ako ng* [“I ate (something)”].

Table 23. Top pronouns in tweets

PRONOUN	FREQUENCY (n = 1,268)	PERCENTAGE (100%)	KEYWORD IN CONTEXT
1. Ko (my)	249	20	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Ko na [e.g., <i>ayaw ko na</i> (I do not want)]</li> <li>◆ Ko lang [e.g., <i>share ko lang</i> (I just want to share)]</li> <li>◆ Ko ng [e.g., <i>pagpasok ko ng bahay</i> (upon entering the house)]</li> </ul>
2. I	233	18	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ I am not</li> <li>◆ I have not</li> <li>◆ I was not</li> </ul>
3. Ako (I or me)	182	14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Ako sa [e.g., <i>papunta ako sa</i> (I am going to)]</li> <li>◆ Ako ng [e.g., <i>kumain ako ng agahan</i> (I ate breakfast)]</li> <li>◆ Ako lang ba (Am I the only one)</li> </ul>
4. My	120	9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ My status</li> <li>◆ My god</li> <li>◆ My birthday</li> </ul>
5. You	109	9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ You are</li> <li>◆ You can</li> <li>◆ You need</li> </ul>

As shown in Figure 36, first-person pronouns were the most frequently used, demonstrating the tendency of this user base to post status updates concerning themselves whether as the doer of an action (i.e., *I, ako*) or the receiver of one (i.e., *my, ko*). Meanwhile, the appearance of the second-person pronoun *you* among the top words highlights Twitter's interpersonal environment that encourages conversations with others in the network. The overall recurring use of pronouns suggests that these users tweeted for highly personal purposes.

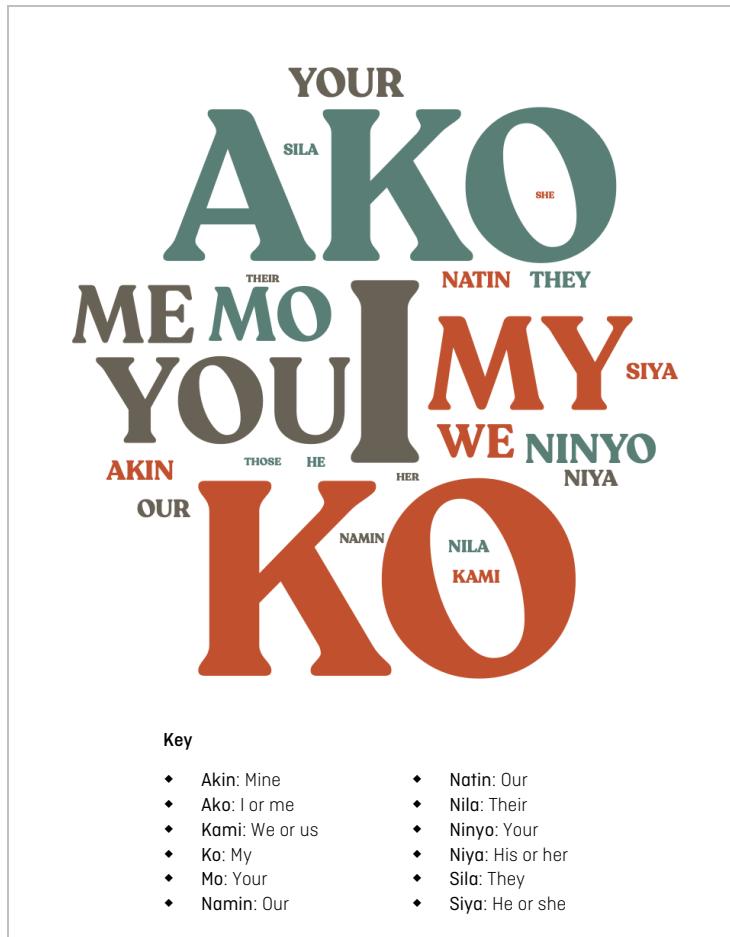


Figure 36. Word cloud of top pronouns in tweets

Excluding pronouns, other frequently occurring words related to temporality (e.g., *year*, *time*, *morning*) and positive sentiments (e.g., *good* and *happy*). Coupled with the rest of the entries shown in Table 24, these terms evoked a sense of social presence and phatic communication. Recalling Miller (2008), phatic messages function less to convey substantial information and more to connect with people. To drive home this point, both *good* ( $n = 72$ , 6%) and *morning* ( $n = 63$ , 5%) came out as frequently used words, which was

to be expected due to their frequent collocation as a ceremonial greeting (i.e., “good morning”). Similarly, *happy* ( $n = 46$ , 4%) and *year* ( $n = 44$ , 3%) were frequently co-occurring terms because the analysis period covered 1 January 2022, resulting in an abundance of tweets bearing “happy new year” greetings.

Table 24. Top words excluding pronouns in tweets

WORD	FREQUENCY ( $n = 1,268$ )	PERCENTAGE (100%)	KEYWORD IN CONTEXT
1. Good	72	6	◆ Good morning ◆ Good night
2. Day	63	5	◆ Day [number] of
3. Feel	51	4	◆ Feel like ◆ Feel <i>ko</i> (I feel)
4. Happy	46	4	◆ Happy new year ◆ Happy Monday
5. Year	44	3	◆ Year of being
6. Time	42	3	◆ Time to
7. <i>Wala</i> (none or nothing)	42	3	◆ <i>Wala na</i> (no more)
8. <i>Sana</i> (I hope)	40	3	◆ <i>Sana naman</i> (I really hope)
9. Morning	38	3	◆ Good morning <i>sa</i> (good morning to)
10. Brother	38	3	◆ Brothers and sisters

The word cloud in Figure 6 offers a peek into what Twitter users identifying as FMLWH posted about from 21 October 2021 to 21 April 2022. As has been pointed out, the 2022 Philippine national elections campaign was a major event that took place during the analysis period. Despite many elections-related tweets recorded, only the term *Leni*—referring to presidential candidate Leni Robredo—was consistently featured in the random

sample. To some extent, discussions around the elections centred around her presidential campaign.

The word cloud also featured some recurring HIV-related terms, namely, *HIV*, *poz*, *blood*, and *brother*. Across the board, HIV-related content was found in only a small fraction ( $n = 139$ , 11%) of the randomly sampled tweets, with about half of the users ( $n = 68$ , 47%) authoring such posts. This suggests that from 21 October 2021 to 21 April 2022, Twitter users were more inclined to discuss other topics, with the subject of HIV being less prevalent in their tweets.

If anything, the assortment of words on display suggests that users identifying as FMLWH participated in Twitter by documenting the minutiae of everyday life (refer to Figure 37). The word *day*, for example, was used as a tally to document one's experiences (e.g., "day 2 of my booster shot and I am feeling 😊"). Other words like *work*, *life*, and *week* conveyed the routine details of daily activities (e.g., "sadt<sup>27</sup> that I be working on Christmas day"). Their tweets also hinted at making their presence known, evident in expressions of greetings addressed to their network (e.g., "good morning"). Collectively, the selection of

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<sup>27</sup> This is another example of the trend of appending the letter 't' to words that end in 'd' (e.g., *sad*) for stylistic flair, as discussed in Chapter 6.

terms in the word cloud evinces the masspersonal environment that Twitter fosters (Castells, 2007; O'Sullivan and Carr, 2018; Rikkonen et al., 2023). If the prominent words are any indicator, users identifying as FMLWH embraced Twitter as a platform to express their thoughts and sentiments while also signalling interaction with others in their network.

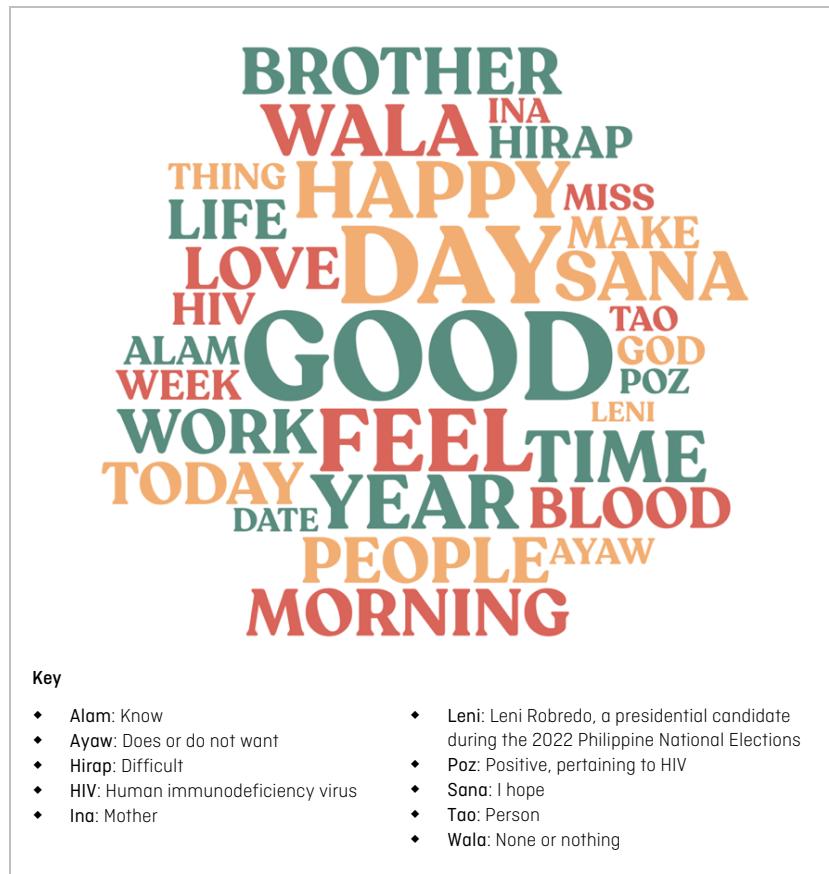


Figure 37. Word cloud of top words excluding pronouns in tweets

**Collocations in tweets.** The larger sample size of tweets made it possible to generate a larger set of co-occurring words, which serve to better contextualise the word frequencies presented earlier. A total of 108 collocates that appeared at least thrice were recorded. The most frequently repeated bigram or word pair in the corpus was *blood* and *brother* ( $n = 31$ ), often used as a term of endearment for FMLWH. That many tweets were addressed to so-called *blood brothers* suggests their role as intended readers. The masspersonal dimension of Twitter is once again emphasised, indicating these users' propensity to broadcast their messages to these intended readers instead of sending them private messages. Following *blood brother* were the bigrams *good morning* ( $n = 29$ ) and *thank you* ( $n = 20$ ); these ceremonial greetings exemplified the communication style centred around interaction on Twitter. Put differently, acknowledging the presence of others contributes to a sense of connectivity (Dann, 2015); this way, tweets serve more than just an expressive function by broadcasting one's thoughts and feelings. Finally, the Filipino expletive *putang ina* ( $n = 18$ )—literally translated to 'whore mother'—was the fourth most used bigram. The repeated use of this expression in numerous tweets suggests that it was common for these individuals to post rants and candid reactions on Twitter, further illustrating a tendency toward phatic communication. This result also affirms the experiences shared by certain participants regarding their use of Twitter as an outlet to vent, as detailed in Chapter 6.

Figure 38 shows the collocations found in tweets.

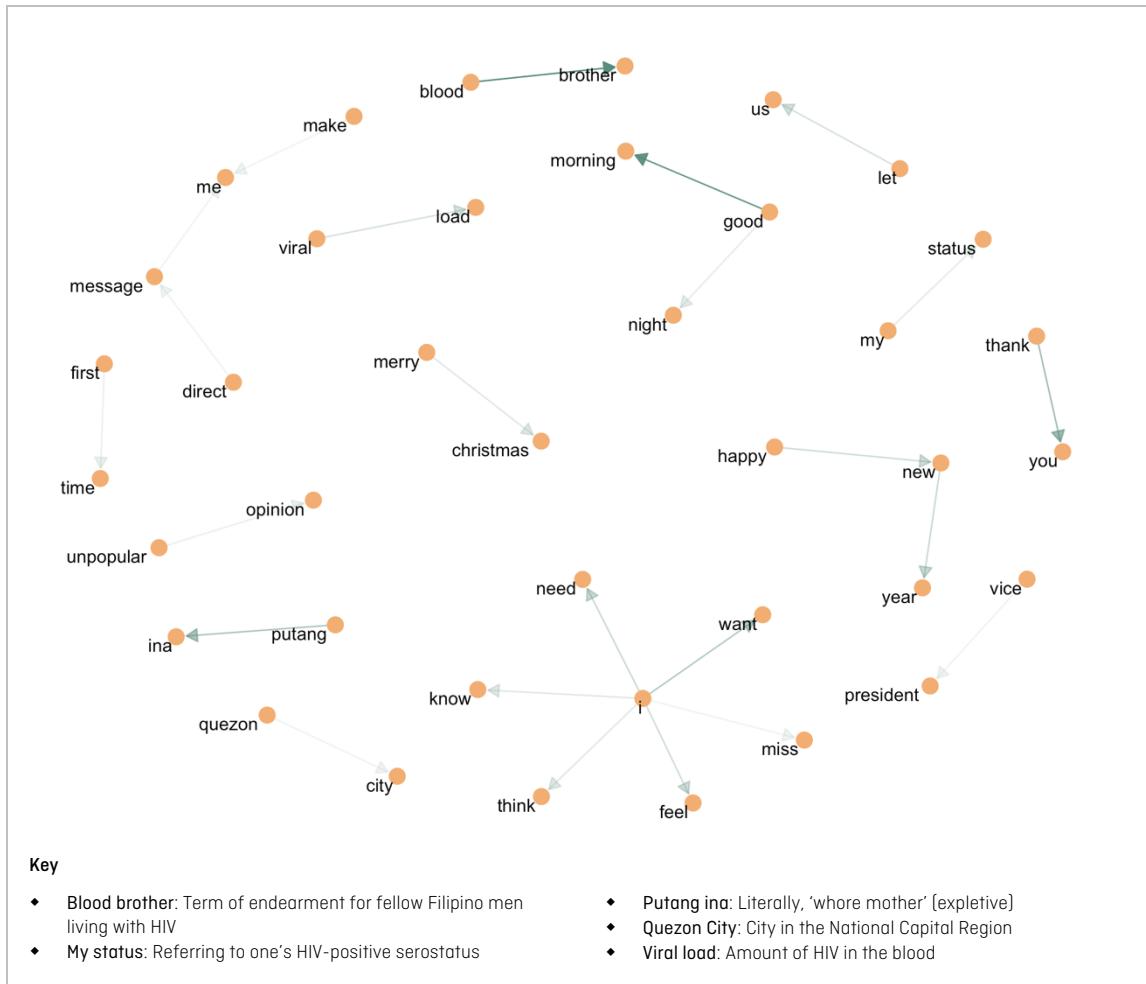


Figure 38. Collocations in tweets

**Emojis used in tweets.** The corpus contained 1,219 occurrences of emojis, with 178 of them being unique. Despite most of the account owners ( $n = 124$ , 85%) using emojis, they were present in less than half ( $n = 517$ , 41%) of the total tweets. With an average of 1 emoji per tweet, it may be said that textual content took a more prominent role in communication in this dataset. Occurrences of emojis in tweets varied widely, with counts

ranging from 0 to 25 ( $\sigma=2.39$ ), implying that while some users opted not to use emojis, others employed them extensively.

Similar to the analysis of Twitter bios, the random sample of tweets covered emojis across all nine categories (Table 25). However, the large majority of emojis present in tweets came from only three groups: *smileys and emotion* ( $n = 710$ , 58%); *symbols* ( $n = 288$ , 24%); and *people and body* ( $n = 107$ , 9%). Emojis belonging to the other categories were sparsely used.

Table 25. Emoji groups present in tweets

EMOJI GROUP	EXAMPLE	FREQUENCY ( $n = 1,219$ )	PERCENTAGE (%)
1. Smileys and emotion	😊 😃 😍	710	58
2. Symbols	██████	288	24
3. People and body	🙏 💪 🤝	107	9
4. Activities	✨ 🎉 🎄	43	4
5. Travel and places	☀️ 🌞 🌟	23	2
6. Animals and nature	🌸 🐱 🌱	18	1
7. Objects	♫️ 🎨 🎂	18	1
8. Food and drink	🥂 🍕 🎂	10	1
9. Flags	🇵🇾 🇺🇦	2	0

As noted earlier, using emojis in Twitter bios primarily served a referential purpose, either by accentuating written text or substituting for it. This referential role was less pronounced in tweets, where emojis took a more emotive function. According to Danesi (2017: 95), emojis help add tone to effectively convey the precise emotion intended by the author. The tweet in Figure 39 demonstrates this function.



Figure 39. Sample tweet with an emoji used for emotive tone

In this tweet, Aldous expresses elation over his CD4 count shooting up from 20 to 435 cells/µL in a year, indicating the effectiveness of his medication. He punctuates his last statement—"I'm finally UD"—with a loudly crying face emoji (😭), as if to visualise his tears of joy. While the written content already conveys a celebratory tone, the inclusion of this emoji serves to heighten the emotional value of the tweet.

Even the top emojis made infrequent appearances in tweets due to their minimal usage (refer to Table 26). For instance, although the grinning face with sweat emoji (😅) ranked as the most popular emoji in the dataset, it showed up in only 3% of the sample. Nevertheless, analysis showed that these top emojis were collocated with certain words, most notably *ako* (I or me) and *ko* (my), as these examples show:

- ◆ *Sino nagpacarwash kahit bumubuhos? Haist talaga namang napapareflect ako sa life choices ko 😭*  
(Who got a car wash even though it's pouring? Sigh, I really find myself reflecting on my life choices 😭)
- ◆ *Yay only two days to go tas off ko na 😁*  
[Yay, only two days to go until my (day) off 😁]
- ◆ *Wow, UD na pala ako mula 2021 🙏🙏*  
(Wow, apparently, I've been UD since 2021 🙏🙏)

These lines extracted from tweets illustrate how emojis were used in reference to the author, as indicated by the pronoun *ako* or *ko*. Such usage corresponds with earlier findings that pronouns were prominent, most emojis in tweets were smileys and emotions, and emojis were used for emotive purposes.

At the time of data collection, the web-based daily word game Wordle was at the peak of its popularity, resulting in users sharing their daily statistics on Twitter. Interestingly, the dataset included multiple instances of square emojis (████). In all instances, these emojis appeared as part of the standard format of Wordle game results. Despite their frequency in the sample, square emojis seemed to serve a primarily graphical rather than representational or emotive purpose. A tweet showing a user's Wordle score is provided in Figure 40.

Table 26. Top emojis in tweets

EMOJI	FREQUENCY ( <i>n</i> = 1,268)	PERCENTAGE (%)	SAMPLE ADJACENT WORD
1. 😅	41	3	Ako (I or me), day, jowa (significant other)
2. 😂	38	3	Ako (I or me), ko (my), talaga (indeed)
3. 😢	37	3	Ako (I or me), ko (my), years
4. ❤️	36	3	Happy, love, year
5. 😭	30	2	Ako (I or me), ko (my), hirap (difficult)
6. 😊	27	2	Day, good, happy
7. 🙏	22	2	Blessed, ako (I or me),
8. 😜	22	2	Ako (I or me), ko (my), baka (maybe)
9. 🟩	14	1	Wordle
10. 🟪	13	1	Wordle

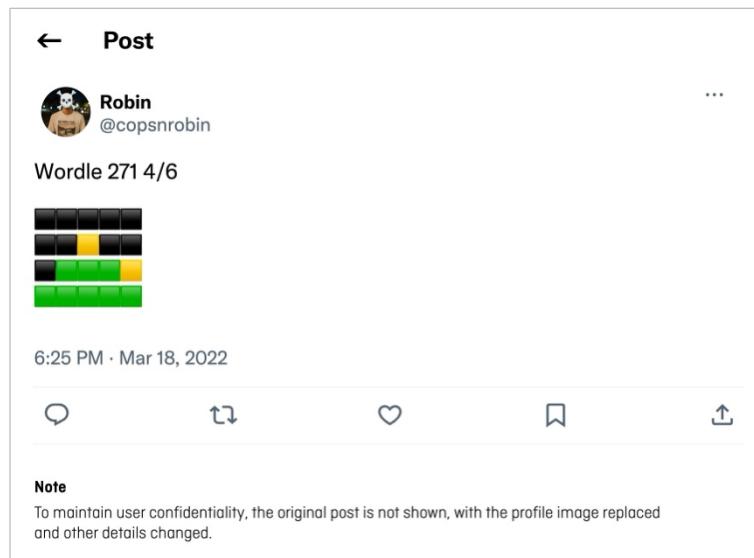


Figure 40. Sample tweet showing Wordle score

### 7.3.3 Uncovering User Descriptions in Twitter Bios

A qualitative analysis of the Twitter bios of prominent account owners revealed a variety of descriptions account owners put on display. These included stigmatised identifiers, socio-demographic characteristics, personal attributes, relational identifiers, statements, account descriptions, and details about other accounts. This classification includes categories identified in prior research by Pathak et al. (2021) and Priante et al. (2016), alongside those that emerged from the data. In the ensuing discussion, descriptions of each category are provided, supported by examples.

***Stigmatised identifiers.*** Building on Goffman's ideas, Priante et al. (2016: 55) characterise stigmatised identity as affiliating with a group deemed different from what society considers normal. The content analysis revealed that Twitter users who identify as FMLWH related to their HIV serostatus and other health conditions as stigmatised identities. Five types of identifiers emerged, namely, clinical details, HIV biomarkers, HIV social identifiers, pertinent dates, and other health conditions. The HIV-oriented categories mirrored those in Study 1 (composition) aimed at identifying Twitter users relevant to this research (see Chapter 4).

Clinical details included references to these account owners' highly active antiretroviral therapy (HAART), treatment hub or care facility, and patient confirmatory

code. Mentions of HAART were a common fixture in Twitter bios. Some users provided straightforward details about their current medication (e.g., *TLD*), while others highlighted the progression of their prescribed HAART (e.g., *LTE ➔ ALE ➔ TLD*). Their treatment hub or care facility also served as an integral facet of their social identity as FMLWH. As discussed in Chapter 4, individuals newly diagnosed with HIV are assigned a unique alphanumeric confirmatory code corresponding to the initials of their treatment hub and the year they were diagnosed. An example is the code *KB18*, indicating an HIV diagnosis in 2018 and registration at Klinika Bernardo, a social hygiene clinic in Quezon City, Metro Manila. Mentions of health centres (e.g., *MMC baby*, *RITM*) and confirmatory codes (e.g., *R15*) served as place-specific identifiers, creating a possible connection point where these account owners could potentially encounter other ‘blood brothers’ enrolled in the same facility.

HIV identities were also constructed by employing pertinent biomarkers, such as one’s CD4 count, viral load, and undetectable status. An indicator of immune system function, CD4 cell count was typically provided as a series of values, occasionally associated with specific time intervals:

- ◆ *CD4: 59 (Apr '15) “ 475 (Apr '18) “ 524 (Apr '21)*
- ◆ *cd4: 14- 99- 157- 200- 181- 204- 701*
- ◆ *CD4 2019: 540, 2020: 604, 2021: 885*

Ideally, the series of CD4 digits should demonstrate an upward progression, indicating the effectiveness of HAART. In Twitter bios, quantifying viral load, or simply *VL*, was less common compared with CD4. Instead, these users tended to describe their viral load as undetectable or simply *UD*. Others preferred the expression *U=U*, which is short for “undetectable is untransmittable.” The following examples show how viral load and undetectable status were encoded in Twitter bios:

- ◆ *VL: UD as of October '19*
- ◆ *#UequalsU*
- ◆ *Team U=U*

Stigmatised identities were especially evident in the social identifiers employed by Twitter users who identify as FMLWH. Both explicit and suggestive self-descriptions were used to denote HIV serostatus. Examples of explicit identifiers incorporated the terms *HIV* and *AIDS*, evident in the following examples:

- ◆ *HIV+ as of 2020*
- ◆ *#PLHIV 2014*
- ◆ *Pinoy AIDS survivor*

The practice of using suggestive identifiers was also widespread, with these account owners employing slang (e.g., *blood brother*, *mutant*, *poz*, *proton*, *pusit*, *reborn*) to refer to their

HIV serostatus. Meanwhile, the descriptions *fighter*, *survivor*, and *warrior* commonly appeared alongside other HIV identifiers:

- ◆ *I'm a fighter • cd4 150, 178, 345 • Undetected VL*
- ◆ *Dx 2012 | Aluvia | UD | Survivor<sup>28</sup>*
- ◆ *TMC warrior. 04.12.18. Undetectable.<sup>29</sup>*

Many Twitter bios of prominent users presented a date or a series of dates in their bio. The analysis uncovered four types of dates:

- ◆ Date corresponding to HIV diagnosis (e.g., *positive since 2014*)
- ◆ Date corresponding to HAART prescription (e.g., *LTE Feb 18 ➡ LZE Dec 19*)<sup>30</sup>
- ◆ Date corresponding to status of HIV biomarkers (e.g., *VL less than 40 copies/mL 05.03.17*)
- ◆ Date without context (e.g., *important dates in my life: Aug 15, 1990, Jul 9, 1992 & Jul 15, 2016*)

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<sup>28</sup> Aluvia is a type of HAART.

<sup>29</sup> 'TMC' stands for 'The Medical City,' a treatment hub in Pasig, Metro Manila.

<sup>30</sup> 'LZE' stands for 'lamivudine, zidovudine, and efavirenz,' a combination drug therapy.

Lastly, prominent account owners also shared details about other health conditions apart from HIV. For example, some of them volunteered opportunistic infections they faced at the time of HIV diagnosis (e.g., *dx'd with pneumonia and TB 11/2017<sup>31</sup>*). Others shared their struggles with mental health (e.g., *living with GAD<sup>32</sup>*).

**Socio-demographic characteristics.** The Twitter bios of prominent account owners identifying as FMLWH featured self-descriptions aside from HIV identifiers. It was typical to supply socio-demographic details, including academic, age, geographic, occupational, political, and religious identities, in Twitter bios. Academic identity encompassed details such as one's scholastic program (e.g., *MBA, Fine Arts*), enrolment status (e.g., *soon to be lawyer, med student*), and academic institution (e.g., *FEU<sup>33</sup>, Green Archer<sup>34</sup>*). Meanwhile, age references were either made explicitly (e.g., *34 y/o*) or hinted at (e.g., *forty-something, a millennial*). As for geographic identity, prominent account owners either mentioned a

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<sup>31</sup> 'Dx'd' is short for 'diagnosed' while 'TB' is short for 'tuberculosis.'

<sup>32</sup> 'GAD' stands for 'generalized anxiety disorder.'

<sup>33</sup> 'FEU' stands for 'Far Eastern University,' an educational institution in Manila.

<sup>34</sup> The Green Archers are the varsity team of De La Salle University, an educational institution in Manila.

location (e.g.,  *Angono<sup>35</sup>, from Dasma<sup>36</sup>*) or referred to themselves as a native of a particular locale (e.g., *Bisdak<sup>37</sup>, Bulakenyo<sup>38</sup>*).

Twitter bios featured mentions of occupation through work role (e.g., *RN<sup>39</sup>, accountant*), field of work (e.g., *tech, healthcare*), work status (e.g., *self-employed, working class*), or professional affiliation (e.g., *works @enjoyGLOBE<sup>40</sup>, Bagani volunteer<sup>41</sup>*). With data collection coinciding with the 2022 Philippine national elections campaign period, prominent account owners were unsurprisingly vocal about their political leanings in their Twitter bio. They either indicated the political party they supported or opposed (e.g., *Kakampink<sup>42</sup>, ❌ DDS<sup>43</sup>*) or employed emojis commonly associated with certain political

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<sup>35</sup> Angono is a municipality in the province of Rizal.

<sup>36</sup> Dasma is short for Dasmariñas, a city in the province of Cavite.

<sup>37</sup> Bisdak is a Cebuano colloquial term for native-born Visayans.

<sup>38</sup> Bulakenyo refers to a native of the province of Bulacan.

<sup>39</sup> 'RN' stands for 'registered nurse.'

<sup>40</sup> @enjoyGLOBE is the Twitter handle of Globe Telecom.

<sup>41</sup> Bagani Community Center by LoveYourself is a community-based organisation providing free HIV education and treatment in the province of Negros Occidental.

<sup>42</sup> Kakampink refers to the group of supporters rallying behind Leni Robredo's presidential campaign.

<sup>43</sup> 'DDS' stands for 'Diehard Duterte Supporters.'

candidates, such as the cherry blossom (✿) for presidential aspirant Leni Robredo and the fist bump (👊) for outgoing president Rodrigo Duterte. Lastly, prominent account owners made their religious identity known by explicitly stating their religion (e.g., *Roman Catholic*), affiliating with a religious group (e.g., *Christian*), or hinting at their spirituality (e.g., *saved by His grace*).

***Relational identifiers.*** Expressing relational identity manifests when individuals position themselves in connection to others or define a social role they fulfil (Priante et al., 2016: 56). In this study, prominent account owners were found to employ relational identifiers by identifying their partner (e.g., *owned by @PozzieJet07*), indicating their relationship status (e.g., *in a serodiscordant relationship*), specifying a sexual self-label (e.g., *vers<sup>44</sup>*), and mentioning other roles they take in relation to others (e.g., *brother*).

***Personal attributes.*** Apart from supplying their socio-demographic characteristics, prominent account owners identifying as FMLWH also offered other details about themselves. Eight personal attributes emerged from the analysis:

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<sup>44</sup> 'Vers' is short for 'versatile,' indicating someone who assumes both top (insertive) and bottom (receptive) sexual roles.

- ◆ External characteristics (e.g., *chubby, inked*)
- ◆ Internal characteristics (e.g., *resilient, geeky*)
- ◆ Hobbies and interests (e.g., *cooking, loves 🎵*)
- ◆ Accolades (e.g., *2016 TAYO awardee*<sup>45</sup>)
- ◆ Non-relational roles (e.g., *advocate, athlete*)
- ◆ Personality type (e.g., *ESTJ, INFP*<sup>46</sup>)
- ◆ Astrological sign (e.g., *Virgo, Aquarius* 🌌)
- ◆ COVID-19 vaccination status (e.g., *fully vaxxed, AstraZeneca*)

**Statements.** Besides providing concise self-descriptions in their Twitter bios, several Twitter users also took advantage of the available space to include a statement. The analysis uncovered nine types of statements commonly featured in the bios of prominent account owners:

- ◆ Bible passages (e.g., *Trust in the Lord with all your heart*)
- ◆ Calls for action (e.g., *DM me*<sup>47</sup>, *follow for follow*<sup>48</sup>)
- ◆ Current state (e.g., *Currently struggling with anxiety*)
- ◆ Declarations (e.g., *HIV is not a death sentence*)

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<sup>45</sup> 'TAYO' stands for the 'Ten Accomplished Youth Organizations' awards.

<sup>46</sup> These are two of the 16 personality types identified by the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator.

<sup>47</sup> 'DM' stands for 'direct message.'

<sup>48</sup> 'Follow for follow' is a reciprocal agreement in which users follow each other with the expectation of a mutual follow.

- ◆ Direct quotations (e.g., *Where there is love, there is life* — Mahatma Ghandi)
- ◆ Greetings (e.g., *Hey blood bro* 
- ◆ Lyrics (e.g., *I love to feel the rain in the summertime* 
- ◆ Questions (e.g., *What's your story?*)
- ◆ Self-centred statements (e.g., *I've been told the sexiest part of my body is my* 

**Account descriptions.** In addition to personal characteristics, Twitter account descriptions were also present in bios. These statements served to comment on their purpose for being on Twitter or the nature of their account, potentially setting expectations for users who would come across their profile:

- ◆ *Disclaimer: political thoughts are mine*
- ◆ *Created this account to connect with fellow blood bros*
- ◆ *Poetry, stories, and travel tips*
- ◆ *Warning: NSFW content<sup>49</sup>*
- ◆ *Alter account<sup>50</sup>*

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<sup>49</sup> 'NSFW' stands for 'not safe for work.'

<sup>50</sup> Cao (2021) links alter accounts to amateur pornographers, but study participants also used the term to refer to pseudonymous HIV accounts (see Chapter 6).

**Other accounts.** Users also cited other online accounts or profiles they managed. They either shared their username and the corresponding platform (e.g., IG: @altered\_wunderkind22<sup>51</sup>) or provided a URL (e.g., <https://t.co/rGrOeICW>).

### 7.3.4 Classification of Twitter Bio Content

**Codebook development.** The descriptors emerging from qualitative analysis were assembled into a manual for the coding of a larger sample of Twitter bios (refer to Appendix J for the codebook). Firstly, the codebook was pilot tested on a random sample of 30 Twitter bios to assess the reliability of codes. The initial codebook consolidated a total of 50 variables representing seven categories of Twitter bio content. Following the pilot test, Krippendorff's  $\alpha$  values ranged from -0.011 to 1.000. Almost one-third of the variables demonstrated strong intercoder reliability ( $n = 15, 30\%$ ) while few showed tentative reliability ( $n = 4, 8\%$ ). Sixteen variables (32%) were deemed unreliable. Krippendorff's  $\alpha$  was undefined for 15 variables (30%) due to invariant values. However, these cases consistently showed 100% agreement on the presence or absence of the variable.

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<sup>51</sup> 'IG' is short for 'Instagram.'

Measures were taken to enhance intercoder agreement. Firstly, definitions of codes with Krippendorff's  $\alpha$  values below 0.8 were refined, particularly for those failing to meet tentative reliability thresholds. The initial codes *assertion* and *platitude, saying, or other quotation*, both under the category *statement*, were merged into the singular code *declaration*. Meanwhile, the code *state of being*, originally under the category *personal attribute* was reconfigured to *current state* and placed under the category *statement*. The coders also underwent additional training.

After the final test, Krippendorff's  $\alpha$  values ranged from 0.440 to 1.000. Majority of the variables exhibited strong intercoder reliability ( $n = 31$ , 63%) while almost one-fourth of them showed tentative reliability ( $n = 12$ , 24%). Only six variables (31%) were still deemed unreliable and thus dropped from the classification of Twitter bio content. The lowest intercoder agreement was found for the following codes: *internal characteristic* ( $\alpha = 0.440$ ), *declaration* ( $\alpha = 0.465$ ), *current state* ( $\alpha = 0.509$ ), non-relational role ( $\alpha = 0.557$ ), *hobby* ( $\alpha = 0.591$ ), and *date without context* ( $\alpha = 0.658$ ). According to Neuendorf (2012: 170), low intercoder agreement may be attributed to coder misinterpretation, coder inattention, coder fatigue, and recording errors. Attempts made to enhance reliability included codebook refinement and coder retraining. However, factors beyond these measures might have contributed to the lower intercoder agreement for certain codes. Despite challenges, the decision was made to finalise the coding, as a substantial proportion of the codes achieved tentative to strong reliability. A total of 43 variables were then

employed to categorise Twitter bio content. Appendix Table 1 summarises the reliability coefficients for both pilot and final analyses.

**Types of content present in Twitter bios.** All seven self-description categories identified in the qualitative analysis were present to varying degrees in the 142 Twitter bios (Table 27). Stigmatised identifiers were notably prominent, appearing a total of 379 times. This serves as a strong indicator that these account owners' self-presentation practices in their Twitter bios were rooted in their identities as people living with HIV (PLWH). Ranking a distant second were socio-demographic identifiers with 79 instances recorded. Alongside the predominant stigmatised identifiers, these account owners included some information about their age, location, and occupation, perhaps to contextualise their HIV serostatus. Oppositely, the categories least represented in Twitter bios related to account information, with only 11 mentions of other accounts and 12 account descriptions.

**Table 27. Frequency of categories of content represented in Twitter bios**

CATEGORY	FREQUENCY
1. Stigmatised identity	379
2. Socio-demographic identity	79
3. Statement	45
4. Personal attribute	42
5. Relational identity	23
6. Account description	12
7. Other account	11

Expressing HIV identities in Twitter bios was found to be a typical practice among these account owners. The most featured descriptions in the Twitter bios of users identifying as FMLWH were *undetectable status* ( $n = 65$ , 45%), *date of HIV diagnosis* ( $n = 61$ , 42%), *HAART* ( $n = 54$ , 37%), and *suggestive social identifiers* ( $n = 54$ , 37%). Mentions of undetectable status are perhaps a way of making known that their viral load is suppressed, preventing HIV transmission. Disclosing their HIV diagnosis date establishes the duration of their experience living with HIV and potentially facilitates networking with others diagnosed within the same timeframe. Similarly, mentioning HAART underscores adherence to medication as a key to boosting their immune system. This also enables other PLWH to easily request emergency medication, if needed. Lastly, there were slightly more recorded instances of suggestive social identifiers compared with explicit ones. The use of suggestive labels provides these account owners a sense of cover, allowing them to make their HIV identities discernible only to those familiar with the codes in use.

Beyond stigmatised identifiers, socio-demographic characteristics and personal descriptors were also present in the Twitter bios analysed. Some users volunteered their age (e.g., *officially 30*) or hinted at their generation (e.g., *80s kid*). Professional identities were also displayed with entries like *mechanical engr*<sup>52</sup>, *public servant*, and *licensed physical therapist*.

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<sup>52</sup> 'Engr' is short for 'engineer.'

On the more personal side, analysis showed users' predilection for stating their astrological sign, usually presented as an emoji (e.g., ☽, ☾, ☿). These succinct descriptions served as a lighter counterpoint to the more serious stigmatised identifiers present in Twitter bios.

While writing short descriptions was the norm, longer statements were also found in Twitter bios. Some self-centred statements, consisting of at least three words describing users or their lives, were documented:

- ◆ *I am just a simple guy with a big heart.*
- ◆ *My life is a neverending cycle of commuting, work, Kpop, family, and badminton.*
- ◆ *Am the kind of person who'll order breakfast for dinner*

These account owners also included calls for action in their bios, directing these statements at other Twitter users to encourage specific actions. Thus, Twitter bios served a purpose beyond self-description. Several calls for action were affirmations and statements related to living with HIV:

- ◆ *Let's keep fighting* 💪
- ◆ *Find out about my HIV journey* 🔍
- ◆ *Live life to the fullest.*
- ◆ *Be proud of how far you've come.*
- ◆ *Keep going, blood bros!*

Appendix Table 2 outlines the number of occurrences for each type of Twitter bio content.

### **7.3.5 Uncovering Types of Tweets**

Shifting the focus to the classification of tweets, the qualitative analysis resulted in a framework comprising four categories of tweet content: 1) broadcast; 2) social presence; 3) live commentary; and 4) pass along. These broad categories were adopted from Dann's (2015) Twitter content classification system while specific codes were derived either through conventional content analysis or from the works of Lee et al. (2014), and Shaffer et al. (2013). The following discussion breaks down each category and provides illustrative examples.

***Broadcast.*** On Twitter, broadcast content takes the form of microblog-style tweets, conveying actions, experiences, thoughts, feelings, or events that users wish to share publicly or with their network (Dann, 2015). In this study, broadcast tweets were differentiated into *acontextual expressions, actions or experiences, reflections, scenarios, spiritual communication, and game stats.*

Short socially recognisable expressions in tweets may be unclear without any context provided, making it challenging to grasp their meaning. Such utterances are *acontextual expressions*, exemplified by the following tweets:

- ◆ Yes
- ◆ Damn
- ◆ Purple.

*Acontextual expressions* were found in the corpus of tweets posted by prominent account owners identifying as FMLWH. While these tweets certainly served to express an idea, additional details were unavailable to illuminate such utterances. It is possible that context was available in an adjacent post; however, tweets were treated as standalone units of analysis.

The broadcast nature of Twitter communications was evident in account owners' status updates about what they were doing or experiencing. These tweets are categorised as *actions or experiences*, with attention given to physical, kinaesthetic, and observable actions. To distinguish actions and experiences from reflections, mental and emotive responses were not considered (Dann, 2015). Some examples of tweets showing *actions and experiences* are as follows:

- ◆ *Stalked an ex on FB and found out he's now engaged 😊*<sup>53</sup>
- ◆ *The side effects of Astra are now kicking in 😔*<sup>54</sup>
- ◆ *Just got to work and am already super tired*

Prominent Twitter users also posted *reflection* tweets to convey what they were thinking or feeling (Dann, 2015). In contrast to *actions or experiences*, which are physical and observable, *reflections* occur internally in the mind (cognition) and heart (emotion). The following posts are examples of *reflection* tweets:

- ◆ *Craving for takoyaki*
- ◆ *Can't wait to travel again. Summer 2022 pls 🙏*
- ◆ *Evening thoughts: Was COVID a chance for us to reset?*

To recap, expressions categorised as *actions or experiences* address the question, “What are you doing or experiencing?” Conversely, *reflection*-type posts answer the question, “What are you thinking or feeling?” However, during analysis, it was discovered that many tweets did not neatly fit into these two categories. This prompted the addition of the category *scenario* to capture tweet content that responds to the more general query,

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<sup>53</sup> 'FB' is short for 'Facebook.'

<sup>54</sup> 'Astra' is short for 'AstraZeneca,' likely pertaining to the COVID-19 vaccine.

“What is happening?” Prominent account owners identifying as FMLWH posted *scenario* tweets to establish a situation without using any action words. They also marked personal events or announced occasions without ceremonial greetings (a separate category exists for such expressions). Moreover, users engaged in *scenario*-type posts by recounting conversations in turn-taking style. Following are some examples of *scenario* tweets:

- ◆ *Vikings is a full house today!*<sup>55</sup>
- ◆ *Been a year since I quit smoking*
- ◆ *Sup: Why are you tardy again?*<sup>56</sup>

*Me: \* explains \**

*Sup: Next time you’re late you owe us pizza.*



Numerous tweets exemplified *spiritual communication* in which users addressed a higher being in a conversation or a prayer. One such example is: *Lord, if this is meant for me, please grant it to me now*. Addressivity distinguishes this type of content from reflection, as it signifies that an utterance is directed toward someone (Bakhtin, 1986: 95).

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<sup>55</sup> Vikings is a buffet restaurant.

<sup>56</sup> ‘Sup’ is short for ‘supervisor.’

As mentioned in the discussion of emojis, sharing Wordle scores on Twitter was a trend during the period covered in the analysis. Unsurprisingly, several Wordle-related tweets—categorised as *game stats*—were found in the corpus of tweets of prominent account owners. To share their Wordle score, users typically use the Wordle app’s “share” function, which copies the results to their device’s clipboard. From there, they paste the results into a tweet for posting.

***Social presence.*** Where *broadcast* content is oriented toward status updates, *social presence* posts are aimed at connecting with others, particularly Twitter users in one’s network (Dann, 2015). These messages carry an interpersonal purpose, extending beyond merely expressing one’s actions, experiences, thoughts, and feelings. *Social presence* content is further broken down into the following types: *ceremonial greetings*; *information seeking messages*; *information sharing messages*; *action seeking messages*; *other directed messages*; and *self-referential commentary*.

Posts showing connected presence on Twitter usually incorporated *ceremonial greetings* directed to the broader Twitterverse or specific publics. Various forms of greetings were noted, such as expressions of goodwill, statements of gratitude, and felicitations:

- ◆ *Gmornin Twitter peeps!*
- ◆ *God bless all your generosity!* 
- ◆ *Congrats on being U=U!*

Prominent users often tweeted to obtain actionable or practical information. These posts were categorised as information seeking messages aimed at their network. It is important to clarify that not all questions in tweets are meant to seek information. Musings and rhetorical questions, for instance, are characteristic of reflection tweets rather than information seeking messages. The following tweets exemplify information seeking on Twitter:

- ◆ *Anyone else on Smart<sup>57</sup> experiencing problems connecting to data?*
- ◆ *LF bed space España area. Hopefully with fellow blood bro. HMU!<sup>58</sup>*
- ◆ *Is there a support group for PLHIVs in Tacloban?<sup>59</sup> Have a friend who needs help.*

The opposite of information seeking is information sharing. Posts supplying practical or actionable information to other Twitter users were categorised as information

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<sup>57</sup> Smart is a wireless communications and digital services company.

<sup>58</sup> 'LF' stands for 'looking for.' España refers to España Boulevard, a major thoroughfare in Manila. 'HMU' stands for 'hit me up.'

<sup>59</sup> Tacloban is the capital of the province of Leyte.

sharing messages. In contrast to broadcast-type messages, which prioritise self-expression, information sharing messages are intended for awareness, education, or promotion. Some examples of this type of content include:

- ◆ *CBS motivator here. Once again: ARV IS FREE. This is not tied to your Philhealth contribution. It is against the law for your hub to refuse to give you ARV because your Philhealth is not updated.<sup>60</sup>*
- ◆ *Important reminder: Ivermectin is not a medicine for COVID-19. This is for our pets.*  
😺😺
- ◆ *1989. This was the last year Gilas Pilipinas<sup>61</sup> failed to bring home the gold in the Southeast Asian Games.*

Prominent account owners tweeted not only to seek information but also to call on their followers to do something concrete or tangible. These tweets featuring action seeking messages were usually phrased as requests, commands, or invitations. Examples of such posts are as follows:

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<sup>60</sup> 'CBS' stands for 'community-based screening.' 'ARV' refers to 'antiretroviral medication.' PhilHealth, a government-owned and controlled corporation in the Philippines, offers tax-exempt health insurance to its citizens.

<sup>61</sup> Gilas Pilipinas is the Philippines' national men's basketball team.

- ◆ *Roadtrip?*
- ◆ *Got any change to spare? Donate to the victims of typhoon #UlysessPH.*<sup>62</sup>
- ◆ *Blood bros, watch The Kangks Show on WeTV (you may download the app for free). Episode 6 is for people like us.*<sup>63</sup>

The previous three categories, information seeking messages, information sharing messages, and action seeking messages, represent posts that are ostensibly aimed at one's Twitter network at large, rather than predetermined individuals. However, in numerous instances, prominent account owners also directed tweets to a specific audience, whether living or non-living, without the intention of sharing information, seeking information, or seeking action. These other directed messages comprised posts addressed to non-living objects and otherwise private messages published on Twitter for the wider public to read:

- ◆ *Hey Converge, get your act together #NexplayRoar*<sup>64</sup>
- ◆ *Thank you to my partner for accepting me despite being HIV positive. UD + Negative = #SerodiscordantCouple*

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<sup>62</sup> Typhoon Ulysses, also known as Vamco, was a highly destructive Category 4-equivalent typhoon that severely impacted the Philippines and Vietnam in mid-November 2020.

<sup>63</sup> The Kangks Show is a Philippine comedy series that explores sexual themes.

<sup>64</sup> Converge is an internet service provider. Nexplay is a Filipino gaming and esports technology company.

The last type of social presence content comprises tweets addressed to oneself. Termed by Dann (2015) as self-referential commentary, these posts are usually marked by cues such as 'note to self' or 'reminder to self.' Alternatively, users sometimes addressed themselves by their name in their messages. The following list shows examples of self-referential commentary:

- ◆ *Okay self, time to take a shower, we have work today.*
- ◆ *Exam day. This is it. We'll get through this, Kardo.*
- ◆ *Never forget, self, you are worthy.*

***Live commentary.*** Real-time event discussions were among the types of tweet content identified by Dann (2015) in his classification framework. This study treated *live commentary* as a broader category encompassing account owners' updates, thoughts, or reactions about an event as it unfolds in real time. Real-time tweeting by prominent users covered a range of events:

- ◆ Elections-related events (e.g., *Wow, yorme went all out for his grand rally!*<sup>65</sup>)
- ◆ Movies or TV shows (e.g., *The show is dragging and we still have a national costume segment!*)

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<sup>65</sup> Yorme refers to presidential candidate Isko Moreno.

- ◆ Online games (e.g., *Whoa solid Brody tank build!*<sup>66</sup>)
- ◆ Sporting events (e.g., *Game 6 postponed! Ginebra had this in the bag* 😭<sup>67</sup>)

**Pass along.** Although retweets and quote tweets were excluded from the sample, several original tweets still featured *pass along* content, reflecting the curation aspect of Twitter noted by Dann (2015). These tweets contain text borrowed from other sources, possibly shared to amplify the message. The analysis of *pass along* tweets by the study's prominent users showed a variety of republished content:

- ◆ Bible verses (e.g., “*Don’t lust in your heart for her beauty or let her captivate you with her eyelashes.*” *Proverbs 6:25*)
- ◆ Direct quotations (e.g., “*Fall in love with someone who will love you unconditionally. Who will accept your flaws, imperfections, shortcomings and make you feel that you’re worth having.*” *Thank you, EJ Cenita.*)
- ◆ Lyrics (e.g., *Isigaw mo sa hangin, tumindig, at magsilbing liwanag sa dilim*<sup>68</sup>)

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<sup>66</sup> Brody is a character in the online multiplayer game Mobile Legends.

<sup>67</sup> Barangay Ginebra San Miguel is a professional basketball team competing in the Philippine Basketball Association.

<sup>68</sup> This is a line from the 2005 song *Liwanag sa Dilim* by Rivermaya. Its English translation is: “Shout it to the wind, rise up, and be a light in the darkness.”

- ◆ Platitude, saying, and other quotation (e.g., *The world is your oyster.*)
- ◆ Reposted content (e.g., *FIRST PH e-bike factory up and running in Laguna via Inquirer Mobile*)

### 7.3.6 Classification of Tweets

**Codebook development.** Similar to the examination of Twitter bios, a codebook was crafted, encompassing 20 variables representing classifications of tweet content (refer to Appendix K for the codebook). Following this, a team of three independent coders conducted a pilot test of this manual on 100 randomly sampled tweets. Intercoder reliability results showed that only two variables (10%) exhibited strong intercoder reliability, while four demonstrated tentative reliability (20%). Due to invariant values, Krippendorff's  $\alpha$  could not be calculated for five variables (40%).

To improve intercoder agreement, the codebook was adjusted by introducing new codes, redefining existing ones, and removing one that was deemed irrelevant. As a case in point, the code *other reposted content* was added to be able to classify tweets showing copied and pasted content that was not retweeted. Meanwhile, the original code *stats update* was changed to *game stats* to clarify that this variable was intended for the identification of Wordle tweets. Following these changes, coders underwent further training on utilising the updated manual in coding the final set of 1,268 randomly sampled tweets.

The second round of coding did not yield significant improvement in intercoder reliability results, necessitating further revision of the codebook and additional training for coders. Employing the refined codebook, the coders re-coded the same set of tweets. While there was improvement in the majority of Krippendorff's  $\alpha$  values, no additional variable met the threshold for at least tentative reliability after the third round of coding. As a result, only eight categories showing at least tentative reliability (35%) were employed in classifying Twitter content. The reliability coefficients for the three rounds are summarised in Appendix Table 3.

**Types of content present in tweets.** Analysis showed that no particular type of content stood out among the 1,268 randomly sampled tweets. Furthermore, the top three categories—*HIV content*, *ceremonial greeting*, and *information seeking message*—were present in only a small fraction of these tweets. It is interesting to note that for a user base comprising FMLWH, only 141 tweets (11%) were centred around HIV-themed content. Although HIV-related terminologies emerged as common keywords in the word cloud shown earlier, HIV was not the primary focus of tweets shared by Twitter users identifying as FMLWH.

**Table 28. Frequency of categories of content represented in tweets**

CATEGORY	FREQUENCY (n = 1,268)	PERCENTAGE (%)
1. HIV content	141	11
2. Ceremonial greeting	115	9
3. Information seeking message	94	7
4. Spiritual communication	16	1
5. Game statistics	14	1
6. Direct quotation	13	1
7. Bible verse	3	0
8. Reposted content	3	0

HIV-themed content in tweets was indicated by both explicit and suggestive keywords. In the random sample, explicit HIV terminologies were notably used in commemorating two events: World AIDS Day 2021 and marking one's anniversary since being diagnosed with HIV. Several tweets posted around the time of World AIDS Day—1 December 2021—were present in the sample. Some tweets simply echoed the theme of World AIDS Day 2021 while others honoured their 'siblings' who had since passed away. The sample also included a couple of tweets acknowledging the period that had passed since individuals received their HIV diagnosis, with some referring to this occasion as their 'HIVersary.' In these instances, the use of explicit references to HIV was often necessary, as shown in the two tweets in Figure 41.

**Post**

**Armie** @ursweetpozguy

Remembering our siblings who are no longer with us #WorldAidsDay2021

10:11 AM · Dec 1, 2021

Notes  
To maintain user confidentiality, the original post is not shown, with the profile image replaced, the tweet reworded, and other details changed.

**Post**

**Errol** @pozzide

10 years since my pos dx! Happy HIVersary to myself! 🎉

2:03 PM · Apr 18, 2022

Notes  
◆ 'Pos dx' stands for 'positive diagnosis'.  
◆ To maintain user confidentiality, the original post is not shown, with the profile image replaced, the tweet reworded, and other details changed.

Figure 41. Sample tweets showing explicit HIV keywords

Tweets featuring suggestive HIV labels usually involved refilling prescriptions and undergoing laboratory tests. These casual updates suggest that these account owners have grown accustomed to their condition, treating visits to their hub as routine activities. For example, in Figure 42, Joaquin employs a checkmark emoji to indicate each completed task during his clinic visit, including getting his viral load test done, replenishing his supply of TLD (a combination drug therapy), and receiving a hepatitis B vaccine. Suggestive

references to HIV are also present in Amancio's tweet where he implores his 'blood brothers' to trust the process because 'ARV' (antiretroviral medication) works. For users integrated into this network, it was no longer necessary to explicitly mention 'HIV' when using these terminologies. As elaborated in Chapter 4, leveraging insider language was a visibility management strategy to navigate potential context collapse on Twitter. Hence, individuals external to this community might not readily interpret these implicit references to HIV.

**Post**

**Joaquin** @kaelbogan

VL  
TLD refill  
Hepa B vaccine  
Productive day!

3:36 PM · Mar 14, 2022

Notes

- 'VL' stands for 'viral load' while 'TLD' is 'tenofovir disoproxil, lamivudine, and dolutegravir,' a combination drug therapy.
- To maintain user confidentiality, the original post is not shown, with the profile image replaced, the tweet reworded, and other details changed.

**Post**

**Amancio** @beehive256

Blood bros, tiwala lang. Gumagana ang ARV!

7:23 AM · Jan 6, 2022

Translation

Blood bros, have faith. ARV works!

Notes

- 'Blood bros' is a term of endearment when referring to other people living with HIV.
- 'ARV' stands for 'antiretroviral medication.'
- To maintain user confidentiality, the original post is not shown, with the profile image replaced, the tweet reworded, and other details changed.

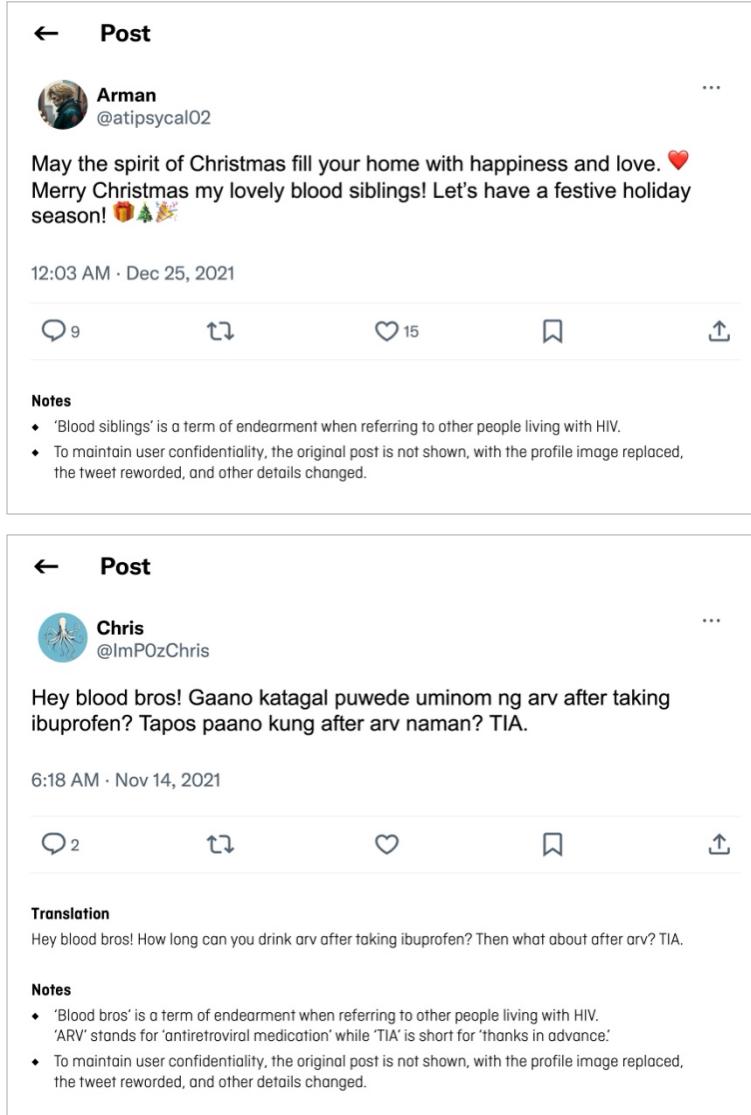
Figure 42. Sample tweets showing suggestive HIV keywords

A number of tweets were coded as displaying ceremonial greetings ( $n = 115, 9\%$ ).

This finding aligns with the analysis of textual features, where two of the most common bigrams were "good morning" and "thank you"—ceremonial greetings often used to open

and close tweets, respectively. There were numerous “Merry Christmas” and “Happy New Year” greetings in the sample, as 25 December 2021 and 1 January 2022 fell within the analysis period. As Dann (2015) notes, ceremonial greetings function to nurture social connections within one’s network. Therefore, these tweets serve not only to broadcast content but also to engage with other people on Twitter.

Several ceremonial greetings were specifically addressed to PLWH, as indicated by the mentions of ‘blood brothers’ and ‘blood siblings.’ These references reveal the primary audience of the *social presence* messages shared by Twitter users identifying as FMLWH. Some tweets were solely intended to greet fellow PLWH, as in Arman’s Christmas wishes in Figure 43. However, ceremonial greetings addressed to fellow PLWH were often followed with requests for information, as illustrated by Chris’s enquiry about the time interval between taking ibuprofen and HAART.



**Post**

**Arman** @atipsycal02

May the spirit of Christmas fill your home with happiness and love. ❤️  
Merry Christmas my lovely blood siblings! Let's have a festive holiday season! 🎁🎄

12:03 AM · Dec 25, 2021

9 15

**Notes**

- 'Blood siblings' is a term of endearment when referring to other people living with HIV.
- To maintain user confidentiality, the original post is not shown, with the profile image replaced, the tweet reworded, and other details changed.

**Post**

**Chris** @ImPOzChris

Hey blood bros! Gaano katagal puwede uminom ng arv after taking ibuprofen? Tapos paano kung after arv naman? TIA.

6:18 AM · Nov 14, 2021

2

**Translation**  
Hey blood bros! How long can you drink arv after taking ibuprofen? Then what about after arv? TIA.

**Notes**

- 'Blood bros' is a term of endearment when referring to other people living with HIV.  
'ARV' stands for 'antiretroviral medication' while 'TIA' is short for 'thanks in advance.'
- To maintain user confidentiality, the original post is not shown, with the profile image replaced, the tweet reworded, and other details changed.

Figure 43. Sample tweets showing ceremonial greetings

Chris' enquiry above falls under the category of an *information-seeking message*, a classification observed in 94 tweets (7%) in the sample. In Chapter 6, the exchange of informational support emerged as a notable practice among FMLWH on Twitter, and the occurrence of information-seeking messages in the sample partly confirms this finding. As

highlighted in specific participants' technobiographies, seeking peer support was more common during the initial stages of HIV diagnosis. However, the information-seeking messages in the sample did not suggest a significant presence of recently diagnosed individuals. Several enquiries tweeted pertained to matters of concern to PLWH, such as insurance, treatment hubs, and HAART. Crisanto's tweet in Figure 44 seeks insights from others regarding their experiences with switching HAART from TLD to LTE. This tweet is a classic example of peer support, emphasising the role of social networks in obtaining experiential knowledge (Peterson et al., 2012). In this regard, Twitter serves as a platform where FMLWH gather valuable information from their peers through crowdsourcing. However, a notable finding in the analysis was that the majority of information requests tweeted did not pertain to HIV. Several queries were related to everyday suggestions, such as movie recommendations, travel tours during the pandemic, and ideas for white elephant gifts. As shown in the tweet below, Crispin took to Twitter to seek advice on the appropriate cash gift amount to give his godchildren for Christmas.



The image contains two separate screenshots of Twitter posts, each enclosed in a light gray border. Both posts are labeled 'Post' at the top left and feature a user profile picture, the user's name, and their Twitter handle at the top center. The first post is from a user named 'Crisanto' (@beehive256) and asks for experiences with switching from LTE to TLD. The second post is from a user named 'Crispin' (@soloistangpgita) asking for ideas on how much to give as a cash gift for godchildren. Both posts include a timestamp, a reply count, a retweet count, a like count, a bookmark icon, and a share icon. Below each post, there is a 'Translation' section followed by a 'Notes' section with specific details about the content.

**Post 1: Crisanto (@beehive256)**

**Text:** Sa mga nagswitch to TLD from LTE, ano naging experience nyo?

**Timestamp:** 9:12 PM · Mar 1, 2022

**Interaction:** 4 replies, 1 retweet, 1 like

**Translation:** To those who switched to TLD from LTE, what was your experience?

**Notes:**

- 'LTE' is 'efavirenz, lamivudine, and tenofovir' while 'TLD' is 'tenofovir disoproxil, lamivudine, and dolutegravir'. On 1 September 2021, the Philippine Department of Health recommended the inclusion of TLD in the Philippine National Formulary for the first-line treatment of HIV. Refer to: <https://bit.ly/ES-TLD-SOHapproved>.
- To maintain user confidentiality, the original post is not shown, with the profile image replaced, the tweet reworded, and other details changed.

**Post 2: Crispin (@soloistangpgita)**

**Text:** Bigyan niyo naman ako ng idea magkano na ang acceptable na pamasko para sa mga inaanak hahaha

**Timestamp:** 2:13 PM · Dec 24, 2021

**Interaction:** 3 replies, 1 retweet, 1 like

**Translation:** Give me an idea how much an acceptable cash gift is for godchildren hahaha

**Note:**

To maintain user confidentiality, the original post is not shown, with the profile image replaced, the tweet reworded, and other details changed.

Figure 44. Sample tweets showing information seeking messages

Although urgent and serious topics, such as HIV-related concerns, were addressed on Twitter, the majority of content focused on maintaining a social presence and posting about mundane and routine aspects of daily life. Results of content analysis supplemented

the technobiographies of FMLWH narrated in Chapter 6, especially the evolution of their Twittering practices. Within the sampled tweets, there was a noticeable absence of requests for peer support from individuals recently diagnosed with HIV, suggesting that the user base consisted primarily of those in more advanced stages of managing the condition. This observation was further corroborated by the information-seeking messages regarding HIV, which centred on obtaining insurance, transferring hubs, and switching HAART—issues typically not raised by individuals in the early phases of coping with HIV. Nevertheless, the depth of the connections among these users was evident in the regular ceremonial greetings addressed to ‘blood brothers’ and ‘blood siblings,’ irrespective of the topic of discussion. These users’ tweets suggest that their engagement with the platform was less directed by rigid thematic orientations and more by the social connections they have established in the network.

#### **7.4 Conclusion**

This chapter detailed the findings of the third study, which focused on the dimensions of content and style in Lomborg’s (2014) genre framework for social media studies. Using an exploratory sequential mixed-methods design, the study classified tweets and Twitter bios and identified their key textual features. The following highlights summarise the study’s main findings:

1. Twitter bios served as a prominent space for HIV identification, with users employing a range of explicit and suggestive signifiers. While HIV-related content dominated tweet frequency, HIV itself was not the central theme of most tweets. Furthermore, the analysis did not reveal a single overarching thematic category in the sample.
2. Tweets served a dual communication purpose: masspersonal and phatic communication. As a masspersonal channel, Twitter enabled users to broadcast public messages, such as information requests, to their network. Additionally, phatic communication was evident in tweets seemingly intended to establish an online social presence.
3. Unsurprisingly, the stylistic features of Twitter content—brevity, informality, and use of non-standard language—mirrored its communicative purposes. Furthermore, users strategically incorporated emojis into both bios and tweets. In bios, emojis provided visual cues, while in tweets, they functioned to add nuance and emotional context to messages.

This chapter marks the culmination of the data analysis for this online ethnography. Chapter 8 will engage in a broader discussion, synthesising the findings from all three studies.

## CHAPTER 8

### SEEING TWITTERING THROUGH THE PRISM OF GENRE

#### 8.1 Chapter Overview

This chapter serves as the capstone of the online ethnography, weaving together the insights gleaned from the previous four chapters. Chapter 4 examined how Filipino men living with HIV (FMLWH) negotiated visibility management on Twitter, while Chapter 5 explored the user base's network structures and activity levels. Chapter 6 showcased select users' technobiographies of Twittering. Lastly, Chapter 7 centred on classifying tweets and Twitter bios and uncovering their stylistic attributes.

The purpose of this discussion is to analyse the interconnected themes and core findings from the three sequential studies conducted, and to explore their relationship to the theoretical framework that guided the genre analysis. The online ethnography utilised a functional-pragmatic genre perspective (Lomborg, 2014), the theory of networked publics (boyd, 2011), the theory of visibility management (Lasser and Tharinger, 2003) and graph theory concepts.

This chapter presents a four-part analysis based on Lomborg's (2014) genre-based approach to analysing social media. Each section corresponds to a research question and a specific dimension of genre analysis. The first section focuses on genre analysis at the level of user composition, examining visibility management, network structures, and the social organisation of communication. Section two examines Twitter content, focusing on thematic orientation and acceptable content norms. Style is the focus of the third section, where the analysis zeroes in on the stylistic features and style affect exhibited in tweets and Twitter bios. Finally, the fourth section explores the pragmatic functions Twittering serves FMLWH. It examines the social practices they engage in and the social achievements they derive from these activities.

## **8.2 Analysing Twittering at the Level of Composition**

This section addresses the first research question: *What is the composition of Twitter users identifying as FMLWH?* To answer this question, the discussion first hones in on how these individuals practise visibility management on Twitter. It then focuses on the network structure of Twitter users identifying as FMLWH, and the social organisation of communicative practices (Lomborg, 2014).

### 8.2.1 Visibility Management Practices

The key findings regarding the visibility management practices of FMLWH on Twitter are summarised as follows:

- ◆ FMLWH managed their visibility on Twitter by composing concise tweets alluding to their HIV serostatus.
- ◆ FMLWH demonstrated an intentional effort to be visible on Twitter, primarily within their own community of 'blood brothers.'
- ◆ The affordances of Twitter facilitated the open disclosure of HIV status, which is traditionally considered a private matter.

***Concise disclosure.*** According to Lasser and Tharinger (2003), visibility management operates on a continuum, ranging from least to most restrictive in terms of disclosure. Study findings aligned with this premise, where a substantial portion of users who identify as FMLWH embraced pseudonymous identities on Twitter while fewer others revealed their legal name and displayed uncensored photos of themselves. Although a little more than half of the account owners in the public Twitter list presented themselves as people living with HIV (PLWH) in their Twitter bio, almost all of them tweeted about their

HIV status<sup>69</sup>. The preference for disclosing HIV status through fleeting status posts implies that Twitter users who identify as FMLWH are selective about the Twitter canvases where they make their HIV identity visible.

Varied forms of HIV disclosure were observed. Although some users openly admitted their HIV status, most others were not as forthcoming. Regardless, Twitter users who identify as FMLWH negotiated the platform's 280-character limit for tweets and 160-character limit for Twitter bios for HIV disclosure. They either employed as little text as possible to stay within the character limit or circumvented the character limit altogether by composing a multi-tweet thread.

*An intentional effort to be visible.* Insights from the analysis of both trace data and trace interviews show that most FMLWH embraced pseudonymous personas on Twitter while a smaller proportion revealed their 'real' identities. These practices support past research, highlighting the prevalence of anonymous communication among individuals with stigmatised health conditions (Boudewyns et al., 2015; Rains, 2014). While illness-related embarrassment and HIV-related stigmas likely drive a preference for anonymity

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<sup>69</sup> In exploring the visibility management practices of FMLWH, analysis was not restricted to a timeframe. Hence, all extant tweets were considered in the analysis. It was only after the pseudo-population had been defined that the analysis period was confined to a six-month timeframe, from 21 October 2021 to 21 April 2022.

(Boudewyns et al., 2015; Rains, 2014), many users still completed their Twitter profile, albeit often choosing to use censored self-portraits. As such, these practices do not result in complete anonymity, which is more prevalent in other platforms like Reddit and Tumblr (Triggs et al., 2021: 7). Following Couldry (2012), these users negotiated their visibility on Twitter by presencing their identities as FMLWH while revealing minimal, and often unidentifiable, details about themselves, as if to affirm the presence of a 'real' person behind the screen. This suggests a complex interplay between the desire for privacy and the need for social connection.

Moreover, the findings suggest that FMLWH primarily utilised Twitter to connect with other members of the community, employing presencing practices that prioritised building relationships within the network. Despite the network's loose interconnectedness, the considerable median followers (171) and friends (152), and high reciprocity of 0.6921, support the finding that users form their own private conversation pockets. This highlights the dynamic nature of visibility management on Twitter, where individuals carefully manage HIV disclosure, beginning with limited sharing in high-visibility spaces like timelines and Twitter Spaces, and progressing to increased self-disclosure in low-visibility spaces such as direct messages and group chats. Future research could focus on these 'bounded social media places,' as conceptualised by Malhotra (2024), to gain deeper insights into the dynamics of visibility management within these low visibility spaces.

However, recent platform changes since Twitter's transition to X have included restrictions on direct messaging functionality to paid subscriptions (X, 2024a). As observed by Fred during member checking, these changes have already impacted user interactions, with a noticeable decline in interactions with fellow PLWH. This raises concerns that newly diagnosed PLWH may no longer have the same level of access to community support and information.

***Socially mediated visibility.*** While traditional perspectives on HIV disclosure emphasise intimate, personal disclosures (Jourard, 1971; Pearce and Sharp, 1973), the affordances of social media enable open disclosure among PLWH (Philpot et al., 2022). This research has highlighted the ways in which users encounter traces of other FMLWH on Twitter, leave traces of their identities as FMLWH within the platform, and limit their own activity to avoid leaving traces of themselves in public Twitter spaces.

The affordances of Twitter facilitate the replication of user-generated content, both in terms of its substance and its format. Replicability was evident in the circulation of common HIV identifiers within the Twitter network of FMLWH, as well as in the adherence to established norms of profile work and pseudonymity. Further, expressions of their identities are not only curated in their own profile (Hogan, 2010), but are also rendered scalable through retweets and searchable via Twitter's search engine. These affordances

foster user connections (boyd, 2011; Treem and Leonardi, 2013), potentially explaining the network's extensive 302,934 follows, linking all but two of these 'blood brothers.'

Findings also revealed the use of coded talk, which has been investigated in related studies on PLWH, although outside the sphere of networked publics (Selikow, 2004; Wood and Lambert, 2008). Social steganography, which involves the encryption of messages accessible to multiple publics but decipherable only by those knowledgeable about the codes in use and aware of the message's existence (boyd and Marwick, 2011), offers a valuable conceptualisation of this practice. Similar to the findings of Davis and Flowers (2014), FMLWH employed ambiguous references to their HIV identity, their steganographic techniques implying that these account owners allowed themselves to be visible and recognisable to other PLWH and the larger HIV community but hidden from other publics.

In their study on HIV disclosure in social media, Philpot et al. (2022) explained how a public post showing HIV medication without any context would prove meaningful to PLWH but perhaps not as much to outsiders. This, too, was observed in the study but with references extending beyond highly active antiretroviral therapy (HAART). Twitter users identifying as FMLWH employed shorthand forms of their medication and HIV biomarkers in their tweets ostensibly addressed to other PLWH. Interestingly, several abbreviations employed by these Twitter users are also used in contexts unrelated to HIV.

Some examples include *LTE*, which is shorthand for the HIV drug *efavirenz*, *lamivudine*, and *tenofovir* but could also refer to *long-term evolution* in the context of wireless data transmission; and *VL*, which could stand for either *viral load* or *vacation leave*. In addition, the use of implicit HIV social identifiers, such as *squid* and *octopus*, including their corresponding emojis (🐙 and 🐙), could have served as non-threatening ways to allude to living with HIV in public Twitter posts. Liam, a research participant, neatly captures this idea, stating: “If you’re one of us or are very familiar with these terminologies, [you] would easily get it—’okay, he’s a blood brother’.” A tweet exemplifying social steganography is shown in Figure 45.



Figure 45. Sample tweet showing coded talk

The theory of networked publics propounds that the affordances of networked technologies reshape the processes of information flow and the dynamics of social interaction on social media platforms (boyd, 2011). This research benefits this perspective by illuminating the ways in which FMLWH leave personal and social identity cues on Twitter while simultaneously encountering traces of other FMLWH on the platform (Baym, 2010; Schmidt, 2013). Because of the affordances of Twitter, expressions of their identities are not only curated in their own profile (Hogan, 2010), but also rendered scalable

(e.g., via retweets) and searchable (e.g., via Twitter's search engine) on Twitter. In this way, users do not exercise full agentic power in managing their visibility on Twitter. The algorithmic mechanisms of the platform also play a role making personal and social identity cues visible to other users.

Further, user-generated content is easily replicable, in terms of both substance and format. Focusing on the Twittering practices of FMLWH, replicability was particularly manifest in the HIV identifiers these users employed, including HIV clinical details, HIV biomarkers, HIV social identifiers. Profile bios also followed a consistent format, often including details like their confirmatory code, date of diagnosis, HAART regimen, treatment hub, and CD4 values, each demarcated by a special character or emoji. When entering a genre, Lomborg (2014) argues that users must first forge links with others. The systematic profile work enacted by Twitter users identifying as FMLWH may thus be seen as a first step toward establishing a social presence to similar others in the network.

## 8.2.2 Network Structures

Ethnographic observation of the visibility management practices of FMLWH on Twitter made it possible to catalogue relevant social identifiers, including recurrent linguistic references to their HIV serostatus. Employing systematic search strategies using pertinent keywords facilitated the identification of 1,447 candidate users comprising the

pseudo-population for the research. Two key insights were gleaned from the network composition of Twitter users identifying as FMLWH:

- ◆ The expansive network of this user base shows a tendency toward homophily.
- ◆ The Twitterverse of FMLWH comprises a loose network rather than a tight-knit community.

***A homophilous network.*** Analysis of the ties binding the 1,447 Twitter users resulted in the construction of two expansive social networks: a connection network based on more than 300,000 follows and a conversation network based on approximately 21,000 @mentions. It is remarkable that almost all the 1,447 Twitter users were connected to at least one other person in the network. Only two Twitter users were found to be isolates<sup>70</sup>, although they were linked to other account owners outside the pseudo-population under analysis. The wide diameter<sup>71</sup> of the connection network offers evidence of the homophily principle guiding the formation of social ties (Rogers and Bhowmik, 1970). In other words, on a social platform that hosts heterogeneous publics, FMLWH form their own circles by seeking out and establishing connections with their ‘blood brothers.’ In this regard, the distinctive ways in which this user base enacts Twittering as a communicative genre are

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<sup>70</sup> In graph theory, isolates are nodes that have 0 connections (Valente, 2010: 5).

<sup>71</sup> In graph theory, network diameter is “the maximum distance between nodes in the network” (Valente, 2010: 135).

predicated on a combination of salient characteristics, namely, nationality, gender identity, and HIV serostatus.

***A loosely connected and decentralised network.*** The low density<sup>72</sup> calculated for both connection and conversation networks suggests that users did not deem it necessary to be linked to everyone else. Instead, they limited their connections with FMLWH to a median of 152 friends and a median of 171 followers, indicating the optimal number of connections for this user base<sup>73</sup>. Despite loose network interconnectedness, these account owners skilfully drew on a repertoire of social identifiers as a means of sustaining a public presence as FMLWH to their fellow ‘blood brothers.’ This finding supports Couldry’s (2012) contention that meaningful participation on social platforms requires acts of showing through an ongoing practice called ‘presencing.’ Patterns of self-presentation among these account owners and the consistency of HIV-related terminologies used may be ascribed to the substantial number of connections that help circulate these expressions within the

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<sup>72</sup> Density refers to “the number of links in the network expressed as a proportion of the total possible links” (Valente, 2010: 6).

<sup>73</sup> To clarify, these figures represent connections to FMLWH with a public Twitter account. It is likely that these users are also connected to other FMLWH, albeit with protected accounts. Furthermore, the median values mentioned here solely represent connections with FMLWH; however, it is likely that these users follow and are followed by other types of users as well.

network, thereby supporting the persistence, replicability, scalability, and searchability of these presencing practices.

### 8.2.3 Social Organisation of Communicative Practices

Beyond following other users, Twittering involves a host of other communicative practices, such as tweeting, retweeting, and tagging other users. Relying primarily on data scraped from Twitter, the following insights shed light on the social organisation of communicative practices among users identifying as FMLWH:

- ◆ The primary mode of socialisation on Twitter involves following other users rather than engaging in timeline conversations.
- ◆ Varied levels of activity on Twitter were observed.
- ◆ The underlying dimensions of Twittering are captured by three factors, namely, connectivity, expression, and prestige.
- ◆ Most Twitter users identifying as FMLWH gathered around the personas 'happy to just be on Twitter' and 'happy to just network.'

*Following as the norm of connectivity.* The connection network based on plain follows represents broad tapestry of potential relationships that knit together Twitter users who identify as FMLWH. However, the structure of the conversation network shows that not all these relationships are actualised through @mentions. In this regard, for these networked publics, connections on Twitter are fundamentally established by following other

users rather than engaging in timeline conversations. These users showed a preference for following other users rather than conversing with them through tweets visible to their network.

Recorded conversational activity was much more conservative, as majority of these Twitter users tagged 20 FMLWH or fewer and themselves addressed by 20 FMLWH or fewer during the period of analysis. Reciprocity<sup>74</sup> was found to be high for the connection network (0.6921) and moderate for the conversation network (0.54). This means that around 70% of Twitter follows resulted in reciprocation, transforming one-way connections into mutual ones between two users. Conversely, the conversation network demonstrated a lower level of reciprocity, with just over half of timeline conversations receiving a reply from the @mentioned users. In this regard, within the network of users identifying as FMLWH, reciprocating follows emerged as a more of a prevalent norm than responding to timeline conversations.

Two implications are derived from these network measures. Firstly, Twitter users identifying as FMLWH did not use tags extensively to interact with others in the network. While @mentions on Twitter typically function as public displays of social connection

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<sup>74</sup> Graph theory holds that reciprocity is the tendency toward mutuality between two nodes (Valente, 2010).

beyond direct dialogue (boyd, 2011), this performative aspect was less evident among these users. This implies a potential prioritisation of private or more intimate forms of connection within their network. Secondly, even though majority of these users were classified as 'micro-interactants,' it is possible that they take their conversations with other users in the network elsewhere. Interviews with select participants revealed that they sustained connections with fellow 'blood brothers' by exchanging one-on-one direct messages, interacting with others in group chats, and engaging with others in Twitter Spaces.

***Varied engagement with Twitter.*** Data on several Twitter usage practices were dispersed, reflecting varying extents to which these account owners participated in the social platform from 21 October 2021 to 21 April 2022. For instance, more than one-third of these account owners were either light tweeters or heavy tweeters. Likewise, sharing links to web resources was not a uniform practice; half of the users did not share links at all while the other half demonstrated a wide range in link sharing (1–628). Additionally, they often marked tweets as favourites more frequently than they authored tweets themselves. This trend might suggest that their everyday use of Twitter leans more toward content consumption rather than content creation.

***Underlying dimensions of Twittering.*** Exploratory factor analysis was conducted to identify the latent components of Twittering. From a set of 28 variables, three factors were extracted and labelled as follows: 1) connectivity; 2) expression; and 3) prestige. The factor

‘connectivity’ captures the essence of networking on Twitter. The variables that exhibited a robust loading under this factor represented not only the practice of following other users but also attracting follows from others on Twitter. With users being invited to answer the question “What’s happening?”, tweets form the bedrock of Twitter’s architecture. Accordingly, the second factor labelled ‘expression’ represents the content broadcasting facets of Twitter use, such as authoring tweets, embedding links and media in tweets, and quoting other users’ tweets. In this context, prolific tweeters are taken to be the most productive content contributors and curators on the social platform. The last factor obtained from analysis was ‘prestige,’ which indicates the attractive quality held by valued users in the conversation network. Enacting Twitter as a communicative genre was found to be predicated on the reliance of users on influential actors, possibly for advice, information, or even plain attention.

***Personas of Twittering.*** Subsequently, the 1,447 Twitter users in the study were grouped into clusters according to their factor scores. Four distinct personas emerged from cluster analysis:

1. ‘Happy to just tweet’ ( $N = 54$ , 4%)
2. ‘Happy to just be tagged’ ( $N = 76$ , 5%)
3. ‘Happy to just network’ ( $N = 445$ , 31%)
4. ‘Happy to just be on Twitter’ ( $N = 872$ , 60%)

The large majority of Twitter users who identify as FMLWH exhibited traits of users who are 'happy to just be on Twitter.' Individuals clustered under this persona recorded the lowest overall scores across the three factors, implying few Twitter posts and weak ties with other users in the network. The second largest cluster bringing together almost one-third of the account owners was labelled 'happy to just network.' Like the previous persona, this cluster rated low in expression and prestige. In contrast, however, these account owners were significantly more sociable in terms of connecting with other users. Despite low factor loadings for expression, these users put premium on simply building a network on Twitter through follows.

From the cluster analysis results, two key questions emerge. Firstly, what motivates majority of these users to sustain a presence on Twitter despite their activity reflecting low levels of connectivity, expression, and prestige? Secondly, what makes networking a central driver of Twittering practice? These questions are addressed in the discussion of the pragmatic functions of Twittering.

### **8.3 Analysing Twittering at the Level of Content**

The focus of this section aligns with the second research question: *What contents are featured in the tweets and Twitter bios of users who identify as FMLWH?* Drawing upon

Lomborg's (2014) genre-based framework, the analysis examines the thematic focus of these users' posts and the implicit norms sanctioning acceptable content on the platform. It also explores recurring themes and topics within the data, alongside the established or developing conventions that shape content creation and dissemination within this specific Twitter community.

### 8.3.1 Thematic Orientation

Twitter content was segmented into two forms: tweets and Twitter bios. Content and corpus analyses revealed the following key findings regarding the thematic orientations of Twitter content generated by users identifying as FMLWH:

- ◆ Self-descriptions in Twitter bios emphasised stigmatised identities.
- ◆ While 'HIV-themed content' emerged as the most common category in terms of tweet frequency, Twittering did not primarily revolve around discussions about HIV.
- ◆ Besides the absence of clear thematic orientations gleaned from the analysis, tweets posted by FMLWH highlighted phatic communication.

***Stigmatised identities.*** Almost all the top words in Twitter bios were related to HIV, showing that profile work among FMLWH emphasised the presentation of stigmatised identities (Priante et al., 2016; Uski and Lampinen, 2014). Expanding on Goffman's concepts, Priante et al. (2016: 55) define stigmatised identity as association with a group

perceived as deviating from societal norms. With the bio sub-canvas appearing at the top of the Twitter profile, stigmatised self-descriptions are placed front and centre in this exhibitional space (Hogan, 2010), thereby setting subjective expectations for spectators. The persistent use of these identifiers across bios demonstrates a sense of social identifiability, indicating that FMLWH associate their HIV serostatus with a group identity. At the same time, displaying HIV markers above threshold values may be a way for users to showcase their favourable health condition in spite of HIV. While stigmatised identifiers were prominently featured, Twitter bios also showcased users' socio-demographic characteristics (e.g., age, work, political beliefs), statements (e.g., calls for action), and personal attributes (e.g., external characteristics). In this context, FMLWH utilised the Twitter bio as a sub-canvas to exhibit multiple facets of themselves; their HIV serostatus was only one of the multiple identities they curated in their profile.

**Varied thematic content.** In contrast to the analysis of Twitter bios, HIV-related keywords were notably absent from the list of top words featured in tweets posted from 21 October 2021 to 21 April 2022. However, analysis showed that some of the most common bigrams or collocated words were linked to HIV, including *blood brother* (a term of endearment for fellow FMLWH), *my status* (referring to one's HIV serostatus), and *viral load* (amount of HIV in the blood). Among the categories in the tweet content classification devised for the study, 'HIV-themed content' accumulated the largest number of tweets. Nonetheless, this category comprised only a small fraction of the total number of posts,

indicating that HIV was not a predominant topic in the tweets of FMLWH during the analysis period. This insight is crucial as it suggests that for a user base sharing salient characteristics, Twittering was not predicated on discussions about HIV. Even though peer support emerged as a narrative theme in the technobiographies of select FMLWH (refer to later discussion), messages pertaining to informational, emotional, and instrumental assistance did not feature prominently in the random sample. As noted in Chapter 7, the content of HIV-themed tweets posted suggests that Twitter users had been living with HIV for a considerable period. It may be inferred that exchanging peer support is more common during the initial stages of HIV diagnosis, gradually becoming sporadic as individuals adapt to living with HIV. As their use of Twitter shifts, so does the type of content with which they engage. Hence, as a communicative genre, Twitter differs from discussion forums for PLWH, which are exclusively focused on HIV concerns (Bar-Lev, 2008; Flickinger et al., 2017; Harris et al., 2015; Mo and Coulson, 2008, 2010, 2012, 2013).

***A platform for phatic and masspersonal communication.*** A major takeaway from the content analysis was that pronouns dominated the list of the most frequently featured words in tweets. The prevalent use of self-referential pronouns underscores the microblogging nature of Twitter, where FMLWH users tweet to share updates about their thoughts (e.g., *craving for takoyaki*) or activities (e.g., *just got to work and am already super tired*). These posts also bring about a sense of ‘temporal co-presence,’ signifying that the Twitter user is online and therefore available for conversation (Lomborg, 2014: 117).

The widespread use of the pronoun ‘you’ also hints at the interactional environment of Twitter, where users can address their thoughts to their network without necessarily @mentioning specific account owners. The analysis of tweets indicates a propensity toward phatic communication, which serves a purpose more social than substantive (Miller, 2008). Prior to the integration of direct messaging into Twitter’s core functionality, users relied exclusively on tweets to cultivate a connected presence with others on the platform. However, despite the emergence of alternative channels for interaction on Twitter, tweets posted by users identifying as FMLWH continued to exhibit the phatic characteristics described by Miller (2008).

Twitter also reflects the characteristic features of a genre enacted for ambient affiliation. Zappavigna (2014: 141–142) qualifies affiliation on Twitter as ‘ambient’ because “individuals do not necessarily have to interact directly in order to align around a common value.” FMLWH users gathered around discussion topics concerning significant events at the time of analysis, such as the 2022 Philippine national elections campaign period. As Zappavigna (2011) notes, tweets become ‘searchable talk,’ allowing account owners to engage in discussion with other users, even if they are not personally acquainted with one another. However, as will be discussed later, this research discovered that for FMLWH, Twitter relationships also extend to ‘real’ life, with previously online-only connections transitioning into friendships, casual flings, or romantic partnerships. Hence, the

maintenance of a connected presence on Twitter is only one of the reasons driving engagement with the platform.

### **8.3.2 Norms of Acceptable Content**

The concept of a ‘safe space’ was frequently brought up in interviews, referring to appropriate content and mode of conduct on Twitter. Building upon the narrative theme of freedom of expression as a defining characteristic of Twitter, the following major insights outline the norms of acceptable content on the platform:

- ◆ Welcome topics embrace ‘anything under the sun,’ including sexually explicit content.
- ◆ ‘Toxic’ content is frowned upon.

*A liberal atmosphere.* ‘Anything under the sun’ were the exact words a participant used to describe the type of content he tweets about. Another participant described Twitter as his ‘escape’ from Facebook, offering him a safe space to share his unfiltered thoughts without limitations. These exemplars illustrate two key points. Firstly, Twitter fosters a liberal atmosphere, where content policing by other users is not as prevalent as it is on Facebook. Secondly, participants felt it necessary to draw comparisons with Facebook when discussing the norms and conventions of Twittering.

One drawback to sustaining extensive Facebook use was the presence of family and friends, many of whom were unaware of their HIV serostatus. FMLWH found a home on Twitter, where they felt free to engage with the type of content they desired without holding back. Participants described the typical content they engaged with on Twitter as follows: peer support; life updates; politics; rants; and sexuality. Notably, participants regarded Twitter an outlet to vent their frustrations. In fact, among the most common bigrams identified from corpus analysis was an expletive, indicating the permissibility of profane and coarse language on Twitter. Along the same lines, sexually explicit content like amateur pornography significantly drove engagement. Several participants logged in to Twitter to watch pornography while some produced their own erotic content. Ironically, while they recognised adult content as acceptable on Twitter, users still harboured reservations about revealing their consumption of pornography to others. To address this, they adopted proactive strategies such as setting up a dedicated account for pornography and scrubbing any traces of pornography consumption from their main account.

***Resistance to ‘toxic’ content.*** Apart from the presence of family members and friends, participants limited their engagement with Facebook owing to its perceived toxicity. Participants characterised Facebook as ‘troll-infested’ and noted its lack of stringent content regulation mechanisms. To preserve Twitter as a ‘safe space,’ certain participants took proactive steps to caution other users about harmful tweets, including those aimed at purveying misinformation or perpetrating scams. They either composed or reposted tweets

discrediting these swindlers to prevent other Twitter users, particularly PLWH, from being deceived by their schemes.

## 8.4 Analysing Twittering at the Level of Style

This section attends to the third research question: *What style of communication is exhibited in the tweets and Twitter bios of users identifying as FMLWH?* Earlier analysis adopted a content-driven approach, emphasising the substance of communication. The analysis of stylistic attributes, however, represents a shift in focus, exploring how users construct and deliver their messages on Twitter.

### 8.4.1 Stylistic Features

The communication style of FMLWH on Twitter can be summarised as follows:

- ◆ Twitter messages were concise.
- ◆ Tone of communication was markedly informal.
- ◆ Non-standard language use was apparent in tweets.

**Brevity.** The short-form nature of Twitter naturally translated to concise messaging. Despite Twitter bios being capped at 160 characters, users identifying as FMLWH composed succinct self-descriptions averaging only 68 characters. This practice

demonstrates the stylistic norm of brevity in Twitter writing. To keep bios short, users relied on abbreviations and preferred phrases over complete sentences. A glance at the top words used in Twitter bios reveals their penchant for abbreviations, such as *Dx* (diagnosed), *PLHIV* (person living with HIV), and *U=U* (undetectable is untransmittable). The concise communication style and use of shared terminology by FMLWH users on Twitter likely reflect a focus on efficient communication within a specific audience—PLWH. This eliminates the need for elaboration on familiar terms. Furthermore, it potentially serves as a covert communication method. The shared language facilitates communication within the community while potentially offering cover from outsiders.

Although Twitter extended tweet character limits from 160 to 280 in 2017, FMLWH users utilised an average of only 89 characters per tweet—approximately one-third of the maximum allowance. Moreover, tweets showcased an average of 17 words, demonstrating a shared expectation for short posts. While a character limit existed, it was not always prohibitive. As discussed in Chapter 4, some FMLWH extended their narratives by employing threaded tweets by posting a series of replies to their initial tweet. This format was often adopted when narrating one's journey with HIV, from diagnosis to acceptance.

**Informality.** Participants described the tone of communication on Twitter as casual. Notably, Filipino gayspeak<sup>75</sup> was embraced within tweets, showcasing the playful nature of communication on the platform. Despite the informality of Twitter communication, several participants still valued the importance of well-written tweets. The core tenets of good writing—clarity, simple language, and proper punctuation—were still appreciated on Twitter.

**Playfulness.** As a final note on stylistic features, pre-processing text for corpus analysis unveiled the widespread use of slang in tweets. Shortened forms like *TIA* (thanks in advance), *SDE* (same day edit), and *sepanx* (separation anxiety) highlight the platform's casual communication culture and its emphasis on concise expression. Meanwhile, deliberately misspelled words like *dasurv* (deserve), *tonyt* (tonight), and *akez* [ako (translation: I or me)] exemplify the platform's propensity for the playful manipulation of language. While searchability is a communicative affordance of networked publics (boyd, 2011), users may desire to control the discoverability of their content. Twitter users identifying as FMLWH employed format-based linguistic steganography, a technique using deliberate misspelling, spaces, and special characters, to subvert searchability and

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<sup>75</sup> Casabal (2008: 90) elegantly describes Filipino gayspeak as follows: "The new, vibrant, potent weapon of marginalised gays is language—creatively crafted like a magical spell that colours their tongue and weaves their protection."

potentially conceal their messages from unintended readers (Bennett, 2004). This can be seen in the misspelling of politicians' names (e.g., *D/uterte* and *Neuterte* for Rodrigo Duterte; *Blengbong* and *Blengblong* for Ferdinand 'Bongbong' Marcos, Jr.) and the obfuscation of terms related to sex and drugs (e.g., *h\*rny*, *t\*t\**, *a/c/i/d*<sup>76</sup>). These language practices demonstrate a multifaceted use of social steganography by individuals identifying as FMLWH. Beyond expressing HIV identities, this technique found application in non-HIV contexts as well, demonstrating these users' adeptness at conveying hidden meanings through language.

#### 8.4.2 Style Affect

Analysis of tweets and Twitter bios yielded these key findings regarding style affect:

- ◆ Emojis belonging to the 'smiley and emotion' category were prevalent.
- ◆ Emojis exhibited different functions between tweets and Twitter bios.

**Smileys and emotions.** In their Twitter messages, FMLWH users blended text with visual elements such as emojis. An analysis of emoji usage revealed a larger repertoire in tweets ( $n = 178$ ) compared with bios ( $n = 93$ ). The red heart emoji (❤) and the smiling

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<sup>76</sup> The user-censored terms are *horny*, *titi* (Filipino for penis), and *acid* (referring to psychedelic drugs).

face with smiling eyes emoji (😊) emerged as the favourites, appearing among the most frequently used emojis for both tweets and Twitter bios.

**Variation in emoji use.** Some variation in emoji use was observed between tweets and Twitter bios. For instance, emojis in Twitter bios mostly served to clarify context or provide visual cues (Danesi, 2017). An example is the pill emoji (💊) appearing alongside next to HAART, such as *LTE* and *TLD*. Within tweets, emojis were used less for reference and more as instruments to convey specific emotions and establish the intended tone. An example shown in Chapter 7 was the loudly crying face emoji (😭) employed to show tears of joy to emphasise good news delivered in a tweet. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that emojis were used sparingly across the board, appearing just once on average in each tweet or Twitter bio.

## 8.5 Analysing Twittering at the Level of Pragmatic Function

This section delves into the findings corresponding to the fourth research question: *What are the pragmatic functions of Twittering for Twitter users identifying as FMLWH?* The focus of the discussion is twofold: firstly, exploring the social practices that characterise FMLWH users' engagement with Twitter, and secondly, examining the social achievements fostered through this platform (Lomborg, 2014).

### 8.5.1 Social Practices

Technobiographies of Twittering revealed a multitude of practices, with the following narratives standing out:

- ◆ Twitter users managed multiple accounts.
- ◆ Twitter users exchanged peer support.
- ◆ Twitter users engaged with sexually explicit material.
- ◆ Twitter users were content with simply 'being there.'

***Managing multiple accounts.*** Most participants already owned a Twitter account when they received their HIV diagnosis. The discovery of the Twitterverse of PLWH, through word-of-mouth recommendations, active searches, or algorithmic suggestions, frequently resulted in the establishment of supplementary pseudonymous or 'alter poz' accounts.

The practice of managing multiple Twitter accounts exemplifies automediality, allowing users to actively shape their online subjectivity through the interplay of visual and verbal communication on the platform (Kennedy and Maguire, 2018; Smith and Watson, 2014). By managing multiple accounts, users can curate their online presence tailored to distinct audiences encountered within the dynamic environment of Twitter (Van Der Nagel, 2018a). This research revealed that Twitter users identifying as FMLWH not only

managed multiple accounts but also utilised ‘alter poz’ accounts. This practice sheds light on the ways they negotiate their identities on the platform. ‘Alter poz’ accounts functioned as a shield against potential discrimination based on the users’ HIV status, allowing them to engage freely on Twitter. As one participant succinctly put it: “I can’t tweet as me.”

The prevalence of pseudonymous ‘alter poz’ accounts among PLWH also aligns with Goffman’s (1963) exploration of stigma management. Individuals with a stigmatised status, such as PLWH, may seek to avoid interactions that could lead to negative social judgments. Twitter’s architecture is prone to context collapse, wherein heterogeneous audiences are merged into a single entity (Marwick & boyd, 2011a). This blurring of boundaries increases the likelihood of what Goffman (1963) calls ‘mixed contacts,’ prompting some users to manage multiple accounts as a means of mitigating this issue and maintaining separation between different social spheres.

***Exchanging peer support.*** Upon integrating into the Twitter community of PLWH, newly diagnosed individuals gained access to a wealth of emotional, informational, and instrumental peer support (Dennis, 2003). This sense of belonging was reinforced by a participant’s comment: “There’s a community that’s willing to listen to you.” The supportive environment of the Twitterverse of PLWH manifests in several ways, including ‘welcome’ tweets from prominent users that tag newcomers. This practice not only extends a warm welcome but also expands new users’ social circles by attracting others within the

PLWH network. The community also fosters a culture of celebration, with members posting congratulatory replies to tweets announcing milestones, such as reaching an undetectable viral load. Twitter Spaces, the platform's live audio feature, emerged as a particularly valuable tool during COVID-19 lockdowns. These virtual spaces provided a platform for social interaction and mental health support, while some participants took advantage of them to raise funds for fellow PLWH facing financial hardship during the pandemic. Lastly, Twitter networks function as a safety net for FMLWH facing critical shortages of HAART medication. Through crowdsourcing, users mobilise their network to locate and acquire essential medication from geographically close members. These examples highlight the critical role played not only by social networks but also by networked publics in facilitating the exchange of peer support. Within this context, Twitter's communicative affordances enable messages to be amplified and searchable, facilitating the delivery of peer support within this online community.

***Engaging with sexually explicit material.*** Several users confessed to engaging with sexually explicit content on Twitter, which has become a significant source of amateur pornography from Filipino creators (Cao, 2021). Their engagement with pornography once again highlights the value of managing multiple accounts. Maintaining a separate account allows them to compartmentalise their viewing habits and prevent their primary Twitter profile from reflecting their pornography consumption. Furthermore, the study revealed that a subset of participants engaged in the production of amateur pornography through

their pseudonymous Twitter accounts. Twitter's content moderation practices, particularly regarding sensitive content, are perceived as lax compared with other platforms. This, in turn, allows for the 'produsage' (Bruns, 2008) of sexually explicit material, which was once accessible only on mainstream pornography sites. These findings illuminate Twitter's potential to serve a wider range of purposes, going beyond its well-established functionalities.

*Simply being there.* The earlier cluster analysis revealed that the majority of FMLWH Twitter users embodied the persona 'happy to just be on Twitter.' This group demonstrated low engagement in factors such as connectivity, expression, and prestige. Some participants attributed their limited engagement to having access to a 'real'-life support group. As one participant quipped: "My friends are my social media." This study highlights the importance of differentiating between tweet frequency, a measure of activity, and broader engagement practices on Twitter. Some participants acknowledged a decrease in their tweet frequency since establishing their 'alter poz' account. However, they continued to stay connected by following others and browsing their timelines. In addition, they acknowledged employing alternative communication channels, such as direct messages, to interact with fellow PLWH. Given their established circles, tweeting no longer served as their primary means for connecting with PLWH.

## 8.5.2 Social Achievements

Analysis of technobiographies unearthed a wealth of social achievements associated with Twittering. The ensuing discussion highlights some of the most illustrative narratives in this regard:

- ◆ Twittering as a shifting practice
- ◆ Twittering as community
- ◆ Twittering as sexual reclamation
- ◆ Twittering as freedom

*Twittering as a shifting practice.* Participants' Twittering practices evolved as they advanced in life with HIV. In the early stages after diagnosis, their tweets primarily focused on managing the condition and finding support networks on Twitter. However, over time, their use of Twitter shifted toward offering guidance and support to newly diagnosed individuals. Notably, the prominence of HIV as a theme within their tweets diminished. Social bonds cultivated with fellow FMLWHs on Twitter have likewise evolved. Presently, participants engage in these interactions through private group chats, utilising either Twitter or other applications.

A minority of participants opted to publicly reveal their HIV status on Twitter. By doing so, they transformed their 'alter poz' accounts, previously operating pseudonymously,

into identifiable profiles. The decision to ‘come out of the sero-closet,’ to borrow an expression from Philpot et al. (2022), was driven by a combination of practicality and a desire for visibility. Managing one unified account simplified their Twitter experience. Additionally, public disclosure served as a form of self-acceptance within the PLWH community, while also raising greater awareness about HIV.

Lomborg (2014) posits that social practices play a defining role in the enactment of a given genre, differentiating it from others. The case of FMLWH on Twitter illustrates this point. Their social motivations for using the platform shift over time, reflecting the different stages of living with HIV. The study included no participants with a recent HIV diagnosis. Nevertheless, the analysis revealed a diversity of Twitter usage patterns and evolving practices. This heterogeneity is likely attributable to the participants’ differing durations of living with HIV, ranging from three to 14 years. Considering this, the temporal dimension offers a meaningful addition to a functional-pragmatic genre analysis framework.

***Twittering as community.*** Twitter fulfils a vital social function by fostering connections among FMLWH who lack opportunities for in-person interaction, even within their treatment facilities. As one participant aptly expressed: “I’ve found my community.” In contrast to other social media platforms like Facebook, participants specifically described Twitter as a ‘safe space’ where they felt less susceptible to HIV-related stigmas. Twitter-initiated connections eventually extended beyond the online sphere, with participants

frequently meeting up in person. Furthermore, some PLWH even embark on group travel excursions organised on Twitter exclusively for PLWH.

***Twittering as sexual reclamation.*** While friendship-building was a key aspect of Twitter use, the platform also facilitated the development of intimate and sexual relationships. A participant recounted that upon receiving his HIV diagnosis, his first thought was that he could no longer engage in sexual activity. However, technobiographies of Twittering unveiled the platform's additional purpose as a 'landi channel,' to borrow a participant's words. Within Filipino culture, this term denotes online environments where flirtation and, potentially, casual sexual connections take place. In conjunction with their use of the platform for consuming pornography, Twitter operates as a 'socio-sexual networking site,' connecting users in ways that can lead to sexual interactions (Wignall, 2017). Importantly, these accounts provide 'counteracting narratives' (Squire, 2013) that challenge prevailing notions of living with HIV, including struggles with negative body image (Alexias et al., 2016) and a life devoid of intimacy (Treichler, 1999). For FMLWH, Twitter provides an avenue to seek sexual satisfaction and boldly exhibit their bodies within their extensive online network.

***Twittering as freedom.*** Overall, FMLWH users' social practices surrounding Twittering are fundamentally driven by the pursuit of freedom. The ability to create multiple accounts on Twitter addressed the varied requirements of participants.

Specifically, setting up an ‘alter poz’ account was a common pathway to becoming part of the network of PLWH on Twitter. These profiles unlocked a space individuals could navigate “with a different name, with a different persona,” as a participant put it. Pseudonymity afforded FMLWH the freedom to express themselves on Twitter without fearing any repercussions for the content they posted.

While this online community of ‘blood brothers’ operated on shared conventions and recognised influential actors, its highly decentralised network fostered an environment conducive to the free-flowing exchange of peer support. Individuals were free to amplify messages by retweeting them, while also having the opportunity to initiate direct messages with other users for personalised support. Furthermore, Twitter’s relatively lenient content policies provided FMLWH with the freedom to engage with sexually explicit content, driving their use of the platform. In fact, the liberal nature of the platform motivated some of them to share sexually suggestive images and videos of themselves, if not fully participating in amateur pornography as alters. This research demonstrates the dynamic nature of Twittering among FMLWH. Engagement levels varied depending on individual needs at specific points in time. While some participants identified as prolific users, others preferred a less active approach, primarily consuming content. This underscores the adaptability FMLWH demonstrated in engaging with Twitter.

Participants characterised Twitter as a ‘safe space,’ enabling them to connect with like-minded and like-blooded individuals – a network they would be unlikely to encounter in physical settings, even their treatment centres. Ultimately, FMLWH were drawn to Twitter’s relative freedom from the social scrutiny present on platforms like Facebook and Instagram. Unlike the carefully curated feeds showcasing a sanitised version of themselves on those platforms, participants felt comfortable expressing a broader range of experiences on Twitter. The platform allowed them to reveal other dimensions of themselves—unfiltered (with cursing and ranting), mundane (capturing the minutiae of daily life), and sentimental (chronicling their HIV journey).

## **8.6 Analysing Twittering as a Communicative Genre**

Living with HIV is often undermined as an isolating experience (Aggleton et al., 2005; Squire, 2013; Taylor, 2001), yet this online ethnography illustrates that FMLWH form networked publics on Twitter, displaying a level of connectivity and engagement that might not naturally arise in unmediated settings. Informed by the empirical results, this section integrates insights from the analyses of composition, content, style, and pragmatic function. To establish the hallmarks of Twittering as a communicative genre, as practised by FMLWH, overall findings are examined through six emergent themes:

1. A desire to be seen
2. Visibility and control
3. Genre knowledge and lived experience
4. FMLWH as networked counterpublics
5. Evolving needs, evolving engagement
6. Finding freedom on Twitter

### **8.6.1 A Desire to be Seen**

Despite pervasive HIV-related stigmas in the Philippines (Adia et al., 2018; Laguna and Villegas, 2019; Pamoso et al., 2024), it is interesting to highlight that almost all the 1,447 account owners in the research chose not to maintain entirely incognito profiles on Twitter. The completion of Twitter profiles, even with pseudonymous personas, suggests an intentional effort toward visibility on the platform and a desire to be seen. This finding challenges the notion that concealment is the typical approach to managing stigmatised identities, as previous work has shown (Baider, 2010; Carricaburu and Pierret, 1995; George and Lambert, 2015).

While pseudonymity might have fostered online disinhibition, several account owners still utilised social steganographic messages to convey their HIV identities. This visibility management strategy shows that in the face of context collapse, even pseudonymous account owners showed a tendency to tailor their visibility on Twitter,

employing coded talk seemingly aimed at fellow PLWH and others within the broader HIV community. This technique of hiding in plain sight afforded them an additional layer of protection on top of their already pseudonymous persona. The communicative affordances of Twitter help facilitate these visibility management practices, offering a potential explanation for these networked publics' preference for Twitter over other more popular platforms used in the Philippines.

### **8.6.2 Visibility and Control**

While findings highlighted the dynamic interplay between the agency of FMLWH in managing a sustained presence on Twitter and the role of platform affordances in shaping user engagement, it is essential to acknowledge that socially mediated visibility grants users only limited control over content archiving and access (Neumayer et al., 2021; Pearce et al., 2020). Despite user freedom, algorithms can potentially expose online traces of vulnerable individuals' identities without their realisation. As algorithmic recommendations also facilitated connections among 'blood brothers,' this user collective exemplifies not only networked publics but also 'calculated publics' (Gillespie, 2014) or 'algorithmic publics' (Christin, 2020; Møller Hartley et al., 2023). While acknowledging the role of algorithms, the research did not explore the 'black box' of algorithmic curation as it pertains to the Twitterverse of FMLWH, whose mechanisms are exclusively known to platform developers (Gillespie, 2014; Møller Hartley et al., 2023). The downside of algorithmic curation is that

socially mediated visibility can expose these users to risks, such as catfishing, fraud, and exposure. To mitigate these risks, these account owners must carefully monitor the content they publish on Twitter and regularly review their privacy settings.

Nevertheless, the digital traces left by hard-to-reach groups offer an important reservoir of data to better understand their lifeworld. Unlike previous research on visibility management in social media, which primarily relied on interviews (Davis and Flowers, 2014; Philpot et al., 2022), this research took a novel approach by examining digital trace data and account metadata. Resulting analyses present empirical evidence of visibility management through these users' network structure, built on actual connections, and their presencing practices exhibited in user-generated content.

### **8.6.3 Genre Knowledge and Lived Experience**

The striking similarity in the format and content of Twitter bios, often showcasing HIV-related keywords, serves as a testament to the use of genre knowledge in negotiating membership within an online community with shared experiences. In this regard, Twitter bios themselves constitute a subgenre, where specific elements function as a language for PLWH to identify each other. These shared practices can be interpreted as a way of asking: "Are you one of us?"

Lomborg (2014) argues that establishing connections is a prerequisite for effective communication on Twitter. The visibility management practices employed by FMLWH illustrate their skilled use not only of genre knowledge but also tacit knowledge arising from the experience of living with HIV. These practices demonstrate their adeptness at crafting online identities recognisable by fellow PLWH, ultimately facilitating the formation of social ties. The extensive network built by the 1,447 public account owners who identify as FMLWH on Twitter serves as evidence for the stability and scalability of these shared practices.

#### **8.6.4 FMLWH as Networked Counterpublics**

This research may offer alternate understandings of the concept of networked publics, which often hews to normative perspectives. The reluctance of marginalised individuals to participate in the ‘real-name web’ (Hogan, 2013) gives rise to pseudonymous publics, defined by Light (2017b: 244) as “public spaces in which we do things alongside or with others, where there is no expectation of complete privacy but where the use of real names is not warranted.” This research illuminates how Twitter provides FMLWH a public space to disclose their HIV status, connect with ‘blood brothers,’ and engage in conversations about HIV—opportunities that may not be available in other settings. Furthermore, the narratives shared by participants regarding the transformation of online connections into real-life relationships raise intriguing questions about the dynamics of

pseudonymous networked publics, particularly concerning the complexities of self-presentation in online and offline settings. As Renninger (2015) suggests, such Twitter users could be conceptualised as potential networked *counterpublics*, establishing a unique set of practices, norms, and expectations for participating in the online community.

### **8.6.5 Evolving Needs, Evolving Engagement**

A central finding of this research was that the role of Twitter for PLWH varies with their HIV journey. Participant technobiographies showed a changing relationship with Twitter, from early use to later acceptance. Motivations for engagement evolve alongside the changing needs of different stages of living with HIV. Importantly, all participants were long-term diagnosed, implying well-established networks on Twitter. This contrasts with recently diagnosed users who are still navigating the Twitterverse of PLWH.

According to Lomborg (2014), genres materialise through shared communicative practices, conventions, and expectations within a specific user group. As a case in point, while participants emphasised the importance of peer support networks for PLWH, analysis of tweets did not show peer support as a dominant theme. The discrepancy might be due to participants recalling experiences beyond the timeframe of analysis (21 October 21–21 April 2022). As discussed in Chapter 8, participants' experience living with HIV (ranging from three to 14 years) may have lessened their reliance on frequent peer support requests

via Twitter. Furthermore, some participant accounts pointed to Twitter Spaces and direct messages as avenues for peer support; however, the research design restricted analysis to public tweets. The diversity in communicative practices adopted by FMLWH at various stages of living with HIV suggests the potential emergence of subgenres within the broader genre of HIV-related Twittering practice. For instance, peer support-oriented communication, exhibiting distinct linguistic features, could be a subgenre specific to newly diagnosed users.

### **8.6.6 Finding Freedom on Twitter**

The fabric of social practices, spun around the genre of Twittering, finds its core threads in the pursuit of freedom. Ethnographic data pointed to the role of Twitter in enabling self-expression, fostering community, and reclaiming sexuality among users who identify as FMLWH. As a communicative genre, Twitter operates on the basic social norm of freedom of expression, which participants felt was lacking on Facebook. Further, Twitter's perceived lack of family and friends, and a perceived absence of HIV stigma, further solidified its appeal to these vulnerable individuals. For these reasons, Twitter presented itself as an alternative social platform for FMLWH, despite Facebook's substantial reach within the Philippines.

Twitter served as a space for connection and cultivating friendships. Participants acknowledged the challenges associated with forming organic friendships with other PLWH in traditional social contexts, such as treatment centres. Twitter emerged as a key platform that bridged this gap, fostering online connections that sometimes transitioned into real-life friendships.

An interesting finding of the research was the role of Twitter in fostering intimate and sexual relationships. Participants reported using Twitter as a substitute for dating apps to engage in casual encounters with other users. Additionally, the lax content moderation policies on Twitter allowed select participants to upload erotic albeit censored photographs of themselves, effectively boosting user engagement and attracting more followers. These counteracting narratives disrupt dominant understandings of HIV, which frequently depict individuals as grappling with negative body image and a lack of sexual fulfilment. The capacity to cultivate intimate and sexual relationships, alongside the freedom to proudly display their bodies on Twitter, stands in stark contrast to these prevailing notions.

Ultimately, this online ethnography offers valuable new understandings of the online communication practices employed by a difficult-to-reach population: FMLWH. The research challenges the prevailing view of HIV as an isolating illness (Aggleton et al., 2005; Squire, 2013; Taylor, 2001) by demonstrating how Twitter fosters community building among FMLWH. It further underscores the importance of socially constructed

genre knowledge and the dynamic nature of online interaction for successful participation within this platform. Initial Twitter adoption by participants stemmed primarily from a desire to jump on the bandwagon. However, the creation of 'alter poz' accounts to connect with the PLWH community reflected a shift toward self-determination. Echoing one participant's words: "We created this account to be free."

## 8.7 Chapter Summary

This synthesis chapter integrated the empirical findings presented in Chapters 4–7, aiming to illuminate how the practices of FMLWH collectively shape Twittering as a communicative genre. The chapter first established key findings on composition, content, style, and pragmatic function. It then moved to a broader level of analysis by examining these findings within the theoretical framework of this research. The discussion was structured around six themes that emerged from genre analysis, including the role of both genre knowledge and lived experience in *doing* Twitter, evolving needs driving changing Twitter practices, and finding freedom on Twitter.

The following chapter builds upon the research findings to articulate the empirical, methodological, and theoretical contributions of this research. It further outlines practical implications and future lines of enquiry.

## CHAPTER 9

### CONCLUSIONS

#### 9.1 Overview of the Research

Despite being a traditionally hard-to-reach population, Filipino men living with HIV (FMLWH) are visible on Twitter (now X), offering a unique avenue for gaining insights into their communicative practices. Seen through the prism of genre, these communicative practices may be understood in terms of how FMLWH *do* Twitter rather than how they *use* Twitter. From this viewpoint, ‘Twittering’ is more than just tweeting. It encompasses the range of practices involved in skilfully applying genre knowledge and negotiating participation in the platform.

These ideas spurred this online ethnography, which sought to answer this overarching question: *How is Twittering enacted as a communicative genre by users identifying as FMLWH?* Specifically, it examined how this user collective negotiated participation in this social platform across four levels of analysis: 1) composition; 2) content; 3) style; and 4) pragmatic function. Grounded in the philosophical assumptions of pragmatism, the theoretical contours of this research were shaped by a functional-pragmatic genre

perspective (Lomborg, 2014) and the theory of networked publics (boyd, 2011). The research also drew upon the theory of visibility management (Lasser and Tharinger, 2003) and graph theory concepts.

Through a multiphase sequential mixed-methods design, three studies were conducted as components of this online ethnography. The first study (Chapters 4 and 5) employed unobtrusive research methods, including online lurking, web scraping, and social network analysis, to characterise the composition of 1,447 FMLWH users on Twitter. To analyse Twitter activity and construct connection and conversation networks of FMLWH users, the study relied solely on digital trace data and account metadata gathered over a six-month period from 21 October 2021 to 21 April 2022. Furthermore, emerging factors of Twittering were modelled and utilised to categorise these users into four distinct personas.

The second study (Chapter 6) uncovered the pragmatic functions of Twittering for FMLWH. Guided by a technobiographic approach (Kennedy, 2003), this qualitative study invited participants to share stories about their everyday relationship with Twitter. Specifically, 19 of the most prominent users and five of the least prominent users in the network took part in interviews and social media elicitation. Aligned with the functional-pragmatic approach to genre, the study traced how these individuals got started on Twitter and eventually integrated themselves into the Twitter community of FMLWH. It also

probed into distinctive practices, norms and conventions, and the application of genre knowledge in negotiating participation in this social platform.

In the third and final study of this research (Chapter 7), attention was directed toward examining the thematic orientations and stylistic features of Twitter content generated by users identifying as FMLWH. A total of 146 randomly selected users consented to the analysis of content they had publicly posted on Twitter during the mentioned six-month timeframe. Firstly, corpus linguistics techniques were employed to uncover the textual features found within Twitter content. Subsequently, qualitative content analysis was employed to catalogue the range of personal identifiers utilised in Twitter bios and the types of content featured in original tweets. Lastly, a team of independent coders content-analysed 142 Twitter bios and 1,268 tweets using the classification frameworks resulting from qualitative content analysis.

## **9.2 Summary of Research Findings**

Drawing on the findings from the three studies, the following discussion outlines the key insights relevant to each research question.

### 9.2.1 Composition

This sub-section tackles the first research question: *What is the composition of Twitter users identifying as FMLWH?*

Twitter users identifying as FMLWH employed two key strategies for managing their visibility: firstly, by composing concise tweets alluding to their HIV status, and secondly, by employing coded language understandable only by members of the HIV community. Ethnographic observation made it possible for the researcher to catalogue an exhaustive list of HIV-related and masculinity-oriented keywords, which were then utilised in identifying the Twitter users of research interest.

A total of 1,447 FMLWH Twitter users comprised the pseudo-population of this research. Analysis of the network structure revealed homophily within this expansive user group. The network, consisting of more than 300,000 ‘follow’ ties, connected almost all users, with only two isolates. As is typical of large networks, a low density was calculated, indicating that the Twitterverse of FMLWH resembles a loose network rather than a close-knit community.

Twitter users primarily engaged in socialisation through following others, with a much lower frequency of engaging in timeline conversations. This disparity in the follow-

conversation ratio highlights that following is the standard method for connection building on this platform. Exploratory factor analysis revealed three underlying dimensions of Twittering: connectivity; expression; and prestige. Utilising these factors, the 1,447 users were clustered into four distinct groups, with the majority of users belonging to two key personas: 'happy to just be on Twitter' and 'happy to just network.' The 'happy to just be on Twitter' persona exhibited low scores across all three factors (connectivity, expression, and prestige). Meanwhile, the 'happy to just network' persona displayed low scores in expression and prestige, but high scores in connectivity.

### **9.2.2 Content**

The following discussion is aligned with the second research question: *What contents are featured in the tweets and Twitter bios of users who identify as FMLWH?*

The study segregated Twitter content into profile bios and tweets. Profile bios prominently featured stigmatised identities, with a notable emphasis on HIV-related keywords. Subsequent analysis of tweet content revealed 'HIV-themed content' as the most frequent category, though not the prevailing theme across all analysed tweets. Besides the lack of clear thematic orientations, tweets by FMLWH users focused on phatic communication and captured the minutiae of everyday life. Therefore, Twittering for this user base was not primarily driven by HIV discussions.

The lack of thematic coherence in tweets mirrored participants' understanding of Twitter as a space for diverse content, potentially including material of a sexual nature. Also, participants actively contributed to maintaining Twitter as a 'safe space.' Their vigilance extended to warning fellow users about harmful tweets, with a particular focus on misinformation and scams.

### **9.2.3 Style**

This subsection is centred on the third research question: *What style of communication is exhibited in the tweets and Twitter bios of users identifying as FMLWH?*

Brevity, informality, and playfulness characterised the stylistic hallmarks of Twittering among FMLWH users. The concise communication style and the use of shared terminology likely reflect a focus on efficient communication within a specific audience—people living with HIV (PLWH). Participants also described the expected tone of communication on Twitter as casual, with Filipino gayspeak being a common feature of tweets. Furthermore, the use of non-standard language, including deliberate misspellings and linguistic steganography, highlighted the playful nature of communication on Twitter. Emojis belonging to the 'smiley and emotion' category were prominently featured in both tweets and Twitter bios. However, emoji use differed between these content forms. Within

bios, emojis functioned to provide visual cues, while their use in tweets served to communicate emotions more precisely.

#### **9.2.4 Pragmatic Function**

The social achievements of Twittering take centre stage in the following discussion, which aligns with the fourth research question: *What are the pragmatic functions of Twittering for users identifying as FMLWH?*

Technobiographies of Twittering revealed four key social practices by FMLWH Twitter users: 1) managing multiple accounts; 2) exchanging peer support; 3) engaging with sexually explicit material; and 4) simply ‘being there.’ In addition to a ‘legitimate’ account, Twitter users managed an ‘alter poz’ account to navigate HIV-related stigmas and protect ‘real’-world identities. Initially drawn to the Twitterverse of PLWH for peer support following their HIV diagnosis, these users eventually transitioned into a role of providing support to newly diagnosed individuals. Numerous participants also admitted to using Twitter to access pornography, with some even creating amateur pornography themselves. The analysis revealed a pattern of minimal engagement on Twitter, evidenced by modest tweeting activity across the six-month timeframe considered. However, participants emphasised their continued connection to the platform through following others and viewing their timelines. They acknowledged a decrease in tweeting frequency since

establishing their 'alter poz' accounts, attributing this shift to the use of alternative communication channels, such as direct messages, for interaction with fellow PLWH.

### **9.2.5 Analysing Twittering as a Communicative Genre**

Collective findings on composition, content, style, and pragmatic function were explored through six emergent themes, which attempt to address the overarching research question: *How is Twittering enacted as a communicative genre by users identifying as FMLWH?*

Firstly, the research revealed a desire among FMLWH to be seen. This is particularly noteworthy given the widespread stigmas surrounding HIV. By not opting for complete anonymity on Twitter, the vast majority of the 1,447 users in the research challenged assumptions about the necessity of total concealment online.

Secondly, while this research emphasised the agency of FMLWH on Twitter, it also acknowledged the limitations of their control over platform visibility. Caution is warranted regarding the platform's power over user data. Nonetheless, the digital footprints left behind by FMLWH present a valuable resource for research endeavours, as demonstrated by this work. However, it is imperative that subsequent research uphold the highest ethical standards when handling the digital trace data of these vulnerable users.

Thirdly, the research highlighted how FMLWH draw on both genre knowledge and lived experiences to manage their online identities on Twitter. Standardised Twitter bios with HIV signifiers functioned as a shared practice for recognition within the PLWH community. This approach, informed by tacit knowledge, fostered social ties, as evidenced by the extensive networks built by 1,447 Twitter users identifying as FMLWH.

Fourthly, this research explored how Twitter functions as a pseudonymous public space for FMLWH. Here, they can freely disclose their HIV status, connect with similar others, and discuss HIV-themed topics. Shared experiences of online connections becoming real-life relationships raise questions about self-presentation across online and offline contexts. These practices suggest FMLWH potentially forming networked counterpublics with their own unique norms.

Fifthly, analysis revealed that the Twittering practices of FMLWH change over time. Motivations and needs evolve alongside their HIV journey. Long-term diagnosed participants have well-established networks, potentially contrasting with experiences of recently diagnosed users, who rely heavily on peer support.

Finally, this online ethnography illustrated how Twitter subverts the common understanding of HIV as an isolating experience. Analysis showed how the platform empowers FMLWH through self-expression, community building, and sexual reclamation.

Participants valued Twitter's perceived freedom of expression compared with Facebook. Additionally, the perceived lack of familiar connections on Twitter and reduced HIV stigma fostered a safe space for self-expression. This sentiment was poignantly captured by a participant who expressed: "We created this account to be free."

### **9.3 Research Contributions**

The significance of this online ethnography is discussed by exploring its contributions in terms of empirical data, methodology, and theory development. It also acknowledges the limitations of the research.

#### **9.3.1 Empirical Contributions**

This research makes important contributions to scholarship on living with HIV in the Philippines, and social media as communicative genres. The literature review revealed that relatively sparse academic work has been written on these two areas. Hence, this research was deemed an opportunity to fill these research gaps.

As mentioned, despite the growing population of PLWH in the Philippines, scholarly accounts of the HIV experience among seropositive Filipinos remain few and far in between. Given the challenges associated with identifying PLWH in 'real'-world settings,

they have traditionally been a challenging population to study using quantitative research methods. As a result, studies on Filipinos living with HIV have often been qualitative in nature, relying on small samples obtained through snowball sampling. This research makes a significant empirical contribution by analysing the individual and network characteristics of a large sample ( $N = 1,447$ ). Furthermore, it demonstrates the value of analysing digital trace data in participant selection.

This multiphase mixed-methods research yielded a rich dataset that can serve as a springboard for further research on this understudied population. As will be elaborated upon in the theoretical implications of this research, the visibility management practices of FMLWH offer valuable insights into the experiences of a vulnerable, hard-to-reach, and stigmatised group. Furthermore, the analysis of Twitter network data provides empirical evidence of the interconnectedness within this user base, potentially overcoming the limitations of traditional sociometry techniques that rely on self-reported connections.

Participant technobiographies enriched the quantitative findings, offering new understandings of how Twitter is appropriated within networked publics. Content analysis served to categorise the thematic content and types of tweets by FMLWH, and systematically described their self-descriptions in their Twitter bios. This method offered a means to capture the topics—or lack thereof—discussed by FMLWH and the strategies they utilised to construct their online identities in social media environments. Notably, such

insights might be difficult, if not impossible, to obtain through traditional research methods like interviews and surveys. While research has often prioritised the analysis of substantive content within Twitter messages, this study also examined the stylistic features of tweets and Twitter bios. Altogether, this multifaceted approach offered a well-rounded analysis of the communicative practices of FMLWH on this social platform.

### **9.3.2 Methodological Contributions**

This research embraced the perspective that genre analysis offers a comprehensive approach to understanding the lifeworld of FMLWH. Integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches, this mixed-methods investigation examined their tweets, network connections, Twitter content, and technobiographies. This research, therefore, presents a novel methodology for analysing how FMLWH enact Twittering as a communicative genre. The methodology complements Lomborg's (2014) conceptualisation of social media as communicative genres by outlining a detailed roadmap for analysing each of the four dimensions.

The field of social media research has witnessed a growing trend toward hybrid methodologies in recent years (Croeser and Highfield, 2016; Lewis et al., 2013; Zamith and Lewis, 2015). This is particularly evident in health-focused Twitter studies, where numerous scholars have successfully combined quantitative and qualitative approaches.

Examples include research identifying physicians and medical patients on the platform (Lulic and Kovic, 2013; Riddell et al., 2017, 2019). The combination of social network analysis and textual analysis of tweets is a prevalent approach in Twitter-based mixed-methods research. While the fusion of epistemologically diverse methodologies holds merit, its effectiveness relies on a sound research design. However, a notable shortcoming of existing mixed-methods research on Twitter is the lack of a clearly articulated theoretical or conceptual foundation, leading to studies that are primarily descriptive. This mixed-methods research, however, engaged with a range of theoretical material to analyse Twittering as a communicative genre, aiming to contribute to the ongoing exploration of hybrid research methodologies.

Furthermore, while the genre perspective has been applied to analysing websites and blogs (Cornett, 2009; Herring and Paolillo, 2006; McNeill, 2003; Schmidt, 2007), little research to date has probed into social media as communicative genres. Several studies have examined Twitter content through genre analysis, primarily focusing on identifying and categorising tweet characteristics (Alam and Lucas, 2011; Sæbø, 2011; Shaffer et al., 2013). While analysing the form and content of tweets holds value, Lomborg (2011) suggests that online texts often lack in-depth analysis beyond thematic orientations. This viewpoint is echoed in the wider literature, where studies applying a functional-pragmatic genre perspective to internet genres remain scarce. This research went beyond simply analysing the content of tweets authored by FMLWH. It delved deeper, examining their social

network, communication style, and the pragmatic functions they derive from engaging with Twitter.

Finally, the value of online lurking and analysis of digital trace data cannot be overstated when it comes to understanding hard-to-reach populations. Similar studies that aimed to describe the online practices of a given health community relied solely on explicit identifiers to sample users (Sugawara et al., 2012; Talbot et al., 2020). However, this approach could be restrictive in identifying PLWH on Twitter since these individuals might be hesitant to openly disclose their status. Online lurking was instrumental to discerning nuances in HIV disclosure and visibility management strategies, allowing for a more well-rounded approach to understanding vulnerable individuals who form networked publics.

### **9.3.3 Theoretical Contributions**

This online ethnography makes an original contribution by applying established theoretical frameworks to a novel setting outside Western contexts. The twofold value of the study lies firstly in its focus on the Philippines, a nation grappling with a pressing public health issue, and a sector facing entrenched stigmas. Secondly, the research expands the scope of theoretical inquiry into non-normative contexts.

This research crucially demonstrates that data generated within the online spaces inhabited by traditionally hard-to-reach populations constitute a rich resource for researchers. By analysing digital trace data, researchers stand to gain deeper insights into the lived experiences of these communities. Furthermore, analysing how a social platform is enacted as a communicative genre by a vulnerable user base goes beyond exploring media practices; it provides a unique window into their everyday lives.

While visibility management has traditionally been theorised in the context of minority and marginalised groups, its application has primarily focused on the coming-out process for individuals identifying as gay, lesbian, or bisexual. Lasser and Tharinger (2003) posit that the theory of visibility management can be extended to other contexts. This research not only illuminated the strategies employed by FMLWH but also explored their negotiation of visibility management on a public social platform like Twitter. In doing so, the research offers theoretical insights into the enactment of visibility management by individuals facing the complex stigmas of gender identity, sexual orientation, and HIV status. Furthermore, it sheds light on how Twitter's communicative affordances mediate this process. Overall, the research contributes to the ongoing theoretical development of socially mediated visibility in a datafied world (Neumayer et al., 2021; Pearce et al., 2018), particularly regarding hard-to-reach populations like PLWH.

The theory of networked publics (boyd, 2011) provided a valuable lens for understanding how platform affordances shape user participation on Twitter. However, this research argues for a more critical approach when examining marginalised populations. Light's (2013, 2014, 2017b) exploration of networked masculinities and pseudonymous publics exemplifies this need for deeper theorisation. Furthermore, although HIV social identities have been a subject of theoretical inquiry (Rintamaki, 2009), the ways in which such identities are produced and managed within 'datapublics,' including networked publics and algorithmic publics (Hartley, Bengtsson, et al., 2023; Hartley, Mathieu, et al., 2023), remain under-explored. This research showed empirical evidence that FMLWH form pseudonymous networked publics on Twitter and employ genre knowledge to guide their self-presentation practices. These insights pave the way for a theoretical exploration of networked HIV social identities.

The research further highlighted the non-normative ways in which FMLWH engaged with Twitter. Their preference for pseudonymous identities and aversion to the 'real-name web' (Hogan, 2013) offer a valuable case study for understanding the online management of stigmatised identities. The experiences of participants who fostered 'real'-life relationships from online connections illuminate the unique dynamics at play within these communities, which are not primarily motivated by self-promotion or financial gain.

Furthermore, the social practices of FMLWH on Twitter can be understood as a form of counterpublic communication. As Renninger (2015: 1516) suggests, counterpublic communication offers a space for networked publics to explore and negotiate identity, community, and relationships. This facilitates the development of strategies for managing and adapting their identities within the context of their social networks. This online ethnography demonstrates that FMLWH have carved out a niche on Twitter, enabling them to engage in discussions surrounding a stigmatised condition, share resources, and foster a sense of community. Their technobiographies of Twittering also serve as counteracting narratives that challenge prevailing norms of HIV and PLWH in the Philippines.

### **9.3.4 Limitations of the Research**

A key limitation of this research design lies in its generalisability. The analysis included only public Twitter accounts at the time of data collection. Consequently, the findings may not fully represent the experiences of all FMLWH on Twitter, or the broader PLWH population. Moreover, the analysis period was restricted to six months, from 21 October 2021 to 21 April 2022. Given the inherent in flux state of social media (Lomborg, 2017), the data collected may not accurately represent current user behaviour on the platform.

A systematic process was devised to identify tweets containing HIV-related keywords. However, Twitter's search limitations, such as the 1500-tweet cap per query, may have restricted access to some data, particularly from active users who publish a high volume of tweets. Moreover, candidate users were identified through the presence of specific keywords in their tweets and Twitter profile. While this approach aimed to encompass a wide group of relevant users, it is also recognised that some FMLWH on Twitter may not have employed these keywords. These limitations raise the possibility that the research may not have captured all FMLWH on Twitter with a public account.

Trace interviews offered valuable insights, but the potential for memory lapses regarding past Twittering practices highlights a limitation of this study. The participants, many of whom were long-term social media users and had been living with HIV for a considerable time, may have forgotten specific details about their past Twittering practices. This limitation was mitigated, in part, by employing social media elicitation wherein participants were presented with their Twitter metrics and past tweets to stimulate recall.

An ideal examination of Twittering would encompass all interaction spaces. However, for ethical and practical reasons, this analysis focused only on public content and public Twitter accounts. While interviews offered glimpses into private interactions, a future study employing an ethically sound methodology could explore Twitter Spaces and direct messages from this user base, potentially enriching the findings.

Moreover, the dynamic nature of Twitter allows users considerable flexibility. This means they can join or leave the platform at any time, delete tweets, manage their connections, and switch their account visibility between public and private. Given these platform functionalities and user behaviours, the research findings should be interpreted as a cross-section of data collected at a specific point in time, not as a fixed and static representation of social practices on Twitter.

Finally, it is worth noting that data collection concluded before the rebranding of Twitter to X in July 2023. Consequently, the study may not fully capture the evolving dynamics of online interaction and community engagement among FMLWH on X, particularly considering these recent changes. Further research is needed to understand how these platform changes have affected the visibility dynamics of vulnerable users on X.

## **9.4 Implications of the Research**

### **9.4.1 Future Research Directions**

For interested researchers, this research suggests the following areas for further exploration:

- ◆ **A focus on social media innovation:** This research emerged from a keen interest in how marginalised users appropriated Twitter to suit their specific needs. Genre analysis offered a productive approach to understanding user practices; however, investigating this phenomenon through the lens of social media innovation presents an equally compelling avenue for uncovering insightful findings. Shifting the focus to social media innovation would bring user-led practices to the forefront (Von Hippel, 1988). This framework would reveal how platforms evolve in response to social needs and how constellations of users, through their mediated interactions, contribute to this dynamic process (Ní Bhroin, 2015).
- ◆ **A focus on low-visibility spaces:** The conversation network constructed was based on @mentions, yet analysis showed that timeline conversations were not a prevalent mode of interaction among FMLWH Twitter users. This finding highlights a limitation, as the conversation network may not fully capture the richness of interactions that occurred during the six-month analysis period. The research design necessarily excluded private communication channels like direct messages and Twitter Spaces, although participants revealed utilising them in interacting with fellow PLWH. If Twittering encompasses the entire spectrum of communicative practices employed by users on the platform, then investigating 'bounded social media places,' as proposed by Malhotra (2024) could be insightful.
- ◆ **Analysis of peer support messages on Twitter:** While peer support networks and messages were not the direct focus of this ethnography, participants identified Twitter as a key platform for peer support, especially around the time of HIV diagnosis. Although research on HIV peer support is abundant, social media platforms like Twitter remain under-explored. Analysing tweets that showcase

peer support could offer valuable insights into the role of Twitter in facilitating various forms of assistance for PLWH.

- ◆ ***Analysis of 'small stories' of lived experiences of PLWH:*** The fragmented nature of HIV disclosure on Twitter resonates with Georgakopoulou's (2007) concept of small stories. This framework departs from traditional storytelling expectations of linear, well-structured, and grand narratives. Future research could explore tweets as a narrative data source, moving beyond thematic analysis to examine how these fragmented narratives are constructed.
- ◆ ***Conduct of a longitudinal study:*** The finding that Twitter use changes over time among FMLWH suggests a need for further exploration. While trace interviews complemented digital trace data, the inherent subjectivity of memory regarding past online behaviour presents a limitation. This could be overcome through a longitudinal study. Following a cohort of PLWH from diagnosis to acceptance would allow for a more nuanced understanding of how their Twittering practices unfold over time. This study would provide empirical data on the real-time development of these practices alongside continual platform changes.
- ◆ ***Conduct of a multi-sited ethnography:*** While this Twitter-focused online ethnography yielded rich insights, it is acknowledged that users identifying as FMLWH also engage with other social platforms and migrate interactions to other instant messaging applications. Additionally, participants described instances where online connections evolved into offline relationships. Future research exploring these alternative platforms and the potential for offline interaction could offer a more holistic understanding of the lived experiences of FMLWH.

#### 9.4.2 Policy Recommendations

This research offers the following recommendations for the Philippine Department of Health (DOH), advocacy groups, and other institutions involved in HIV treatment, care, support, and advocacy:

- ◆ *Adoption of a multidisciplinary approach to HIV communication:* The dominance of biomedical and socio-psychological approaches in HIV program design has attracted criticism. Scholars argue that these approaches overemphasise rational decision-making, linear progression through predetermined behaviour change models, a pro-innovation bias, and individualistic perspectives, failing to account for the broader social context (Airhihenbuwa et al., 2000; Airhihenbuwa and Obregon, 2000; Melkote et al., 2000). A culture-centred approach to health communication presents a potential alternative by creating spaces for voices traditionally excluded by expert-driven and elitist models (Dutta, 2008). This research not only supports Dutta's (2008) proposition but also expands the discussion by advocating for a multidisciplinary approach to HIV communication. Incorporating experts from diverse disciplines into project teams and task forces designing HIV programs offers practical advantages. This research particularly exemplifies that big data and computational social science techniques hold significant potential in this field. By analysing data from social media platforms, where hard-to-reach populations are prevalent, these methods can provide valuable insights into their lived experiences and communication dynamics (Rains, 2020). This knowledge can then be harnessed to develop more inclusive communication strategies that empower participant voices (Dutta, 2008).

- ♦ ***Collaboration with platform developers:*** The communicative affordances of networked publics present a paradox. While they facilitate the search and amplification of vital messages, these very affordances can be misused by individuals with harmful intentions. Participants recounted instances of other users being defrauded on Twitter by individuals masquerading as PLWH seeking help. To address this issue, advocacy groups could partner with platform developers to implement safeguards for vulnerable users, such as PLWH. In addition, HIV advocacy groups could develop informative resources to guide newly diagnosed PLWH on leveraging Twitter's functionalities to their advantage.
- ♦ ***Enhancement of HIV advocacy efforts:*** Participant narratives underscored the enduring presence of HIV stigma. However, the research findings offer a nuanced portrayal of FMLWH, moving beyond stereotypical representations of 'otherness.' These insights offer valuable contributions to the development of well-considered HIV advocacy initiatives, as detailed in the forthcoming recommendations.
- ♦ ***Refinement of treatment, care, and support services:*** Traditionally, evaluation research using survey data has been instrumental in driving improvements and expansion of health services for PLWH. However, this approach, while capturing a breadth of concerns, can overlook specific aspects of the HIV experience. This research, through its focus on FMLWH on Twitter, offers health providers an opportunity to gain deeper understandings of this population. These insights can be instrumental in enhancing programs and services to better address the needs and realities of FMLWH. For instance, by mapping the FMLWH health network on Twitter, this research has generated empirical data on the level of interconnectedness among users and the influence of specific actors. This social network could also be viewed as a potential

information resource, allowing health communication practitioners to develop targeted strategies for disseminating HIV-related messages.

- ◆ ***Leveraging social media as a social listening tool.*** Beyond fostering connections among PLWH, Twitter serves as a valuable social listening tool that justifies investment. Health providers, advocacy groups, and other relevant institutions can glean data from this platform to identify the needs and concerns of PLWH. Tweets offer insights into the unprompted thoughts, anxieties, and communication styles of PLWH users, potentially revealing aspects not captured in consultations with health specialists, counsellors, and community-based screening motivators. Because access models to Twitter's application programming interface may involve subscription fees, government institutions must consider these costs in preparing their yearly project procurement management plan.
- ◆ ***Collaboration with prominent FMLWH Twitter users:*** This research employed large-scale social network analysis of FMLWH Twitter users, providing valuable insights into the network's composition. Additionally, by analysing individual network metrics, the study identified the most prominent and influential users within the network. These individuals have the potential to serve as valuable champions, promoting HIV treatment, care, and support initiatives.
- ◆ ***Leveraging weak ties:*** Although both connection and conversation networks exhibited weak ties, Granovetter (1973) highlights the potential benefits of cultivating such connections. While weak ties may not translate to frequent communication, they can bridge user clusters within the network, facilitating the flow of novel information (Weng et al., 2018: 2). Social network data can inform the grouping of participants from diverse subcommunities within the Twitter network, facilitating team-building activities and knowledge exchange.

- ◆ **Guiding integration into existing online peer support communities:** This research demonstrates that Twitter's functionalities effectively address the essential needs of PLWH for privacy, anonymity, and social connection. This suggests that the development of a separate online portal for peer support may be superfluous, and potentially even undermine these very needs. A more strategic approach might involve HIV counsellors equipping newly diagnosed individuals with the resources and guidance necessary to navigate existing, supportive online communities like those found on Twitter.

Finally, based on the insights from this research, the following recommendations are offered for consideration by PLWH:

- ◆ **Engaging with the Twitter community:** The research highlights the need for social network building among PLWH, particularly during the early stages of diagnosis. However, this research also identified challenges associated with forming in-person social connections. Twitter presents itself as a potential bridge, enabling newly diagnosed patients to connect with peers. At the same time, it is important to reiterate that peer support should complement, not replace, regular consultations with HIV counsellors and infectious disease specialists.
- ◆ **Exercising caution in using Twitter:** It was previously established that Twitter's functionalities can pose threats to PLWH who use the platform, especially those who choose not to remain fully anonymous. Socially mediated visibility in a datafied world may put these users at risk of harm, such as catfishing, fraud, and exposure. This prompts account owners to routinely check the content they publish to prevent their actual identity from being compromised.

## EPILOGUE

When I embarked on this ethnography in 2018, the Philippines averaged 32 new HIV diagnoses daily (Department of Health- Epidemiology Bureau, 2018). The most recent report (May 2023) from the Philippines' HIV/AIDS and ART Registry reveals a troubling rise, with the daily average reaching 49 cases (Department of Health- Epidemiology Bureau, 2023). As I write these reflections one year after this Department of Health report was released, a further rise appears likely. This epilogue serves as a bookmark on this ongoing research, not a concluding chapter. Within this section, I contemplate on my project, my ethnographic subjects, and the future direction of this work. I have also invited Hans, whose experience with HIV diagnosis I narrated in the prologue, to offer his own reflections on this project.

This online ethnography unfolded amidst a period of flux within social media. In October 2022, a significant development occurred when Elon Musk, Chief Executive Officer of Tesla, acquired Twitter for \$44 billion (The Associated Press, 2022). This was followed by a further noteworthy event in July 2023, with the platform being renamed to X. The rebrand also saw established terms like 'tweet,' 'retweet,' and 'quote tweet' replaced with 'post,' 'repost,' and 'quote,' respectively (Mac and Hsu, 2023).

Notably, this period also saw significant functional changes within the platform, including the introduction of optional paid subscription tiers ranging from a rate of ₦165 (₦3) to ₦880 (₦16) per month (X, 2024a). While the premium subscription service offers users more features like extended post lengths, post editing, and a blue verification checkmark, this has been accompanied by limitations in functionality, such as restricting direct messages to users an account owner follows.

What are the implications of these changes on how Twittering is enacted as a communicative genre by users identifying as FMLWH? During member checking, one of the participants, Fred, commented that changes to the X landscape have impacted the way 'blood brothers' connect with one another on the platform:

I wish to add that due to Elon Musk's takeover of Twitter, now X, I am now getting less and less interactions with fellow [people living with HIV]. If you're not familiar with it, you can now only [direct message] an account if you follow each other on Twitter. Or if you are subscribed to X Premium. With this change, newly diagnosed [people living with HIV] don't have that freedom anymore to reach out to us

On the date of this writing, 17 May 2024, Twitter is officially no more. An article published today on The Verge states that "the social network formerly known as Twitter has officially adopted X.com for all its core systems" (Peters, 2024). This development then prompts the question: Has the term 'Twittering' also become obsolete?

Perhaps so—but labels, by their very nature, are susceptible to change anyway. This research broadly conceptualised Twittering as encompassing the range of communicative practices involved in skilfully applying genre knowledge and negotiating participation in the platform. While the term alludes to the platform name, its conceptualisation is founded on practice, emphasising user agency over platform dependency. Labels may change, yet historical events over the past decade or so demonstrate the organic formation of online communities around shared concerns—Arab Spring in 2011, #MeToo in 2017, and #BlackLivesMatter in 2020. While these events represent fleeting hashtag activism, not a continuous practice, they underscore the ability of social platforms to empower the formation of underrepresented counterpublics who cannot or choose not to engage in offline spaces (Mueller et al., 2021; Zulli, 2020).

In contrast to the mentioned movements, living with HIV is not a transient event; it is an ongoing condition. One significant outcome of Twittering is the creation of ties between and among users identifying as FMLWH. Perhaps due to HIV-related stigmas, this phenomenon is not commonly replicated in offline environments. Following my public research presentation in December 2023, I received an unexpected message from an

attendee. He was not involved in the research, but he identified himself as a person living with HIV (PLWH)<sup>77</sup>. A portion of his message to me read:

...I agree with every sentiment you shared: it seems like the world is preventing us from communicating with each other. Whenever we go to treatment hubs, we simply take our [antiretroviral] bottles, deposit blood samples, and leave as discreetly as we came. We even wear face masks and long-sleeved clothing to remain anonymous. Plenty of us, myself included, don't really talk much about our status or our health regimes.

The line from his message that struck a chord with me was: "It seems like the world is preventing us from communicating with each other." This sentiment of his resonated with the experiences of Brad, Jesson, and Marcus, as documented in Chapter 6, who described a culture of avoidance within HIV treatment hubs. My research highlights how Twittering facilitates the formation of friendships among FMLWH—a connection that is demonstrably lacking in traditional settings frequented by this population, such as treatment hubs.

The Twittering practices of users identifying as FMLWH also showcase the importance of genre knowledge and interactional skills for connection, self-organisation,

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<sup>77</sup> While the manuscript employs 'PLWH' for consistency, 'PLHIV' is the more common abbreviation within the HIV community.

and social media participation. While my research has documented how Twittering has become integrated into the everyday lives of these users, their practices are not necessarily contingent on specific platform features of Twitter/X. This resonates with Hutchby's (2001: 444) contention that communicative affordances "frame, while not determining, the possibilities for agentic action in relation to an object." Consequently, this online ethnography does not argue that Twitter is *the* singular space where 'blood brothers' band together, but emphasises its role as an alternative platform due to its communicative affordances. Drawing on boyd (2011), the affordances of persistence, replicability, scalability, and searchability inherent to networked technologies hold the potential for FMLWH to form networked (counter)publics, independent of a specific platform like Twitter/X.

While encrypted instant messaging applications, categorised as 'bounded social media places' by Malhotra (2024), offer potential for FMLWH user connection, their emphasis on private communication may limit the public articulation of interactions, a key aspect of social media engagement for this community. Considering the potential drawbacks of Facebook for FMLWH users, it is unlikely to be a suitable replacement for Twitter/X. Likewise, alternative microblogging platforms such as Bluesky, Mastodon, and Threads currently exhibit a lack of user engagement, which appears to be a critical factor for FMLWH communities to thrive. Furthermore, the absence of direct messaging in

Threads—a feature that became ingrained in the Twittering practices of this user group—presents an additional obstacle for widespread adoption.

While the anonymity offered by Reddit creates a possible space for this user base, it might not fully cater to the range of social practices observed on Twitter for this population. A subreddit called r/PLHIVPH (currently with 94 subscribers) serves as a “supportive community dedicated to providing a safe space for individuals living with HIV in the Philippines.” However, functionalities on Reddit may be better suited for peer support, potentially limiting opportunities for casual connections and the curation of ‘alter poz’ accounts, which were documented as social practices on Twitter.

The absence of a definitive successor to Twitter/X is not inherently negative. If anything, this scenario highlights the dynamic nature of communicative genres, which constantly evolve and adapt to new platforms. Furthermore, it underscores the limitations of technological determinism, the idea that technology dictates communicative practices. The case of users identifying as FMLWH exemplifies this point, showing that communicative genres can be enacted and thrive independent of a specific platform. As long as HIV-related stigmas persist, these individuals will undoubtedly find ways to self-organise, and this process will likely be facilitated by social media. This opens a multitude of avenues for investigating their online communicative practices and, consequently, their lived experiences.

When I began recruiting participants for this research in 2022, I was concerned about potential participation, anticipating reluctance from FMLWH despite clearly framing the study as focusing on Twittering rather than living with HIV. As expected, several of my invitations were met with silence. Some received outright refusal: "It's a no for me," read a curt reply dated 29 May 2023. One or two Twitter users might have blocked me as well. What I did not foresee was the outpouring of hopeful and appreciative messages from Twitter users at the recruitment stage:

**Lydwin:** I hope you'll find very good research findings and I hope it helps the PLHIV community fight off stigma about the condition.

**Teejay:** I wish you all the best in completing this study. I hope it sheds light on what we, as people living with HIV in the Philippines, are experiencing. It is hard to fight stigma when even your own family and community cannot protect you.

**Rylan:** ...good luck on your research, I hope your research will help us in the community to be understood by other people and also to lessen the stigma between us and on the non-PLHIV peeps.

**Xyster:** Feel free to use my Twitter data for your thesis. Thanks for choosing PLHIVs as your subject. I look forward to the day when stigma surrounding HIV and sexual health in general are no longer an issue to the LGBTQ+ community and society at large.

**Rino:** Thank you for choosing the PLHIV community.

Several messages spoke to the stigma PLWH endure, with hopes that my research would serve as a means of fighting it. (“That’s quite the tall order,” I told my research supervisors.) But it was that short message from Rino on 15 June 2023 that truly gave me pause: “Thank you for choosing the PLHIV community.” It was a touching message, but the truth was, I did not view FMLWH as a community I had deliberately selected based on predefined criteria. This made me wonder: If I did not choose it, did it choose me?

I opened this manuscript by describing how a single tweet served as the catalyst for this ethnography. I also narrated how my personal experience of witnessing a friend’s HIV diagnosis instilled in me a deep sensitivity toward this population. For this reason, it feels fitting to close this manuscript with an account from Hans, just as it began with one about him. This time, however, I am turning over the writing to him to give us the final word:

When Troy<sup>78</sup> informed me that I need to write a reflection as part of the epilogue, there was an instant feeling of flummox that came upon me. But then I realised this is the natural order of things seeing how the prologue was written. After I was told of the help needed from me primarily as a sort of bridge into the ‘hidden’ community of PLHIV on Twitter, I knew I wanted to have a bigger role as I can see the excitement brew in my friend’s eye knowing he was working on a good topic. Personally, there was also a beam of pride in me knowing I have somehow ‘set the wheels in motion’ for my friend knowing I have contributed to something worthwhile.

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<sup>78</sup> The researcher is known by this nickname within some friend circles.

There has been a growing exhaustion in the PLHIV community on Twitter being used as respondents of case studies and surveys by middle school and college students. Not to take away any importance from them but whatever anticipated impact was barely felt by the Twitter PLHIV community. I was hopefully eager that this study will be seen differently.

As someone who immediately turned to Twitter after my diagnosis after reading a WordPress blog mentioning that PLHIV have been congregating in that platform, the way I curated my profile bio was something I just copied from majority of the profiles I saw. No one specified a standard but providing one's location, antiretroviral cocktail of use, and CD4 progress made sense. My profile many years ago is still how it appears now. For us, this was nothing special, but lo and behold, turns out it developed as a part of how we present ourselves in online settings. I won't go deeper as the author has already analysed this, though it was a pleasant and perhaps an unexpected finding that we were not just drowning ourselves with HIV-related concerns. Sure, we started our Twitter alter lives seeking comfort and support but once it had been fulfilled, we naturally talked more about our normal and mundane lives. I think this is one of the unnoticed events that was brought into light by this study.

To tie this all up, I would like to come back on an aspect I mentioned earlier—impact, as any study worth pursuing should have. It may still be not clear-cut what the impact of this study actually is as I got the impression being an involved party that nothing similar has been published yet and that it shows high probability of birthing further studies coalescing to a clearer picture of overall impact. What this study however gave us, coming from a perspective not that of an educator nor a PhD candidate but as a member, is the very heartfelt recognition, that we can and that we do exist outside of our HIV diagnosis. There is also the validation that we do not have to be tied to the stigma and marginalisation commonly tagged to our community. I share the pride and sense of accomplishment with my friend after the feedback from the respondents came after having shared the output when this study was initially presented to the public. Members of the community, together with its allies, had been so used to how we had been previously portrayed. Now it is more than just that. With the recognition given us, I feel like we have also been set free.

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## **APPENDIX TABLES**

Appendix Table 1. Krippendorff's  $\alpha$  reliability coefficients for the coding of Twitter bios

VARIABLE	INTERCODER AGREEMENT		EXAMPLE
	PILOT (n = 30)	FINAL (n = 142)	
1. Stigmatised identity			
A. Clinical detail			
i. Confirmatory code	0.715**	0.882*	R18
ii. HAART	0.956*	0.963*	LTD
iii. Treatment hub	0.657	0.912*	LoveYourself Anglo
B. HIV biomarker			
i. CD4 count	1.000*	0.965*	CD4 213 - 85 - 132 - 146 - 252
ii. UD status	0.956*	0.948*	HIV+ and undetectable
iii. Viral load	1.000*	0.948*	VL less than 40 copies/mL 09.01.18
C. Social identifier			
i. Explicit	0.498	0.909*	HIV reactive 10-21-2016
ii. Suggestive	0.245	0.700**	Blood brother since Oct '19
D. Pertinent date			
i. Date of HIV diagnosis	0.949*	0.875*	Reborn Feb 29, 2016
ii. Date of HAART	0.795**	0.875*	LTE Feb 18 ➔ LZE Dec 19
iii. Date of HIV biomarkers	0.699**	0.732**	CD4 151   8/29/17 308   3/11/18
iv. Date without context	0.889**	0.658	04.11.18
E. Other health condition	N/A	0.769**	Survived PTB

Appendix Table 1 continued on next page...

Appendix Table 1 continued from previous page...

VARIABLE	INTERCODER AGREEMENT		EXAMPLE
	PILOT (n =30)	FINAL (n = 142)	
2. Socio-demographic identity			
A. Academic identity			
i. Scholastic program	N/A	0.783**	Nursing
ii. Enrolment status	N/A	0.813*	Currently studying
iii. Academic institution	0.000	0.966*	UST
B. Age	0.847*	0.982*	Millennial
C. Geographic identity			
i. Location	1.000*	0.782**	📍 Dasma
ii. Local identity	1.000*	0.946*	Ilonggo
D. Occupational identity			
i. Work role	0.581	0.799**	Physical therapist
ii. Field of work	N/A	0.783**	Finance
iii. Broad description of work	0.000	0.684**	Working class
iv. Professional affiliation	N/A	0.870*	Bagani volunteer
E. Political identity	0.000	0.975*	BBM solid
F. Religious identity			
i. Religious affiliation	N/A	1.000*	INC
ii. Spirituality	0.494	0.803*	Saved by His grace
3. Relational identity			
A. Identified partner	N/A	0.910*	Partnered to @redbloodselmo
B. Relationship status	1.000*	0.807*	Looking for LTR
C. Sexual position	N/A	0.859*	Vtop
D. Other relational role	N/A	0.921*	Brother

Appendix Table 1 continued on next page...

...Appendix Table 1 continued from previous page

VARIABLE	INTERCODER AGREEMENT		EXAMPLE
	PILOT (n =30)	FINAL (n = 142)	
4. Personal attribute			
A. External characteristic	0.847*	0.799**	Chubby
B. Internal characteristic	0.498	0.440	Kind
C. State of being	0.322	-	N/A (variable dropped in final codebook)
D. Hobby or interest	0.494	0.591	Volleyball
E. Accolade	N/A	1.000*	Top financial advisor 2018
F. Non-relational role	0.756**	0.557	Ally
G. MBTI personality type	1.000*	0.954*	ESFJ
H. Astrological sign	1.000*	0.907*	Gemini
I. COVID-19 vaccination status	1.000*	1.000*	💉 Sinovac
5. Statement			
A. Assertion	-0.011	-	N/A (variable dropped in final codebook)
B. Bible passage	N/A	0.946*	Philippians 4:13
C. Call for action	0.429	0.792**	Sapiosexuals to the front
D. Current state	-	0.509	Hanging by a thread
E. Declaration	-	0.465	Safe is the new sexy
F. Direct quotation	N/A	0.936*	"And when you're gone, who remembers your name?" — Aaron Burr
G. Greeting	N/A	0.939*	Hi 🙌
H. Lyrics	N/A	0.921*	Look how they shine for you
I. Platitude, saying, or other quotation	0.457	-	N/A (variable dropped in final codebook)
J. Question	1.000*	1.000*	Are you one of us?
K. Self-centred statement	0.364	0.675**	Open to collabs
6. Account description	N/A	0.773**	Warning: NSFW content
7. Other account	0.000	0.769**	Locked account: @bloodiebro18

\* Reliable

\*\* Tentatively reliable

Appendix Table 2. Frequency of types of content in Twitter bios

VARIABLE	FREQUENCY (n = 142)	PERCENTAGE (%)
1. Stigmatised identity		
A. Clinical detail		
i. Confirmatory code*	9	6
ii. HAART*	54	38
iii. Treatment hub*	25	18
B. HIV biomarker		
i. CD4 count*	33	23
ii. UD status*	65	46
iii. Viral load*	3	2
C. Social identifier		
i. Explicit*	44	31
ii. Suggestive**	54	38
D. Pertinent date		
i. Date of HIV diagnosis*	61	43
ii. Date of HAART*	6	4
iii. Date of HIV biomarkers**	24	17
E. Other health condition**	1	1
2. Socio-demographic identity		
A. Academic identity		
i. Scholastic program**	2	1
ii. Enrolment status*	5	4
iii. Academic institution*	6	4
B. Age*	17	12
C. Geographic identity		
i. Location**	8	6
ii. Local identity*	3	2
D. Occupational identity		
i. Work role**	17	12
ii. Field of work**	2	1
iii. Broad description of work**	4	3
iv. Professional affiliation*	3	2
E. Political identity*	11	8
F. Religious identity		
i. Religious affiliation*	0	0
ii. Spirituality*	1	1

Appendix Table 2 continued on next page...

...Appendix Table 2 continued from previous page

VARIABLE	FREQUENCY (n = 142)	PERCENTAGE (%)
3. Relational identity		
A. Identified partner*	4	3
B. Relationship status*	10	7
C. Sexual position*	9	6
D. Other relational role*	0	0
4. Personal attribute		
A. External characteristic**	12	8
B. Accolade*	0	0
C. MBTI personality type*	11	8
D. Astrological sign*	16	11
E. COVID-19 vaccination status*	3	2
5. Statement		
A. Bible passage*	2	1
B. Call for action**	19	13
C. Direct quotation*	1	1
D. Greeting*	1	1
E. Lyrics*	1	1
F. Question*	4	3
G. Self-centred statement**	17	12
6. Account description**	12	8
7. Other account**	11	8

\* Reliable

\*\* Tentatively reliable

Appendix Table 3. Krippendorff's  $\alpha$  reliability coefficients for the coding of tweets

VARIABLE	INTERCODER AGREEMENT			EXAMPLE
	PILOT (n = 250)	SEMIFINAL (n = 1,268)	FINAL (n = 1,268)	
1. HIV content	0.78**	0.67**	0.74**	Just got my VL test result. < 50 copies.
A. Broadcast				
B. Acontextual expression	0.66	0.51	0.57	Damn
C. Action or experience	0.54	0.43	0.57	OMW to Trinoma for Avengers: Endgame
D. Reflection	0.56	0.46	0.54	These covid cases rly makin me wanna get boosted now
E. Scenario	-	0.40	0.45	EDSA traffic on a Friday booooo
F. Spiritual communication	-	0.70**	0.79**	Praise Jesus for today!
G. Stats update	0.62	-	-	N/A (variable dropped in final codebook)
H. Game stats	-	0.93*	0.95*	Wordle 211 3/6
				
2. Social presence				
A. Apology	N/A	-	-	N/A (variable dropped in final codebook)
B. Ceremonial greeting	0.77**	0.72**	0.74**	Gmornin Twitter peeps!
C. Information seeking message	0.71**	0.66	0.72**	Any blood bros here who recently went to Saudi? Have some Qs.
D. Information sharing message	0.85*	0.29	0.43	Important reminder: Ivermectin is not a medicine for COVID-19.
E. Participation seeking message	0.78**	-	-	N/A (variable redefined to 'action seeking message')

Appendix Table 3 continued on next page...

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VARIABLE	INTERCODER AGREEMENT			EXAMPLE
	PILOT (n = 250)	SEMIFINAL (n = 1,268)	FINAL (n = 1,268)	
F. Action seeking message	-	0.59	0.66	Got any change to spare? Donate to the victims of typhoon #UlyssesPH.
G. Other directed message	-	0.36	0.42	Oh Baguio you're so pineapple
H. Self-referential commentary	0.53	0.38	0.36	Okay self, time to take a bath!
3. Live commentary				
A. Election-related event	0.00	0.18	0.25	Krissyyy I almost cried after listening to your message! #TarlacIsPink #KulayRosasAngBukas
B. Movie or TV show	0.19	0.71**	0.66	Can't believe this guy got away with this! #tinderswindler
C. Online game	N/A	0.00	0.00	Dota lose streak 10 games
D. Sporting event	N/A	N/A	N/A	LFG @MiamiHEAT
4. Pass along				
A. Bible verse	N/A	0.78**	0.87*	"Ask and you will receive, that your joy may be full" — John 16:24
B. Direct quotation	N/A	0.87*	0.80*	"Be the change you wish to see in the world." - Mahatma Gandhi
C. Lyrics	1.00*	0.60	0.61	I'm good, yeah, I'm feelin alright
D. Platitude, saying, or other quotation	0.82	0.49	0.60	Everything happens for a reason.
E. Other reposted content	-	0.67**	0.67**	Repost Tell me you're a middle child without telling me you're a middle child.
5. Unclassifiable	0.00	0.00	0.00	s.#a.ss.sssnddc

\* Reliable

\*\* Tentatively reliable

## APPENDICES

## **APPENDIX A: CERTIFICATES OF ETHICS CLEARANCE**

**Form 2. MSc PhD Staff Ethical Clearance Submission Form**

**PLEASE allow a minimum of 3 weeks for this process.**

**You must not begin your research until you have obtained consent as evidenced by this form returned from the APD student Office signed and dated. Ethical Clearance cannot be granted retrospectively.**

This form can only be used if the application :

- Does not involve participants who are patients or clients of the health or social services
- Does not involve participants whose capacity to give free and informed consent may be impaired within the meaning of the Mental Capacity Act 2005
- Does not involve patients who are 'vulnerable'
- Does not involve any element of risk to the researchers or participants
- Does not involve any participants who have a special relationship to the researchers/investigators

If any of the above apply, please refer to the APD Ethics Chair to decide whether an application can be made through the APD review process or whether the application needs to be referred to the full University Committee.

**It is the applicant's responsibility to check for any particular requirements of a funder regarding ethical review. Some funders may require that the application is reviewed by full University Committee and not the devolved School committee.**

Full details of the University Research Ethics procedures are available at <http://www.reading.ac.uk/internal/res/ResearchEthics/reas-REethicshomepage.aspx> and you are encouraged to access these pages for a fuller understanding. Some helpful advice is available on this link <http://www.reading.ac.uk/internal/res/ResearchEthics/reas-REwhatisneededto.aspx> and the FAQs are particularly relevant.

**ALL QUESTIONS MUST BE COMPLETED.**

**APD Ethical Clearance Application Reference Number : 001587**

**1. APPLICANT DETAILS:**

Main applicant name: Aldo Gavril Lim

Name of academic supervisor/project investigator: Sarah Cardey

Email Address (decision will be emailed here): @pgr.reading.ac.uk

MSc Student

PhD Student

Staff Member

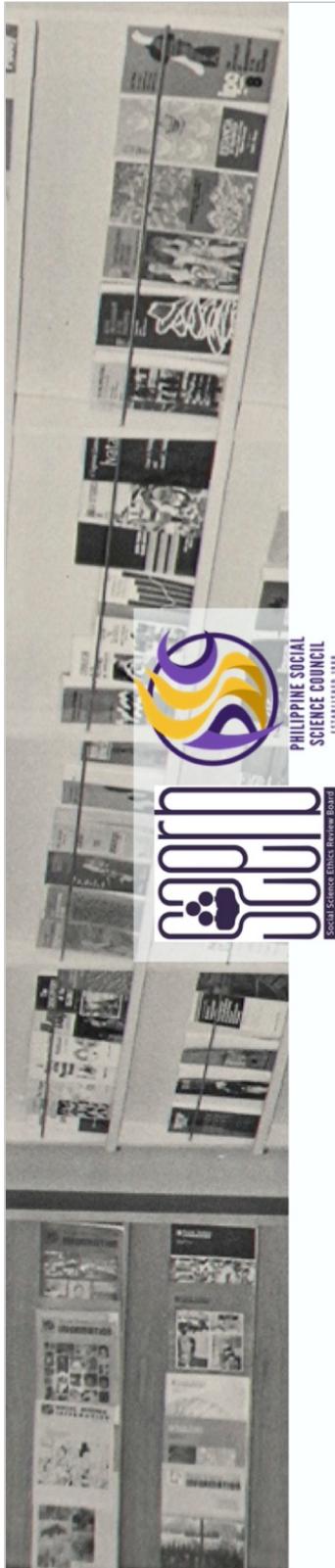
Other (please specify) [Click here to enter text.](#)

**2. PROJECT DETAILS:**

Title of project: A Genre Analysis of Twitter Filtered through the World of Filipino Men Living with HIV/AIDS

Please provide a lay summary of the project, including what is being investigated and why: The online communication practices of people living with chronic illnesses is well-documented in the literature.

However, beyond social support and therapy, relatively little scholarly work has explored how people living with HIV/AIDS communicate on social media and integrate social media into their everyday lives. The Philippines makes for an especially fascinating case of social media engagement among Filipino men living with HIV/AIDS. For one, 2019 data show that the Philippines is home to the fastest growing HIV/AIDS epidemic in the world, with infections skewed toward males. Moreover, social media collectively reach 73 million Filipinos or two-thirds of the country's total population. Thus, it is not surprising to note that a critical mass of Filipino men living with HIV/AIDS inhabit Twitter—the fifth most used social platform in the Philippines. Without focusing on a specific dimension of social media use—for example, peer support—



The Philippine Social Science Council-Social Science Ethics Review Board (PSSC-SSERB)  
hereby grants this

## *Certificate of Ethics Clearance*

to the project

**"A Genre Analysis of Twitter Filtered through the World of Filipino Men Living with HIV/AIDS"**

Reference Code: CB-20-09 (Full Review)

Principal Researcher: Mr. Aldo Gavril Lim

Validity: Upon fulfillment of the attached Terms and Conditions

Research Duration: 22 March 2021 - 31 December 2022

**LOURDES M. PORTUS, PhD**

Executive Director, PSSC  
Chair, SSERB

## APPENDIX B: SAMPLE SEARCH STRATEGIES

## Sample R Script for Extracting Tweets with HIV-related Keywords

```

## Sets filename of source file
base_filename <- "Partial Dataset"
base_filename_ext <- paste0(base_filename, ".xlsx")

## Reads data from Excel file
source_data <- as.data.table(read_excel(base_filename_ext))

## Creates additional columns
source_data$num_hiv_tweets <- numeric()
source_data$prop_hiv_tweets <- numeric()

## Defines data sets as lists
user_IDs <- source_data$user_id

## Specifies HIV inclusion keywords
hiv_inclusion_kw <-
"\U1F419\U1F991\U2795|ABACAVIR|ALUVIA|\bBANGLO\b|\bBARV\b|\bBARVS\b|
ATRIPLA|\bBAZT\b|BIKTARVY|\bBLOOD BRO\b|\bBLOOD BROTHER\b|
\bBLOOD BROTHERS\b|\bBLOOD CHEM\b|\bBLOOD CHEMISTRY\b|\bBLOODBRO|
\bCD4\b|CONFIRMATORY|COPIES|\ML|\bCOTRIM\b|COTRIMOXAZOLE|DIAGNOSED|
\bDX\b|\bDX\b|EDURANT|\bEFAV\b|\bEFAVIRENZ\b|\bEFV\b|ELTVIR|
\bH4\b|\bHAART\b|\bHIV\b|\bHIV POSITIVE\b|\bHIV+\b|\bHIVPH|
\bHUB KO\b|\bHUB MO\b|\bIREACT\b|\bIREACT\b|\bJUSIT\b|LAMITENO|
LAMIVUDINE|LAMIZIDO|\bLPV\b|\bLTE\b|\bLTN\b|\bLTR\b|\bLYS\b|\bLZE\b|
\bLZN\b|\bMEDS\b|\bNEVI\b|\bNEVIRINE\b|\bNVP\b|PLHIV|PLHIVDIARIES|
PLWHA|\bPOS\b|\bPOWER CARD\b|POWERCARD|\bPOZ\b|POZDIARY|\bPUSIT\b|
\bPWD CARD\b|\bREACTIVE\b|REBORN|REFILL|\bRILPI\b|\bRILPIVIRINE\b|
\bRPV\b|\bSAAN HUB\b|\bSCACL\b|\bSERODISCORDANT\b|\bTDF\b|\bTLD\b|
\bTMC\b|U|=U|\bUD\b|\bUEQUALSU\b|UNDETECTABLE|UNTRANSMITTABLE|
\bVIRAL LOAD\b|\bVL\b"

## Specifies HIV exclusion keywords
hiv_exclusion_kw <- "\b3G\b|\bA NATION REBORN\b|\bADHD\b|\bADOOB\b|\bAIDS|
MEMORIAL\b|\bADS POLICY ACT OF 2018\b|\bALLERGY MEDS|ALZHEIMER|
AMBASSADOR|ANABANANAREBORN|\bBANGL SAXON\b|\bANGLO\b|\bSAXON|
\bAPPROVE VL\b|\bAPPROVE YUNG VL\b|\bAPPROVED VL\b|ART REGISTRY|
\bAWARENESS MONTH\b|\bBABY PUSIT\b|\bAGAL NG LTE|BAKASYON|
BALLPEN|\bBATANG POZ\b|\bBAWAL JUDGMENTAL\b|\bBAWALJUDGMENTAL|
\bBEAUTY MEDS\b|\bILIS NG LTE\b|\bIPOLAR DISORDER\b|\bROADBAND|CANCER|
\bCANDLELIGHT MEMORIAL\b|\bCASHIER\b|\bCATRIONA GRAY\b|\bCATRIONAELISA|
\bCBS MOTIVATOR\b|\bCHARLIE SHEEN\b|\bCHILL PILL\b|\bCONFIDENTIAL|
HIV\b|\bCOVID|DAING|DAY VL|DAYS VL|DEMENTIA|DENGUE|DENIED VL|DIABETES|
DOLOMITE|\bDRIED PUSIT\b|\bBEAT BULAGA\b|EATBULAGA|ENDTHESTIGMA|
\bENJOY YOUR VL\b|\bENJOYGLOBE|EPIDEMIC|\bFAST LTE\b|FAVE SEX|
POS|FAVORITE SEX POS|\bFIGHT AGAINST HIV\b|\bFILE A VL\b|
\bFILE NG VL\b|\bFILED A VL\b|\bFILED VL\b|\bFILING A VL\b|\bFIREBORN\b|

```

||bFOR LTR KA||b\\bFREE HIV||b\\bg TECH||b||bg-TECH||b||bGENERIC MEDS||b||bGET YOURSELF TESTED||b||bGINATAANG PUSIT||b||GLOBE|GRAVY|GRILLED||b||bGTECH||b||bHAIR IS VANISHING||b||bHINA NG LTE||b||bHITMAN REBORN||b||bHEROESREBORN||b||bHINA NG LTE||b||bHINA NG LTE||b||bHITMAN REBORN||b||bHIV 101||b||bHIV ADVOCATE||b||bHIV AIDS 101||b||bHIV AWARENESS||b||bHIV CASES||b||bHIV EDUCATION||b||bHIV INFECTIONS||b||bHIV NEGATIVE||b||bHIV PA MORE||b||bHIV\\AIDS 101||b||bHIV\\AIDS AWARENESS||b||bHSDPA||b||bHYPER||-REACTIVE|HYPERREACTIVE|HYPERTENSION|HYPERTENSIVE MEDS||b||bI WANT TV||b||bICED TEA||b||bINASAL|INIHAW|INIIHAW|INK REFILL|IPHONE|IVERMECTIN||b||bIWANT||b||bIWANTTV||b||bJAYSONREBORN||b||bJUICE||b||bKALEL 15||b||bKALEL||b||bKALEL15ONNETFLIX||b||bKNOW YOUR STATUS||b||bLATEST HIV NEWS||b||bLEAVES||b||bLEBRON||b||bLESS REACTIVE|LEUKEMIA|LIVESMART|LONG TERM RELATIONSHIP|LONG VL||b||bLONG WEEKEND||b||bLOOKING FOR A LTR|LOOKING FOR LTR|LTE BAND|LTE CAPABLE||b||bLTE CONNECTION||b||bLTE COVERAGE||b||bLTE DEVICE||b||bLTE NA DATA||b||bLTE PHONE||b||bLTE PLAN||b||bLTE SPEED|LTR ANG HANAPILYMPHOMA||b||bMAGFILE NG VL||b||bMAGREFILL NG TUBIG||b||bMAGREREFILL NG TUBIG||b||bMAKAKAPAGFILE NG VL||b||bMAKAKAPAGFILE NG VL||b||bMAKAPAGFILE NG VL||b||bMALARIA||b||bMBPS||b||bMGA BATANG POZ||b||bMGABATANGPOZ|MONTH VL|MONTHS VL||b||bMY OCTOPUS TEACHER||b||bMYOCTOPUSTEACHER||b||bNAGFILE NG VL||b||bNAKA VL||b||bNAKA||-VL||b||bNAKAPAGFILE NG VL||b||bNATIONAL HIV||b||bNCOV||b||bNON REACTIVE||b||bNON||-ANGLO||b||bNON||-REACTIVE||b||bNONREACTIVE|NOTEBOOK REFILL||b||bON VL||b||bOTC||b||bOVER THE COUNTER||b||bPAELLA||b||bPAPAREFILL NG TUBIG||b||bPAREFILL NG TUBIG||b||bPEN REFILL||b||bPEN REFILLS||b||bPIA WURTZBACH||b||bPIAWURTZBACH||b||bPLANNED VL||b||bPOCKET WiFi|POS BLDG||b||bPOS||b||bPOS||b||bPOS||b||bPOS||b||bPOS||b||bPOSE FX||b||bPOSE ON FX||b||bPOSEFX|PREP||b||bPREPPY||b||bPRITONG PUSIT||b||bPROACTIVE||b||bPTSD||b||bRA 11166||b||bRA 8504||b||bRA11166RA8504||b||bREACTIVE ACTIONS||b||bREACTIVE MEASURES||b||bREACTIVE MOON||b||bREACTIVE NEW MOON||b||bREFILL NG TUBIG||b||bREFILL WATER||b||bREFILLABLE|REFILLING STATION||b||bRIDING A WAVE OF OPTIMISM||b||bRISEUPTOHIV||b||bSAAN MAY HIV||b||bSAAN PO MAY HIV||b||bSAMSUNG|SAVESEXY||b||bSB 376||b||bSEAFOOD|SIGNAL||b||bSIM||b||bSKYROCKETING||b||bSSL AND VL||b||bSSL AT VL||b||bSSL O VL||b||bSMART|SMARTCARSES||b||bSOC MEDS||b||bSODA||b||bSOFTDRINK||b||bSPEED TEST||b||bSPEEDTEST||b||bSTILL NEGATIVE||b||bSTOPTHESTIGMA||b||bSTUDY ON HIV||b||bSTUFFED PUSIT||b||bTAHONG|TAKOYAKI|TALK2GLOBE||b||bTEDDY BOY LOCSIN||b||bTEDDYBOYLOCSIN|TENTACLE||b||bTESTED NEGATIVE||b||bTHIS IS IT PUSIT||b||bTIYA PUSIT||b||bUBOS NG VL||b||bUBOS VL||b||bUBUSIN ANG VL||b||bUBUSIN VL||b||bUNDER MY SKIN||b||bUNDER THE SEA||b||bUNLISURF||b||bUNUSED VL||b||bURSULA|VACATION LEAVE||b||bVAHAY LINIS||b||bVAPE||b||bVOL AND SL||b||bVL AT SL||b||bVL CANCELLED||b||bVL CREDITS||b||bVL FILED||b||bVL O SL||b||bVL STARTS NOW||b||bVL STARTS TODAY||b||bVL SUBMITTED||b||bVOLTE||b||bVOLUNTEER|WATER REFILL||b||bWE ARE OPEN TODAY||b||bWE'RE OPEN TODAY||b||bWEEK VL|WEEKS VL||b||bWORLD AIDS DAY||b||bWORLDAIDSDAY"

```
## Checks each user's tweets for the presence of HIV keywords
for (i in seq_along(user_IDs)) {

  ## FILTERS HIV TWEETS

  ## Assigns the value 1 to tweets with inclusion keywords
  original_tweets[grep(hiv_inclusion_kw, original_tweets$text, ignore.case =
  TRUE, value = F), "is_hiv_tweet"] <- 1

  ## Filters tweets with HIV keywords
  hiv_tweets <- as.data.table(original_tweets[original_tweets$is_hiv_tweet == 1,])

  ## Some keywords in the inclusion list may not pertain to an HIV diagnosis
  ## Assigns the value 0 to tweets with exclusion keywords to differentiate from
  ## the rest
  hiv_tweets[grep(hiv_exclusion_kw, hiv_tweets$text, ignore.case = TRUE, value =
  F), "is_hiv_tweet"] <- 0

  ## Filters tweets with updated HIV keywords
  hiv_tweets <- hiv_tweets[hiv_tweets$is_hiv_tweet == 1,]

  ## Counts number of tweets with HIV keywords
  num_hiv_tweets <- nrow(hiv_tweets)

  ## Filters data table to only the relevant characteristics
  hiv_tweets <- hiv_tweets[, .(num_hiv_tweets, screen_name, status_url, text,
  lang_cld2, lang_consd, created_at)]
}

}
```

## Sample Advanced Search Queries on Twitter to Return a User's Public Tweets Containing HIV-related Keywords

```
## Returns @user's public tweets containing keywords pertaining to HIV diagnosis
@user (reborn OR status OR diagnosed OR dx OR reactive OR HIV OR AIDS OR HIVPH
OR PLHIV OR PLWHA OR positive OR LOVEYOURSELF OR LOVEYOURSELFPH OR LYS)
OR ("HIV positive" OR "HIV+" OR "love yourself")

## Returns @user's public tweets containing keywords pertaining to highly active
antiretroviral therapy
(from:@user) (Abacavir OR Aluvia OR ARV OR ARVs OR Atripla OR AZT OR Biktarvy OR
Edurant OR Efav OR Efavirenz OR EFV OR Eltvir OR HAART OR Lami OR LamiTeno OR
Lamivudine OR LamiZido OR LPV OR LTE OR LTN OR LTR OR LZE OR LZN OR Meds OR
Nevi OR Nevirapine OR NVP OR Rilpi OR RPV OR TDF OR TLD)

## Returns @user's public tweets containing keywords pertaining
to HIV social identities
(from:@user) (Anglo OR bloodbro OR bloodbros OR CD4 OR confirmatory OR H4 OR
hub OR MMC OR nakapagparefill OR nakapagrefill OR paparefill OR parefill OR
plhivdiaries OR pos OR powercard OR poz OR pozdiary OR pusit OR proton OR refill OR
RITM OR SACCL OR serodiscordant OR UD OR undetectable OR untransmittable OR VL)
OR ("blood bro" OR "blood brother" OR "blood brothers" OR "blood chem" OR
"copies/ml" OR "power card" OR "pwd card" OR "san lazaro" OR "U=U" OR "viral load")

## Returns @user's public tweets containing pronouns to confirm that tweets
with HIV-related keywords refer to himself
(from:@user) (atin OR satin OR natin OR tayo OR we OR our OR ours OR "ako rin" OR
"ako din" OR "me too")
```

**APPENDIX C: INFORMATION SHEET FOR STUDY 2**

## INFORMATION SHEET FOR RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

**Study Title:** A Genre Analysis of Twitter as Enacted by Twitter Users Who Identify as Filipino Men Living with HIV/AIDS

**Investigators:** Dr. Sarah Cardey/Mr. Aldo Gavril Lim (PhD student)/  
Dr. Anna Macready  
Agriculture Building, Earley Gate, Whiteknights Road PO Box 237  
Reading RG6 6AR, United Kingdom

**Contact Names:** Sarah Cardey  
Email: [REDACTED]@reading.ac.uk

Aldo Gavril Lim  
Email: [REDACTED]@pgr.reading.ac.uk

Anna Macready  
Email: [REDACTED]@reading.ac.uk

### Background

#### *Why am I doing this study?*

For the past few years, I have been fascinated by the growing online community of Filipino men living with HIV/AIDS on Twitter. The creative ways you describe yourself on your Twitter profile, the short stories you tell about your HIV/AIDS journey, and the peer support you exchange with fellow blood brothers have all but inspired me to pursue this research topic for my PhD dissertation. As a development communication scholar interested in social media, I believe that Twitter offers a window into how the lives of Filipino men living with HIV/AIDS unfold. With very little research done on this subject matter, my dissertation will make important contributions toward understanding the lifeworld of Filipino men living with HIV/AIDS on Twitter. I would like to invite you to join me in this journey.

***What is the purpose of the study?***

Generally speaking, my research aims to uncover the distinctive characteristics of how Filipino men living with HIV/AIDS communicate on Twitter. So far, through social network analysis, I have mapped out the social connections of users who identify as Filipino men living with HIV/AIDS, with a public Twitter account. For the succeeding phases of my research, I aim to investigate why you use Twitter, what you tweet about, how you present yourself on your Twitter profile, and how you communicate with your blood brothers.

***Who would we like to participate in the study? Why have I been invited?***

I believe that the best way for me to obtain quality, meaningful data is by involving the most prestigious Twitter users who identify as Filipino men living with HIV/AIDS. That includes you. I have identified you as one of the Top 50 most prestigious users based on your activity, popularity, and influence on Twitter. I can tell you more about how I computed this during our interview.

***How can I be involved?***

I would like to invite you to take part in an online interview, obtain your permission to study your Twitter profile and timeline, and request you to verify my initial research findings. I will go over these items one by one later.

***Do I have to take part?***

Your participation in my research is totally up to you. Moreover, you are free to withdraw from the study at any point, and you do not need to provide me a reason for your withdrawal. If you so decide to opt out of the study after our interview has ended, please let me know within a week's time so that I may delete your data prior to analysis. After this point, your data will be pseudonymised and aggregated for analysis; thus, I would no longer be able to expunge any information you have provided.

### **What will be involved if I take part?**

#### *Participation in an Interview*

First, I wish to engage you in a free-flowing interview to gain insights into why you use Twitter. These are some of the questions I might ask you:

- Why do you use Twitter?
- Why you decide to tweet about certain topics?
- What role does Twitter play in your life?

In addition, I will ask you to walk me through your Twitter profile and timeline. I might also ask you the story behind some interesting tweets you have posted. I prefer to call this a conversation or a storytelling session rather than a formal interview. Although I will offer some talking points, I will let you direct the conversation within the scope of my broader research inquiry.

We will schedule the interview at a date and time most convenient to you—I am available to talk any hour, any day of the week. To ensure the privacy of our conversation, let's use Zoom, a warranted secure service of the University of the Philippines. Prior to our call, you may change your screen name so you don't have to disclose any personal information. You do not have to turn on your camera.

If our bandwidth permits, I am more than willing to switch on my camera; I feel this would give you a better sense that you're speaking to someone on the other side of the screen. I would like to inform you that our interview will be recorded on a password-protected device so I may transcribe our conversation for data analysis.

I anticipate this interview to last 90–120 minutes. During our session, I will ask you every 25 minutes if you wish to pause for a break; just the same, you may simply call my attention if you need to take a breather. Please know that you may decline any question you prefer not to answer. Moreover, you are free to withdraw from the interview at any point during our conversation.

I believe an in-depth interview with you would supply me with more than enough data about why you use Twitter. However, during data analysis, it is possible for additional questions to crop up. Thus, I will ask you at the end of our interview if you are willing to indulge me in one follow-up session, only if necessary.

### ***Permission to Study Your Twitter Profile and Timeline***

Likewise, I would like to obtain your permission to study your publicly available Twitter profile and timeline, specifically your Twitter activity from 21 October 2021 thru 21 April 2021 (a six-month period). From this pool of tweets, I will draw a random sample of 30–50 of your original tweets and 30–50 of your conversations (@replies) with other Twitter users who identify as Filipino men living with HIV/AIDS. This procedure does not require any active participation on your part.

Your original tweets would give me an idea of the topics you tweet about. Meanwhile, your conversational tweets would allow me to understand your style of communication with your blood brothers. For your information, I will analyze your tweets along with those of other prestigious Twitter users. Please note that I will not publish any of your tweets in my research report without obtaining your prior express permission. I will discuss how my research protects your privacy and confidentiality in detail in an upcoming section.

### ***Providing Feedback on My Research Results***

I intend to reach out to you again at various stages of my research to obtain your feedback on my initial findings. Specifically, I wish to share with you initial stories of Twitter use from my interviews with prestigious users, topics of communication from my analysis of original tweets posted by prestigious users, self-presentation practices on Twitter profiles of influential users, and themes of communication styles and patterns from my analysis of conversational tweets among Twitter users who identify as Filipino men living with HIV/AIDS.

I intend to obtain your feedback via email. I will send you a PDF file of my initial findings and a link to an online Google form where you may input your comments. You are also free to indicate your feedback on the PDF file itself. Your participation in any or all of these verification procedures is optional. I will reach out to you within three months at the latest after our interview to ask if you are willing to provide feedback on my initial findings.

### ***Confidentiality, storage and disposal of information***

This research will report findings in the form of themes, stories, and personal anecdotes. I wish to assure you a high level of privacy and confidentiality of information by taking the following precautionary steps. First, I will undertake a pseudonymous data collection process. This means I will not actively seek out any personal information about you, apart from your mobile number, which will be used only to send you GCash credit, and email address, which will be used only to schedule the interview and follow-up with you, if necessary. Any information you wish share about yourself will be entirely up to you.

Rest assured that you will not be identified in my research. All data collected from you will be pseudonymized. If I need to quote you in my research report, I will assign you a pseudonym. Further, I will assign you a pseudonymized Twitter handle as I have no intention of disclosing your actual one. In the event that I need to feature your tweets, profile information, or images as examples in my research report, I will make sure to obtain your prior express permission.

All data will be stored securely in accordance with the University of Reading Research Code of Ethics. Research data will be housed in the lead researcher's OneDrive account, a university-warranted secure service, controlled by two-factor authentication. Meanwhile, data will be processed on a password-protected laptop, which itself will be kept in a secure place when not in use.

Please be assured that all data sets that may need to be shared with data analysts, coders, transcribers, the principal researcher's advisory committee, and examiners will have been cleaned to redact any details that may identify you and any portions you have explicitly stated to be kept off the record. All file transfers will be done via encrypted VPN connection. To ensure that there is no permanent record of these materials, files will not be shared as email attachments.

Further, data analysis will be carried out in my place of study or residence, and never in a public place. All research data will be retained for a maximum of five years after the research project has been completed; at which time digital files will be deleted and printouts shredded.

#### **Are there any benefits/risks to taking part?**

While some research on HIV/AIDS discrimination in the Philippines and coping strategies of Filipinos living with HIV/AIDS has been done, there is yet no published study on how Filipinos living with HIV/AIDS communicate on and use Twitter. This is a missed opportunity considering the critical mass of Filipino men living with HIV/AIDS who inhabit this social platform. While participating in this study does not offer any immediate, tangible benefits, your involvement would make important contributions toward understanding how the lives of Filipinos living with HIV/AIDS unfold on Twitter. These insights would, in turn, help inform national and local health communication initiatives to better cater to this population group. Moreover, my research hopes to contribute to better educating the larger public about the realities of living with HIV/AIDS in the Philippines, and hopefully minimising the stigmas associated with it.

The study involves no anticipated physical or physiological risks on your part. In the unlikely event that the interview causes you any stress, I will attempt to minimize this risk by pausing for breaks, rescheduling the interview, and directing you to the following helplines:

- **PLHIV Response Center**  
+639158776077  
+639195332676  
plhiv.response@gmail.com  
www.twitter.com/PlusAdvocacy  
www.facebook.com/PinoyPlusAssociationInc
- **AIDS Society of the Philippines**  
(02) 376-2541  
(02) 410-0204  
info@aidsphil.org  
www.twitter.com/aidsphil  
www.facebook.com/aidsphilOfficial
- **HIV & AIDS Support House, Inc.**  
+639162340401  
hash@hashinfo.org  
www.twitter.com/HASH\_Support  
www.facebook.com/HASHPilipinas
- **Courage Pilipinas**  
+63 9173155863  
courage.pilipinas@gmail.com  
www.twitter.com/CouragePinas

To make sure you have not suffered any undue emotional distress resulting from our interaction, I will get in touch with you two weeks and four weeks after our interview has ended.

**What expenses and/or payment or equivalent be made for participation in the study?**

As a token of gratitude for participating in the study, I will offer you a ₱500 Lazada voucher to be sent to you via email one day after completing our interview. In addition, I will send you ₱200 via GCash to cover any data charges that may be incurred during our interview.

**What will the results of the study be used for?**

Research findings will contribute toward the completion of my PhD degree. Specifically, pseudonymised findings will be reported in a PhD dissertation, as well as conference papers/presentations and journal articles. A copy of my dissertation will be entered into the catalog of the library of the University of the Philippines Los Baños and the University of Reading. If you are interested, I will be more than happy to share with you a copy of any published papers arising from this research project.

**Who has reviewed the study?**

This research project has been reviewed by the Research Ethics Committee of the School of Agriculture, Policy and Development, University of Reading, England and the Social Science Ethics Research Board of the Philippine Social Science Council. Both review boards have granted this research ethical permission to proceed.

**Contact details for further questions, or in the event of a complaint**

If you have queries or concerns about this research project, please get in touch with me and I will do my best to provide satisfactory answers to your queries. If you remain unsatisfied with the quality or quantity of information given you, you are free to direct your concerns to any of the following academic staff:

- **Dr. Jomar F. Rabajante**  
Dean  
Graduate School, University of the Philippines Los Baños  
████████@up.edu.ph
  
- **Dr. Sarah P. Cardey**  
Director  
Graduate Institute for International Development, Agriculture and Economics,  
School of Agriculture, Policy, and Development, University of Reading  
████████@reading.ac.uk

**Thank you for your consideration!**

## **APPENDIX D: CONSENT FORM FOR STUDY 2**

## INFORMED CONSENT

**What is your Twitter handle? \***

Your answer

**What do you want me to call you? \***

You don't have to give me your real name.

Your answer

**Your Contact Details**

**How might I get in touch with you? \***

Email is preferred but I am also happy to reach you via other means, such as instant messaging. If you prefer instant messaging, please let me know in the "other" field which app to use, as well as your username/number (where applicable). Thanks!

Email

Twitter DM

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**Email**

Your answer

**Mobile number**

I only need your digits to send you GCash credit but you may opt not to provide this if you are not inclined.

Your answer

**If you have questions or comments at this point, please feel free to let me know!**

Your answer

Please agree to the terms of participation. \*

I understand the purpose of the research project and what is expected of my participation.

I understand that my participation in the research is entirely voluntary. In exchange for my participation, I will be given a ₱500 Lazada voucher and ₱200 GCash credit.

I express my willingness to participate in a recorded interview via Zoom.

I give my consent to have my Twitter profile and timeline studied.

I give consent to be contacted within three months at most after our interview to ask if you are willing to provide feedback on my initial findings.

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**APPENDIX E: INFORMATION SHEET FOR STUDY 3**

## INFORMATION SHEET FOR TWITTER USERS

**Study Title:** A Genre Analysis of Twitter as Enacted by Twitter Users Who Identify as Filipino Men Living with HIV/AIDS

**Investigators:** Dr. Sarah Cardey/Mr. Aldo Gavril Lim (PhD student)/  
Dr. Anna Macready  
Agriculture Building, Earley Gate, Whiteknights Road PO Box 237  
Reading RG6 6AR, United Kingdom

**Contact Names:** Sarah Cardey  
Email: [REDACTED]@reading.ac.uk

Aldo Gavril Lim  
Email: [REDACTED]@pgr.reading.ac.uk

Anna Macready  
Email: [REDACTED]@reading.ac.uk

### Background

#### *Why am I doing this study?*

For the past few years, I have been fascinated by the growing online network of Filipino men living with HIV/AIDS on Twitter. The creative ways you describe yourself on your Twitter profile, the short stories you tell about your HIV/AIDS journey, and the peer support you exchange with fellow blood brothers have all but inspired me to pursue this research topic for my PhD dissertation. As a development communication scholar interested in social media, I believe that Twitter offers a window into how the lives of Filipino men living with HIV/AIDS unfold. With very little research done on this subject matter, my dissertation will make important contributions toward understanding the lifeworld of Filipino men living with HIV/AIDS on Twitter. I would like to invite you to join me in this journey.

#### *What is the purpose of the study?*

My research aims to uncover the distinctive characteristics of how Filipino men living with HIV/AIDS communicate on Twitter. So far, through social network analysis, I have mapped out the social connections of 1447 users who meet my inclusion criteria. I have also interviewed select individuals to extract their stories of using Twitter. For the succeeding phases of my research, I aim to analyze a sample of tweets and Twitter profiles of Twitter users who identify as Filipino men living with HIV/AIDS, with a public account.

**Why have I invited you to participate?**

Based on profile details and public tweets available as of 21 April 2022 (the date when I harvested Twitter data for my study), I was able to identify 1447 users who identify as Filipino men living with HIV/AIDS with a public account. You are among these account owners. I have randomly selected you as one of the Twitter accounts I would like to include in my content analysis. Even though you manage a public Twitter account, I still thought it proper to seek your informed consent to analyze your Twitter profile and tweets. I will elaborate on my research procedures in a while.

**How can you be involved?**

Your involvement requires no active participation. Once you give me your informed consent to proceed, I will be able to capture your Twitter profile and tweets on my own.

**Do you have to take part?**

It is totally up to you whether you want your Twitter profile and tweets to be analyzed as part of my research. With your consent, I wish to assure you a high level of privacy and confidentiality, as I will discuss later. If you decide to opt out of the study, please let me know within a week after you have given me your initial consent. This would give me enough time to delete your Twitter profile and tweets from my data set. After this point, your data will be pseudonymized and aggregated for analysis; thus, I would no longer be able to expunge your data.

**What will be involved if you give your consent to analyze your Twitter profile and tweets?**

I intend to download your banner image and profile image for visual analysis purposes. I will also take a screenshot of your Twitter profile on both my computer and phone. Meanwhile, with the use of the *rtweet* package of RStudio, I will collect a random sample of 12 of your original tweets.

***Analysis of Banner Image and Profile Image***

One of the aims of my research is to describe the types of banner images and profile images featured in the profiles of Twitter users who identify as Filipino men living with HIV/AIDS. Together with other images, I will identify the visual elements in the images you have uploaded and attempt to make sense of what they convey to viewers. At this point, I would like to make it clear that I will not use any of your images in my research report without obtaining your prior informed consent.

#### *Analysis of Twitter Handle and Display Name*

I will then examine all Twitter handles and display names in my data set to identify any recurring patterns, styles, and themes. I will not divulge either your Twitter handle or display name in my research. If I need to refer to your profile or tweets, I will assign you a pseudonym.

#### *Analysis of Twitter Bio*

Twitter bios tell a lot about users. I intend to closely study all the Twitter bios in my data set and create categories of the details users provide to describe themselves. This way, I would be able to write about the distinctive characteristics of Twitter bios of Filipino men living with HIV/AIDS.

#### *Analysis of Original Tweets*

Original tweets are those you have authored on your own or retweets with your commentary. These do not include your replies to other users' tweets. I will randomly sample 12 original tweets you have authored prior from 21 October 2021 to 21 April 2022. By analyzing these original tweets, I would get a sense of the topics you post about. Please be assured I will not republish any of your tweets in my research without obtaining your prior informed consent.

#### **Confidentiality, storage, and disposal of information**

This research will report findings in the form of themes, stories, and personal anecdotes. I wish to assure you a high level of privacy and confidentiality of information by taking the following precautionary steps. First, I will undertake a pseudonymous data collection process. This means I will not actively seek out any personal information about you. You are welcome to provide me your email address if you wish to receive updates about my research.

Rest assured that you will not be identified in my research. All data collected from you will be pseudonymized. Should I need to feature your tweets, profile information, or images as examples in my research report, I will make sure to obtain your prior express permission.

All data will be stored securely in accordance with the University of Reading Research Code of Ethics. Research data will be housed in the lead researcher's OneDrive account, a university-warranted secure service, controlled by two-factor authentication. Meanwhile, data will be processed on a password-protected laptop, which itself will be kept in a secure place when not in use.

Please be assured that all data sets that may need to be shared with data analysts, coders, transcribers, the principal researcher's advisory committee, and examiners will have been cleaned to redact any details that may identify you and any portions you have explicitly stated to be kept off the record. All file transfers will be done via encrypted VPN connection. To ensure that there is no permanent record of these materials, files will not be shared as email attachments.

Further, data analysis will be carried out in my place of study or residence, and never in a public place. All research data will be retained for a maximum of five years after the research project has been completed; at which time digital files will be deleted and printouts shredded.

**Are there any benefits/risks to taking part?**

While some research on HIV/AIDS discrimination in the Philippines and coping strategies of Filipinos living with HIV/AIDS has been done, there is yet no published study on how Filipinos living with HIV/AIDS communicate on and use Twitter. This is a missed opportunity considering the critical mass of Filipino men living with HIV/AIDS who inhabit this social platform. While participating in this study does not offer any immediate, tangible benefits, your involvement would make important contributions toward understanding how the lives of Filipinos living with HIV/AIDS unfold on Twitter. These insights would, in turn, help inform national and local health communication initiatives to better cater to this population group. Moreover, my research hopes to contribute to better educating the larger public about the realities of living with HIV/AIDS in the Philippines, and hopefully minimising the stigmas associated with it.

As your active participation is not required, the study involves no anticipated physical or physiological risks on your part.

**What expenses and/or payment or equivalent be made for participation in the study?**

You won't receive compensation for giving me your consent to analyze your Twitter profile and tweets. Please know, however, that you will be providing me access to rich data needed to complete my research.

**What will the results of the study be used for?**

Research findings will contribute toward the completion of my PhD degree. Specifically, pseudonymised findings will be reported in a PhD dissertation, as well as conference papers/presentations and journal articles. A copy of my dissertation will be entered into the catalog of the library of the University of the Philippines Los Baños and the University of Reading. If you are interested, I will be more than happy to share with you a copy of any published papers arising from this research project.

**Who has reviewed the study?**

This research project has been reviewed by the Research Ethics Committee of the School of Agriculture, Policy and Development, University of Reading, England and the Social Science Ethics Research Board of the Philippine Social Science Council. Both review boards have granted this research ethical permission to proceed.

**Contact details for further questions, or in the event of a complaint**

If you have queries or concerns about this research project, please get in touch with me and I will do my best to provide satisfactory answers to your queries. If you remain unsatisfied with the quality or quantity of information given you, you are free to direct your concerns to any of the following academic staff:

- **Dr. Jomar F. Rabajante**  
Dean  
Graduate School, University of the Philippines Los Baños  
████████@up.edu.ph
  
- **Dr. Sarah P. Cardey**  
Director  
Graduate Institute for International Development, Agriculture and Economics,  
School of Agriculture, Policy, and Development, University of Reading  
████████@reading.ac.uk

**Thank you for your consideration!**

**APPENDIX F: CONSENT FORM FOR STUDY 3**

**ACCOUNT OWNER'S CONSENT**

**Twitter Handle \***

Your answer

**Email**  
You are welcome to provide me your email address if you wish to receive updates about my research.

Your answer

**If you have questions or comments at this point, please feel free to let me know!**

Your answer

Please agree to the terms of participation. \*

I understand the purpose of the research project and the extent of my involvement.

I give my consent to have my Twitter profile and a sample of my tweets studied.

**Submit** **Clear form**

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## **APPENDIX G: INTERVIEW AGENDA**

## INTERVIEW AGENDA

### **Introductory Spiel**

Establish rapport. *Good day! Before we proceed, allow me to introduce myself and set the stage for our interview. My name is Aldo Lim. I am a graduate student enrolled in a dual PhD by research program between the University of Reading in England and the University of the Philippines Los Baños. My PhD dissertation explores how Filipino men living with HIV/AIDS use Twitter. I thought it would be a good idea to converse with you, as you are among the most influential users in your social network on Twitter.*

Explain purpose. *I want this session to be more of a free-flowing conversation than a structured interview. I am particularly interested to talk about why you use Twitter, what you tweet about, what stories you tell on Twitter, and how you present yourself in your Twitter profile.*

Motivate. *Over the past few months, I have been immersing myself in select Twitter timelines of Filipino men living with HIV/AIDS. While I have learned a great deal about what they tweet about and their style of communication, I still need to know more about why they use Twitter—hence this interview. By conversing with you, I am certain to gain meaningful insights into the role Twitter plays in your life.*

Give timeline. *As I have previously communicated, I anticipate this interview to last about two hours. May I confirm if your current schedule permits this duration? (Wait for response.) Please don't hesitate to let me know if you wish to pause for a break; just the same, every 20 minutes I will check in with you if we need to take a breather.*

Reiterate informed consent to participate. *I would like to reiterate that your participation as an interviewee is entirely voluntary. Please know that you may decline any question you prefer not to answer. Moreover, you are free to withdraw from the interview at any point during our conversation, and you do not need to provide me a reason for your withdrawal. If you so decide to opt out of the study after our interview has ended, please let me know within a week's time so that I may delete your data prior to analysis. After this point, your data will be anonymised and aggregated for analysis, and it will no longer be possible to remove your data from the analysis. I would also like to remind you that you have given me permission to voice-record our conversation.*

*May I confirm that you are satisfied with all the information I have provided you? (Wait for response.) Before we begin, do you have any questions? (Wait for response.) Again, thank you very much for agreeing to participate in my study.*

(Transition: *Let's begin with some warm-up questions.*)

### **Warming Up**

1. *May I know what made you agree to participate in my study?*
2. *Please tell me something about yourself.*
3. *How has your day been so far?*
4. *Could you describe to me what a typical day is like for you?*
5. *Have you ever participated in an interview for a research project?*
6. *Have you ever participated in any research project on Twitter use?*

(Transition: Again, I appreciate your participation in my study. Why don't we go ahead and talk about why you use Twitter.)

### **Engagement with Social Media and Twitter**

1. *Please describe to me your typical use of social media on any given day.*
  - Ask which social media platforms he participates in.
  - Ask what role social media in general plays in his life.
  - Ask how long he has been participating in social media.
  - Ask which social media platform/s are most significant to his life.
2. *Please share with me how you got started on Twitter.*
  - Ask how he found out about Twitter.
  - Ask why he wanted to join this social networking site.
  - Ask how many personal accounts he maintains. If user of multiple accounts, probe into reasons why.
3. *Please describe to me your typical use of Twitter on any given day.*
  - Ask what role Twitter in particular plays in his life.
  - Ask how much time he typically spends on Twitter.
  - Ask how many times he typically checks his Twitter feed.
  - Ask what drives him to follow new users.
  - Ask which devices (e.g., mobile phone, tablet, laptop computer, desktop computer) he uses for Twitter. Probe into which device he primarily uses.
4. *Please tell me why you use Twitter.*
  - Ask about the various gratifications met by Twitter use.
  - Ask about the social achievements of using Twitter.

[Transition: *Would you prefer that we continue, or should we pause for a quick break? (Wait for response.) Now that we've talked about your general reasons for using Twitter, let's move on to the topics and stories you tweet about.]*

### **Tweeting**

1. *Please tell me what you typically tweet about.*
  - Ask about the usual topics he posts about.
  - Ask why he is inclined to post about these topics.
  - Ask if he also posts about these topics on other social media platforms.
  - Ask if he also discusses these topics with other people in real life.
2. *Please tell me what stories you tell on Twitter.*
  - Ask about the usual situations that prompt him to narrate events that took place or are taking place.
  - Ask how he tells stories on Twitter given the 280-character limit.
  - Ask about the extent to which these stories become participatory (i.e., other Twitter users replying/retweeting, thereby making contributions).

3. *Please tell me why you tell stories on Twitter.*
  - Ask about the social achievements of telling stories on Twitter.
  - Ask about the technical affordances of Twitter as a storytelling platform.
4. *Please tell me which types of tweets are likely to get a reaction out of you.*
  - Ask which types of tweets he is inclined to like.
  - Ask which types of tweets he is inclined to retweet.
  - Ask which types of tweets he is inclined to reply to.

[Transition: *Would you prefer that we continue, or should we pause for a quick break? (Wait for response.) We've discussed the typical topics and stories you post on your Twitter timeline. Now, I'd like to engage you in an activity called social media elicitation. This time, I will show you your Twitter profile and some of your tweets. By analysing these together, we can gain insights into your online identity and the messages you might be conveying.]*

### **Social Media Elicitation**

#### **Tweets**

1. *From October 21, 2021 to April 21, 2022, you posted a total of <state number> original tweets. Does this seem accurate to your recollection?*
2. *Now I'll show you some tweets you posted. Then tell me why you thought of tweeting them. [Show tweets.]*
3. *From October 21, 2021 to April 21, 2022, you used hashtags a total of <state number> times. Does this seem accurate to your recollection?*
4. *Now I'll show you the top hashtags you used. Then tell me why you thought of using each one. [Show hashtags.]*
5. *From October 21, 2021 to April 21, 2022, you used emojis a total of <state number> times. Does this seem accurate to your recollection?*
6. *Now I'll show you the top emojis you used. Then tell me why you thought of using each one. [Show hashtags.]*
7. *From October 21, 2021 to April 21, 2022, you retweeted a total of <state number> times. Does this seem accurate to your recollection?*
8. *Now I'll show you some tweets you retweeted. Then tell me why you thought of retweeting them. [Show retweets.]*
9. *From October 21, 2021 to April 21, 2022, you @mentioned other Twitter users a total of <state number> times. Does this seem accurate to your recollection?*
10. *Now I'll show you some tweets wherein you @mentioned other Twitter users. Then tell me why you thought of tagging them. [Show tweets.]*

#### **Twitter Profile**

1. *Please walk me through your Twitter profile. [Show Twitter profile.]*
  - Ask why he has chosen to present himself as such with his Twitter handle.
  - Ask why he has chosen to present himself as such with his Twitter bio.
  - Ask why he has chosen to present himself as such with his current avatar.
  - Ask why he has chosen to present himself as such with his current cover photo.
  - Ask why he has chosen to present himself as such with his current avatar.
  - Ask whether his self-presentation on Twitter is consistent with that on other social media platforms. Probe into reasons why.
  - Ask whether his self-presentation on Twitter is consistent with that in real life. Probe into reasons why.

2. *Please tell me what purpose the Twitter profile serves.*

- Ask about the functions of his own Twitter profile.
- Ask about the functions of other users' Twitter profile.

[Transition: It has truly been a pleasure talking with you. Now let me summarize the main ideas we have talked about.]

**Closing spiel**

Summarize interview.

Offer summary of salient conversation topics:

- Reasons for using Twitter
- Topics user tweets about
- Stories behind tweets, hashtags, emojis, retweets, and @mentions
- Stories behind curation of Twitter profile

Maintain rapport.

*It looks like we have covered a lot of ideas in our conversation. You have given me invaluable insights into your Twitter use, which I am excited to write about in my dissertation. Is there anything else you wish to add on to the points I have just summarized? (Wait for response.)*

Conclude with action points.

*Again, I would like to thank you for your time. Right now, I feel like I have gathered everything I need. However, in case I think of something this week, would it be all right to get in touch with you again? (Wait for response.) I appreciate that. Again, I wish to assure you that you will be anonymised in this study. May I also remind you that should you wish to withdraw from my study, you have one week to let me know so that I may delete your data prior to analysis. In case you have additional queries, please don't hesitate to get in touch with me via the contact details I have provided you in advance. Thank you very much and you have a great day ahead!*

## **APPENDIX H: DISTRESS PROTOCOL**

### DISTRESS PROTOCOL

In the unlikely event that the research participant experiences distress, the researcher will adopt the distress protocol for sensitive interviewing developed by Dempsey et al. (2016).

1. Conditions for terminating the interview:
  - a. The research participant so expresses to end the interview.
  - b. The research participant requests that the interview be rescheduled.
2. Conditions for researcher intervention:
  - a. If the research participant experiences anxiety or distress during the interview, the researcher will ask him if he wishes to pause for a break and if he wishes that audio-recording be paused.
  - b. If the research participant continues to show signs of upset, the researcher will ask him if he wishes to end the interview, and if would like to be referred to a counselor with whom he can talk. If he wishes to talk with a counselor, the researcher will signpost where he support may be obtained:
    - i. **PLHIV Response Center**  
+639158776077  
+639195332676  
plhiv.response@gmail.com  
www.twitter.com/PlusAdvocacy  
www.facebook.com/PinoyPlusAssociationInc
    - ii. **AIDS Society of the Philippines**  
(02) 376-2541  
(02) 410-0204  
info@aidsphil.org  
www.twitter.com/aidsphil  
www.facebook.com/aidsphilOfficial
    - iii. **HIV & AIDS Support House, Inc.**  
+639162340401  
hash@hashinfo.org  
www.twitter.com/HASH\_Support  
www.facebook.com/HASHPilipinas
    - iv. **Courage Pilipinas**  
+63 9173155863  
courage.pilipinas@gmail.com  
www.twitter.com/CouragePinas
  - c. If the research participant is unduly distressed, the researcher will remain with him on the line until he shows signs of being calm and composed. The research participant will then be asked if he wishes to continue with the interview or not.

#### **Literature Cited**

Dempsey, L., Dowling, M., Larkin, P., & Murphy, K. (2016). Sensitive interviewing in qualitative research. *Research in Nursing and Health*, 39(6), 480–490. <https://doi.org/10.1002/nur.21743>

## **APPENDIX I: POST-INTERVIEW FOLLOW-UP CARE PROTOCOL**

## 1st Post-interview Follow-up Care Protocol

Once again, I would like to thank you for allowing me to interview you two weeks ago! As part of my research ethics protocol, I am tasked to conduct a post-interview care survey two weeks and four weeks after our interview. I appreciate your taking the time to complete this short survey form.

[Sign in to Google](#) to save your progress. [Learn more](#)

\* Indicates required question

**Twitter Handle \***

Your answer \_\_\_\_\_

**How would you assess the length of our interview? \***

Your answer \_\_\_\_\_

**Did you find engaging in our interview helpful? \***

Yes  
 No

**Did you feel our interview two weeks ago caused you distress? \***

Yes  
 No

**Did you feel that I was understanding during the interview? \***

Yes  
 No

**Did you find it easy to talk to me during the interview? \***

Yes  
 No

**Submit** **Clear form**

Never submit passwords through Google Forms.

This form was created inside University of the Philippines. [Report Abuse](#)

Google Forms

## 2nd Post-interview Follow-up Care Protocol

Once again, I would like to thank you for allowing me to interview you last month! As part of my research ethics protocol, I am tasked to conduct a post-interview care survey two weeks and four weeks after our interview. This is the second and last survey. I appreciate your taking the time to complete this short form.

[Sign in to Google](#) to save your progress. [Learn more](#)

\* Indicates required question

**Twitter Handle \***

Your answer \_\_\_\_\_

Did you feel our interview one month ago caused you distress? \*

Yes  
 No

If necessary, would you be open to being interviewed again? \*

Yes  
 No

How would you assess your overall experience of taking part in this research? \*

Your answer \_\_\_\_\_

Would you be interested in receiving updates about my research project, such as \* conference presentations and publications?

Yes  
 No

**Submit** **Clear form**

Never submit passwords through Google Forms.

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Google Forms

## **APPENDIX J: CODEBOOK FOR ANALYSING TWITTER BIOS**

# Codebook for Analyzing Twitter Bios

---

## What is this codebook for?

The aim of this study is to describe how users who identify as Filipino men living with HIV/AIDS (FMLWHA) construct their identities in their Twitter bio. Through a grounded theory approach, a small sample of Twitter bios of users who identify as FMLWHA was analyzed to reveal the recurring personal identifiers they use. Through multiple passes of coding, a framework was developed to classify the identities expressed in the Twitter bios of these users of interest. This codebook, a product of that pilot study, aims to standardize the process of coding a larger sample of Twitter bios of users who identify as FMLWHA.

Our focus is only the bio section of the Twitter profile; we will not be analyzing users' Twitter handle, name, profile image, and header image. The 160-character limit of the Twitter bio challenges users to strategically paint a concise portrait of themselves in this small space. For this reason, we are looking for the presence of personal identifiers—that is, words, phrases, special characters, and emojis—that serve to succinctly capture the social identities these users curate in their Twitter bio.

---

## How do I use this codebook?

This codebook is designed to facilitate an objective description of Twitter bios. Please follow these instructions in using it.

1. Prior to coding, familiarize yourself with the classifications of personal identifiers outlined in this manual. This way, you would know what categorical descriptions to keep an eye out for during coding.
2. Examine each Twitter bio as provided. Please do not attempt to retrieve any bio on Twitter.
3. Treat each chunk of information provided in the Twitter bio as a unit of analysis. This may be a word, a special character, an emoji, a phrase, or a statement. To pick out chunks of information, it would be helpful to ask yourself what the author is trying to accomplish. Please refer to the following examples, which represent typical bios of Twitter users who identify as FMLWHA. Heavy disguise techniques (Bruckman, 2002) have been applied to ensure users' privacy.

## CODEBOOK FOR ANALYZING TWITTER BIOS

**Exhibit A**

~~~~~  
 Hey Blood Bro | ALUVIA | RITM | U=U | March 2012

~~~~~  
 IG: @bloodbroplus

Many users like to use text dividers (in this case, a vertical bar) and paragraph breaks in their Twitter bio. In this example, the vertical bars (|) function to split the contents of the bio; hence, you do not need to consider them when coding. With the use of text dividers and a paragraph break, we can easily make out six chunks of information in this bio: 1) Hey Blood Bro; 2) ALUVIA; 3) RITM; 4) U=U; 5) March 2012; and 6) IG: @bloodbroplus.

**Exhibit B**

~~~~~  
 +

~~~~~  
 #LeniLiwanagSaDilim

This bio features a special character (+). Because it does not function as a text divider, treat it as a relevant detail that may be coded. Also present in this bio is a hashtag (#LeniLiwanagSaDilim)—consider it as a chunk of information as well.

**Exhibit C**

~~~~~  
 Note to self: Good things come to those who wait.

Although this bio is composed of 10 words, we are going to treat this string of text as only one chunk of information because the statement functions as a quotation.

**Exhibit D**

~~~~~  
 UD • No drama • Virgo 🌌 • DM is the 🎶 • 📲

Many users like to incorporate emojis in their Twitter bio. Sometimes, emojis reinforce or complete accompanying textual content, as in the case of Virgo 🌌 and DM is the 🎶 in Exhibit B. Here, treat each of them as a single chunk of information. However, there are also instances wherein users rely purely on emojis to express an idea. In this example, the emoji 📲 is used without accompanying text. This time, treat the single emoji in itself as a piece of information that may be coded.

## CODEBOOK FOR ANALYZING TWITTER BIOS

4. The codebook will guide you through different classifications of personal identifiers. For each item, critically assess whether the given personal identifier is employed (see categories below). If the Twitter bio satisfies the conditions stated, enter 1 (yes). Otherwise, enter 0 (no).
5. Regarding textual content, code only chunks of information written in English or Filipino. Disregard text written in other languages.
6. For any concern, please get in touch with the researcher. To maintain impartiality, please do not make contact with other individuals, including fellow coders.

**What categories am I looking for?**

For this study, pay attention to the following categories of personal identifiers curated in the Twitter profiles of users who identify as FMLWHA:

1. **Account description**- user's description of his Twitter account
2. **Socio-demographic identity**- user's mention of academic identity, age, geographic identity, occupational identity, political identity, and religious identity
3. **Relational identity**- user's mention of an identified partner, relationship status, sexual position, and other relational roles
4. **Personal descriptors**- user's mention of external characteristics, internal characteristics, hobbies or interests, accolades, non-relational roles, MBTI personality type, astrological sign, and COVID-19 vaccination status
5. **Statements**- user's mention of bible passages, calls for action, current state, declarations, direct quotations, greetings, lyrics, questions, and self-centered statements
6. **Stigmatized identity**- user's mention of identifiers related to HIV/AIDS and other diseases, including clinical details, HIV/AIDS biomarkers, HIV/AIDS social identifiers, other health conditions, and pertinent dates
7. **Other accounts**- user's mention of details about other accounts he owns

## CODEBOOK FOR ANALYZING TWITTER BIOS

**Let's code!****1. Account description**

Some users like to comment on the Twitter account they manage. Examine the bio and determine whether the user describes or muses about his Twitter account. Consider these indicators:

- Is the word *account* (or any variation thereof) mentioned in relation to the account owned by the user?

**EXAMPLES**

- Kalat account
- Not my real account
- Created this acct to...

- Does the user set expectations about the type of content featured in his account?

**EXAMPLES**

- Ramblings of a yuppie in Cebu
- Sharing my art here
- Poetry, stories, and travel tips
- Nothing to see here

- Does the user offer a disclaimer or warning about the account?

**EXAMPLES**

- Disclaimer: political thoughts are mine
- Warning: NSFW content
- Enter at your own risk

- Is the word *alter* mentioned in relation to the user or the user's account?

**EXAMPLES**

- Alter
- My alter ego
- Alter account
- #altercebu

If your answer to any of the questions is *yes*, enter 1. Otherwise, enter 0.

## CODEBOOK FOR ANALYZING TWITTER BIOS

**2. Socio-demographic identity**

Examine the bio for socio-demographic identifiers, including academic identity, age, geographic identity, occupational identity, political identity, and religious identity.

**A. Academic identity**

Examine the bio and determine whether the user expresses his academic identity by stating his scholastic program, enrollment status, or academic institution.

**i. Scholastic program**

Does the user mention a degree program or course?

EXAMPLES

- MBA
- MD
- Nursing
- Fine arts
- Masters
- PhD

If your answer to this question is **yes**, enter 1. Otherwise, enter 0.

**ii. Enrollment status**

Does the user refer to himself as either an ongoing student or a graduate?

EXAMPLES

- Currently studying
- Med student
- Soon to be lawyer
- Grad
- Alum

If your answer to this question is **yes**, enter 1. Otherwise, enter 0.

## CODEBOOK FOR ANALYZING TWITTER BIOS

## iii. Academic institution

NOTE: If the user identifies an academic institution as his place of employment (not his current school or alma mater), code this entry **0**. There is a separate identifier for one's *occupational identity*.

Determine whether the user identifies his academic institution. Consider these indicators:

- Does the user mention the name of his academic institution as his place of study (i.e., not place of work)? For this entry, please consider only proper names (e.g., Letran) and not idioms (e.g., school of hard knocks, university of life). If the name of the academic institution is provided without context, consider it a place of study.

---

EXAMPLES

- University of the Philippines (**UP**)
- Ateneo de Manila University (**ADMU**)
- University of Santo Tomas (**UST**)
- De La Salle University (**DLSU**)
- Far Eastern University (**FEU**)
- University of the East (**UE**)
- National University (**NU**)

---

- Has the user tagged the official Twitter account of his academic institution?

---

EXAMPLES

- @UPMindanao
- @ateneodeemanilau
- @UST1611official
- @DLSUManila

---

- Does the user mention an academic affiliation label?

---

EXAMPLES

- Isko
- Atenean
- Green Archer
- Tamaraw

---

If your answer to any of the questions is *yes*, enter **1**. Otherwise, enter **0**.

## CODEBOOK FOR ANALYZING TWITTER BIOS

**B. Age**

Examine the bio and determine whether the user mentions how old he is. Does the user mention his age or hint at how old he might be?

EXAMPLES

- 42
- 90s kid
- 34 y/o
- Forty-something
- Millennial

If your answer to this question is **yes**, enter 1. Otherwise, enter 0.

**C. Geographic identity**

Examine the bio and determine whether the user expresses his geographic identity by stating his location or his local identity.

**i. Location**

Does the user mention a location (or locations) that could pass as his place of residence?

EXAMPLES

- CDO
- From Dasma
-  Angono, Rizal
- MNL/DVO
- 
- Queen City of the South

If your answer to this question is **yes**, enter 1. Otherwise, enter 0.

**ii. Local identity**

Does the user identify as a local of a municipality, city, province, region, or country?

EXAMPLES

- Pinoy
- Bisdak
- Bulakenyo

If your answer to this question is **yes**, enter 1. Otherwise, enter 0.

## CODEBOOK FOR ANALYZING TWITTER BIOS

NOTE: A common practice on Twitter is to show emoji flags corresponding to the countries one has visited. Pay attention to this practice when coding; a series of flags may not necessarily be an expression of geographic identity as defined above.

#### D. Occupational identity

Examine the bio and determine whether the user expresses his occupational identity by providing his work role, his field of work, a broad description of his work status, or professional affiliations.

NOTE: If the user identifies as a student and only as a student, code all entries under this category **0**. There is a separate identifier for *academic identity*. If the user is a working student, reflect the appropriate codes for entries under both *academic identity* and *occupational identity* categories.

##### i. Work role

What kind of job does the user hold? Does the user provide his occupation or clue you in on what he does for a living? For this entry, please consider only work roles (e.g., farmer) and not fields of work (e.g., agriculture).

---

##### EXAMPLES

- Marino
- RN
- Public servant
- Business owner
- Young professional
- Corporate slave
- PT (physical therapist)
- Accountant

---

If your answer to this question is *yes*, enter 1. Otherwise, enter 0.

##### ii. Field of work

Does the user provide the field or type of organization in which he works? For this entry, please consider only fields of work or organizations (e.g., human resources, BPO) and not work roles (e.g., human resource specialist, BPO specialist).

---

##### EXAMPLES

- Finance
- Tech
- Freelance
- Healthcare company

---

If your answer to this question is *yes*, enter 1. Otherwise, enter 0.

## CODEBOOK FOR ANALYZING TWITTER BIOS

## iii. Broad description of work

If the user has not provided his work role or field of work, examine his bio for any hints about his source of income. Does he provide a broad description of his work status?

NOTE: Please do not count descriptions such as "hardworking" and "workaholic," which are more of *internal characteristics* rather than broad descriptions of one's source of income.

---

**EXAMPLES**

- Self-employed
- Working class
- Working to travel

---

If your answer to this question is **yes**, enter 1. Otherwise, enter 0.

## iv. Professional affiliations

Does the user indicate affiliation with any corporate, professional, civic, or service organization?

NOTE: Please do not count the following: 1) religious affiliations; 2) academic affiliations if user is a student (may be counted if this is where he works); 3) political parties; and 4) HIV treatment hub where user is a patient (may be counted if this is where he works).

---

**EXAMPLES**

- Works @enjoyGLOBE
- Bagani volunteer
- Rotarian

---

If your answer to this question is **yes**, enter 1. Otherwise, enter 0.

## E. Political identity

Examine the bio and determine whether the user expresses his political identity. Consider these indicators:

Does the user name the political candidate or party he supports or is against? Pay attention to hashtags, which may reveal political identity.

## CODEBOOK FOR ANALYZING TWITTER BIOS

EXAMPLES

- Kakampink
- #LetLeniLead
- ❤️💚BBM Solid❤️💚
- #KayIskoPossible
- #IskoAko
- 🚫 DDS

Does the user employ emojis commonly ascribed to certain political candidates?

EXAMPLES

- 🇵🇭
- 🌸

If your answer to either question is *yes*, enter 1. Otherwise, enter 0.

**F. Religious identity**

Examine the bio and determine whether the user expresses his religious identity either by providing his religious affiliation or hinting at his spirituality.

**i. Religious affiliation**

Determine whether the user expresses his religious affiliations. Consider these indicators:

- Does the user indicate his religion?

EXAMPLES

- Roman Catholic
- Islam
- Iglesia ni Cristo
- Seventh-day Adventist

- Does the user indicate being a follower of a religion (or oppositely, a non-believer)?

EXAMPLES

- Christian
- Catholic
- Muslim
- Mormon
- Atheist
- Agnostic

## CODEBOOK FOR ANALYZING TWITTER BIOS

If your answer to either question is *yes*, enter **1** for this item then enter **0** for *spirituality* (the next item). Otherwise, enter **0** for this item.

ii. Spirituality

NOTE: If the user already mentioned his religious affiliation (i.e., previous item coded **1**), code this item **0** then proceed to the next item.

If the user does not mention his religious affiliation, does he hint at his spirituality by either citing a bible passage or mentioning a higher power (e.g., God, Lord, Allah)?

EXAMPLES

- Philippians 4:13
- Trust in the Lord with all your heart
- Lead me Lord
- Saved by His grace

If your answer to this question is *yes*, enter **1**. Otherwise, enter **0**.

NOTE: *Religious affiliation* and *spirituality* are mutually exclusive. If you entered **1** for either item, the other one must be coded **0**.

3. Relational identity

Relational identity pertains to descriptions that place the user in connection to others. Examine the bio for indicators of relational identity, including an identified partner, relationship status, sexual position, and other relational roles.

A. Identified partner

Has the user identified his partner or significant other? Pay attention to tagged users or named individuals who could pass as his partner or significant other.

EXAMPLES

- Owned by @PozzieJet07
- ❤ @redbloodselmo

If your answer to this question is *yes*, enter **1**. Otherwise, enter **0**.

B. Relationship status

Does the user either indicate or hint at his relationship status without identifying other individuals?

## CODEBOOK FOR ANALYZING TWITTER BIOS

EXAMPLES

- Single
- Partnered
- In a serodiscordant relationship
- Looking for LTR

If your answer to this question is **yes**, enter **1**. Otherwise, enter **0**.

**C. Sexual position**

Does the user specify a sexual self-label?

EXAMPLES

- Top or T or 
- Bottom or B or 
- Vers or V or 
- Vers top or VT
- Vers bottom or VB
- Side

If your answer to this question is **yes**, enter **1**. Otherwise, enter **0**.

**D. Other relational role**

Apart from relationship status and sexual position, does the user ascribe to himself other roles he plays in relation to others? These may pertain to kinship or friendship.

NOTE: Count a description as *other relational role* only if it places the user in connection to others but not in a romantic or sexual way. If the role described is not relational in nature, code this entry **0**. There is a separate identifier for *non-relational roles*.

EXAMPLES

- Brother
- Son
- Father
- Friend

If your answer to this question is **yes**, enter **1**. Otherwise, enter **0**.

**4. Personal descriptor**

Examine the bio for personal descriptors, including external characteristics, internal characteristics, current state, hobbies and interests, accolades, non-relational roles, MBTI personality type, astrological sign, and vaccination status.

## CODEBOOK FOR ANALYZING TWITTER BIOS

**A. External characteristic**

Does the user offer any physical or physiological characteristic such as height, weight, and looks? These descriptions must be perceived using any of the five senses.

NOTE: Please consider adjectives only. Some nouns may hint at external characteristics (e.g., twink, bear, Chinito); reflect the appropriate codes under the *non-relational roles* category.

EXAMPLES

- 5'8"
- Chubby
- Inked
- Pogi daw
- Sexy
- Yummy

If your answer to this question is *yes*, enter 1. Otherwise, enter 0.

**B. Internal characteristic**

Does the user supply an adjective to refer to an internal characteristic such as values and character traits?

NOTE: Please consider adjectives only. Some nouns may hint at internal characteristics (e.g., nerd, foodie, adventurer); reflect the appropriate codes under the *non-relational roles* category.

EXAMPLES

- Kind
- Resilient
- Geeky
- Discreet
- Palaban
- Claustrophobic
- Closeted

If your answer to this question is *yes*, enter 1. Otherwise, enter 0.

**C. Hobby or interest**

Some users like to indicate the activities they engage in during their leisure time or attraction to certain subjects or fields. Consider these indicators:

## CODEBOOK FOR ANALYZING TWITTER BIOS

- Does the user cite activities done for pleasure? These may be written as verbs or visualized as emojis.

---

EXAMPLES

- Cooking
- Always 
- Hiking 
- Loves 

---

- Does the user cite fields of interest? These may be written as nouns or visualized as emojis.

---

EXAMPLES

- Sports
- Arts
- Drag
- 

---

If your answer to either question is *yes*, enter 1. Otherwise, enter 0.

NOTE: Please do not count associated roles such as "gamer," "musikero," "triathlete," "vlogger," and "frustrated singer." Instead, reflect the appropriate codes under the *non-relational roles* category.

#### D. Accolade

Does the user cite any award or recognition he has been given? Pay attention to modifiers such as "top," "best," "number 1," and the like. If the user supplied "top-notcher PRC board licensure exam," consider it an accolade but without the "top-notcher" do not treat it as one.

---

EXAMPLES

2016 TAYO awardee

---

If your answer to this question is *yes*, enter 1. Otherwise, enter 0.

## CODEBOOK FOR ANALYZING TWITTER BIOS

**E. Non-relational role**

Does the user ascribe to himself a non-relational role? Please do not count academic, occupational, and relational roles (see previous examples).

EXAMPLES

- Advocate
- Fighter
- Survivor
- Ally
- Free spirit
- Athlete
- Volunteer
- A failure
- Pop culture stan
- Pluviophile

If your answer to this question is **yes**, enter **1**. Otherwise, enter **0**.

**F. MBTI personality type**

Does the user supply a four-letter code representing his Myers and Briggs' personality type? Please do not count either "introvert" or "extrovert" (apt to be coded under *other non-relational roles*), or "introverted" or "extraverted" (apt to be coded under *internal characteristics*).

EXAMPLES

- ESTJ
- INFP
- ENFJ
- ISFJ

If your answer to this question is **yes**, enter **1**. Otherwise, enter **0**.

## CODEBOOK FOR ANALYZING TWITTER BIOS

## G. Astrological sign

Does the user supply his astrological sign or his sun, moon, and rising signs?

EXAMPLES

- Aries ♈
- Leo ♌
- Sagittarius ♐
- Taurus ♉
- Virgo ♍
- Capricorn ♑
- Gemini ♊
- Libra ♎
- Aquarius ♒
- Cancer ♓
- Scorpio ♏
- Pisces ♓

If your answer to this question is **yes**, enter **1**. Otherwise, enter **0**.

## H. COVID-19 vaccination status

Does the user specify whether he is vaccinated against COVID-19? Pay attention to COVID-19 vaccines, which may indicate vaccination status.

EXAMPLES

- Fully vaxed
- Pfizer
- Moderna
- Janssen
- Sinovac
- AstraZeneca

If your answer to this question is **yes**, enter **1**. Otherwise, enter **0**.

## 5. Statement

Examine the bio for statements made, including bible passages, calls for action, current state, descriptions, direct quotations, greetings, lyrics, questions, and self-centered statements.

NOTE: Please do not count users' comments on their Twitter account. There is a separate identifier for *account description*.

## CODEBOOK FOR ANALYZING TWITTER BIOS

**A. Bible passage**

Does the user cite a bible passage whether it be a proper scripture or simply the book, chapter, and verse?

**NOTE:** If present, please make sure to code *religious identity* > *spirituality1* as well.

**EXAMPLES**

- Philippians 4:13
- Trust in the Lord with all your heart

If your answer to this question is **yes**, enter **1**. Otherwise, enter **0**.

**B. Call for action**

Pay attention to statements that convey a command, request, or instruction. These statements invariably contain verbs or action words. Ultimately, does the user ask you to do something?

**NOTE:** Please do not count calls for action that are bible passages, song lyrics, or platitudes or sayings. Also, discern whether an action statement might be more reflective of the user's *current state* (see item below). For example, "keep fighting" is a *call for action* while "still fighting" is a *current state*.

**EXAMPLES**

- DM me
- Keep fighting.
- Follow for follow
- Don't ask me if I'm all right.
- Sapiosexuals to the front
- Padayon

If your answer to this question is **yes**, enter **1**. Otherwise, enter **0**.

**C. Current state**

Does the user express present thoughts, feelings, or actions? This descriptor must answer the question, *what is the user thinking, feeling, or doing right now?* Unlike *internal characteristics* under *personal descriptors*, *current state* refers to a temporary or fleeting condition (even if the user prefaces it with "always").

## CODEBOOK FOR ANALYZING TWITTER BIOS

EXAMPLES

- Hanging by a thread
- Currently struggling with anxiety
- Looking for a buddy
- Still fighting

If your answer to this question is **yes**, enter 1. Otherwise, enter 0.

**D. Declaration**

Some users like to make a declaration whether it be an assertion or a platitude or saying. Consider these indicators:

- Does the user make a confident statement about or an argument for/against a belief, idea, or issue? Pay attention to declarative statements.

**NOTE:** Please do not count assertions that are bible passages, calls for action, song lyrics, platitudes or sayings, or self-centered statements.

EXAMPLES

- HIV is not a death sentence
- Safe is the new sexy
- Marcos magnanakaw
- Fraudsters, beware!

- Does the user cite an oft-repeated statement or an inspirational quote? Pay attention to cliché statements that express conventional wisdom.

**NOTE:** Please do not count platitudes or sayings that are calls for action, bible passages, or song lyrics.

EXAMPLES

- Every moment counts
- To God be the Glory
- Everything happens for a reason
- Life goes on
- Good things come to those who wait
- What goes around, comes around
- Hope springs eternal
- Everything will be all right

If your answer to either question is **yes**, enter 1. Otherwise, enter 0.

## CODEBOOK FOR ANALYZING TWITTER BIOS

**E. Direct quotation**

Does the user provide an exact copy of words attributed to a source? Please consider only quotations wherein the author or speaker is explicitly cited. If no source is cited, consider coding it under *declaration* (see description above).

NOTE: Please do not count direct quotations that are bible passages or song lyrics (even if the performer or songwriter is named).

EXAMPLES

- “Where there is love, there is life.” — Mahatma Ghandi
- “And when you’re gone, who remembers your name?”  
— Aaron Burr
- “Learn from yesterday, live for today, hope for tomorrow.  
The important thing is not to stop questioning.”  
— Albert Einstein

If your answer to this question is **yes**, enter **1**. Otherwise, enter **0**.

**F. Greeting**

Does the user express a statement of welcome or acknowledgment?

NOTE: Please do not count greetings that are song lyrics, or platitudes or sayings.

EXAMPLES

- Hi 
- Hola
- Hey blood bro

If your answer to this question is **yes**, enter **1**. Otherwise, enter **0**.

**G. Lyrics**

Does the user cite lines from a song?

EXAMPLES

- Isigaw mo sa hangin, tumindig, at magsilbing liwanag sa dilim
- It's me, hi, I'm the problem, it's me
- Will you still love me tomorrow

If your answer to this question is **yes**, enter **1**. Otherwise, enter **0**.

## CODEBOOK FOR ANALYZING TWITTER BIOS

**H. Question**

Does the user make an inquiry? Please count rhetorical questions (those that do not necessarily demand an answer) as well.

**NOTE:** Please do not count questions that are bible passages, song lyrics, or platitudes or sayings.

**EXAMPLES**

- Are you one of us?
- What's your story?
- Say hi?

If your answer to this question is **yes**, enter 1. Otherwise, enter 0.

**I. Self-centered statement**

Does the user describe himself or his life in a general sense by way of a statement of at least three words?

**NOTE:** If the statement serves to express present thoughts, feelings, or actions, count it as *current state* instead of *self-centered statement*.

**EXAMPLES**

- I am just a simple guy with a happy disposition
- I've been told the sexiest part of my body is my 
- Poz guy here
- Living dangerously since 93
- Open to collabs

If your answer to either question is **yes**, enter 1. Otherwise, enter 0.

**6. Stigmatized identity**

Examine the bio for stigmatized identifiers related to HIV/AIDS and other diseases. These may include clinical details, HIV/AIDS biomarkers, HIV/AIDS social identifiers, other health conditions, and pertinent dates.

**A. Clinical details**

Examine the bio and determine whether the user provides details about clinical details by referencing his confirmatory code, meds, or treatment hub or care facility.

## CODEBOOK FOR ANALYZING TWITTER BIOS

## i. Confirmatory code

Does the user provide an alphanumeric HIV patient code? This code usually follows the format [first letter/s of hub][year of diagnosis]-[3 letter initial]. For example, the code R14-JMB suggests that patient JMB was diagnosed in 2014 and has RITM for his treatment hub. On Twitter, users who identify as FMLWHA typically provide only the first part of their confirmatory code.

---

EXAMPLES

- KB17
- R18

---

If your answer to this question is **yes**, enter 1. Otherwise, enter 0.

## ii. Meds

Does the user indicate his highly active antiretroviral therapy (HAART)? Users who identify as FMLWHA may supply specific drugs (see list) or simply state "ARV," which is shorthand for antiretroviral drugs. Pay attention to the use of the word "baby," which some users append to their meds (e.g., NVP baby).

---

EXAMPLES

- Abacavir
- Aluvia
- Atripla
- Biktarvy
- Edurant
- Efavirenz or Efav or EFV
- Eltvir
- Lamivudine or Lami
- Lamivudine/Tenofovir or Lami/Teno
- Lamivudine/Zidovudine or Lami/Zido
- Lopinavir/Ritonavir
- LPV
- LTD
- LTE
- LTN
- LZE
- Nevirapine or Nevi
- NVP
- Rilpivirine or Rilpi
- Ritonavir or RTV
- TDF
- Tenofovir
- Tenofovir/Emtricitabine
- Zidovudine

---

## CODEBOOK FOR ANALYZING TWITTER BIOS

If your answer to this question is **yes**, enter 1. Otherwise, enter 0.

iii. Treatment hub or care facility

**NOTE:** Please do not confuse treatment hub or care facility with confirmatory code. For example, treat "R16" as a confirmatory code but "RITM" as a treatment hub or care facility. Also, some users may indicate a treatment hub or care facility as their place of work—pay attention to mention of work roles such as "CBS motivator" and "counselor." Do not count such instances here.

Does the user identify his HIV/AIDS treatment hub or care facility? Pay attention to the keyword "hub." Following is a list of the most common treatment hubs and care facilities.

EXAMPLES

- HIV & AIDS Support House (**HASH**)
- Las Piñas Social Hygiene Clinic
- Love Yourself Anglo (**LYS or Anglo**)
- Makati Medical Center (**MMC or Makati Med**)
- Manila Social Hygiene Clinic
- Marikina City Health Office
- Pasig Treatment Hub (**PATH**)
- Philippine General Hospital (**PGH or PGH SAGIP**)
- Quezon City Klinika Bernardo (**KB**)
- Quezon City Klinika Novaliches
- Quezon City Klinika Project 7
- Research Institute for Tropical Medicine (**RITM**)
- SAIL Clinic
- San Lazaro Hospital
- St. Lukes Medical Center — Global City
- Sta. Ana Hospital
- Sustained Health Initiatives of the Philippines (**SHIP**)
- The Medical City (**TMC**)

If your answer to this question is **yes**, enter 1. Otherwise, enter 0.

B. HIV/AIDS biomarkers

Examine the bio and determine whether the user provides details about his HIV/AIDS biomarkers, including CD4 count, undetectable status, or viral load.

i. CD4 count

HIV attacks the human body by targeting white blood or CD4 cells. A CD4 count below 200 cells/ $\mu$ L indicates that a person has AIDS. Determine whether the user references his CD4 status by considering these indicators:

## CODEBOOK FOR ANALYZING TWITTER BIOS

- Does the user explicitly mention the term "CD4" in his bio?

EXAMPLES

- CD4 213 – 85 – 132 – 146 – 252
- CD4=504
- My last cd4 is 143 but now im 382.

- Usually, account owners list a series of values representing to the progression of their CD4 count. Others even specify the corresponding date per value. Even if the term "CD4" is not explicitly mentioned, take any series of values or a value corresponding to a date as an indicator of CD4 count.

EXAMPLES

- My stats: 406-457-673-723-508-645
- 14 ↗ 161 ↗ 247
- Mar 28 '17 = 72
- 703 as of 042019

If your answer to either question is *yes*, enter 1. Otherwise, enter 0.

## ii. Undetectable status

Having an undetectable viral load means the quantity of HIV present is negligible that the virus can no longer be transmitted. This means that one's HAART is working. Determine whether the user references undetectable status by considering these indicators:

- Does the user express his current or future undetectable status by explicitly using the term "undetectable" in his bio?

EXAMPLES

- Undetectable since 2015
- HIV+ and undetectable
- HIV undetected
- #roadtoundetectable [LTE]

## CODEBOOK FOR ANALYZING TWITTER BIOS

- Does the user allude to his undetectable status through related keywords? Pay attention to "UD," "U=U" (undetectable is untransmittable), and "UVL" (undetectable viral load).

EXAMPLES

- Team UD
- U equals U
- U=U
- UD Oct '21
- Reaching for UVL

If your answer to either question is *yes*, enter 1. Otherwise, enter 0.

## iii. Viral load

Viral load refers to the amount of HIV in one's system. HAART aims to lower the quantity of HIV to undetectable levels.

Does the user explicitly use keywords such as "viral load," "VL," "UVL," or variations thereof in his bio?

EXAMPLES

- vl=less than 30 UD
- VL @ 32
- VL less than 40 copies/mL 09.01.18
- Undetectable VL

If your answer to this question is *yes*, enter 1. Otherwise, enter 0.

NOTE: Undetectable status and viral load go hand in hand. If the user mentions both UD and VL in his bio, code them separately under *undetectable status* and *viral load* entries, respectively.

## C. HIV/AIDS social identifiers

Examine the bio and determine whether the user relates to his HIV serostatus as a social identity by explicitly identifying himself as a person living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA) or alluding to his serostatus via other descriptors.

## CODEBOOK FOR ANALYZING TWITTER BIOS

## i. Explicit identification as a PLWHA

Explicit identification means the user has clearly disclosed that he is a PLWHA with no plausible deniability. Considering these indicators:

- Does the user explicitly mention the terms "HIV+" and/or "AIDS" in his bio?

**NOTE:** Please discern whether these terms pertain to the user himself. Simply mentioning either term does not automatically count as *explicit identification as a PLWHA*. An example of this is the statement "spreading HIV awareness."

---

**EXAMPLES**

- HIV reactive 10-21-2016
- HIV+ 03/2012
- HIV poz as of 02/2016
- AIDS survivor

---

- Does the user mention that he is a person living with HIV? Pay attention to the keywords "PLHIV," "PLWH," "PLWHIV," "PLWHA," or variations thereof.

**NOTE:** Do not count "+," "pos," "positivo," "poz," or other variations of the word "positive" if there is no mention of HIV or AIDS.

---

**EXAMPLES**

- #PLHIVdiaries
- PLHIV since January 2017
- I made this account to socialize with other PLHIV.

---

If your answer to either question is *yes*, enter **1** for this item then enter **0** for *suggestive labeling as a PLWHA* (the next item). Otherwise, enter **0** for this item.

## ii. Suggestive labeling as a PLWHA

**NOTE:** If the user already explicitly identifies as a PLWHA (i.e., previous item coded **1**), code this item **0** then proceed to the next item.

Determine whether the user explicitly identifies as a PLWHA by considering these indicators:

## CODEBOOK FOR ANALYZING TWITTER BIOS

- Does the user NOT mention HIV or AIDS in his bio but allude to his HIV serostatus by using keywords such as "blood brother," "pos," "positivo," "positive," "poz," "pozzy," "proton," "pusit," "reactive," "reborn," or variations thereof?

EXAMPLES

- Poz as of 052014
- Dati gimikero, ngayon pusit na!
- Tested positive in July 2018
- Dx + 05.18.18
- Marinong positibo
- Blood brother since Oct '19

- Does the user mention clinical details and HIV/AIDS biomarkers (see previous items)?

EXAMPLES

- R17
- SHIP
- LTE 05.08.19
- Undetectable
- CD4: 220
- VL 45

If your answer to either question is **yes**, enter **1**. Otherwise, enter **0**.

*NOTE: Explicit identification as a PLWHA and suggestive labeling as a PLWHA are mutually exclusive. If you entered **1** for either item, the other one must be coded **0**.*

## D. Other health conditions

Does the user reference health conditions, apart from HIV/AIDS, that he has or has had?

EXAMPLES

- Anxiety
- Depression
- Pneumonia
- TB

If your answer to this question is **yes**, enter **1**. Otherwise, enter **0**.

*NOTE: Pay attention to how the user references the health condition. For instance, "mental health advocate" does not readily suggest that the user is diagnosed with a mental health condition; in which case, this expression must not be counted.*

## CODEBOOK FOR ANALYZING TWITTER BIOS

**E. Pertinent dates**

Examine the bio for any mention of dates, which may pertain to when they were diagnosed, when they started taking meds, or the status of their HIV biomarkers. Some users may also provide a date without any context. Do not treat dates as mutually exclusive entries, as it is possible for bios to contain more than one date. Consider the following indicators in assessing each date you come across in the bio:

## i. Date user was diagnosed

Does the user specify when he was diagnosed with HIV/AIDS? Consider exact dates, the month and the year, or just the plain year. Pay attention to dates placed adjacent to HIV/AIDS social identifiers, including:

- "Diagnosed" or "DX"
- "Positive as of"
- "HIV+" or "+"
- "PLHIV"
- "Reborn"

EXAMPLES

- Positive since 2014
- #PLWH 2012
- Dxd: Nov'19
- Reborn Feb 29, 2016
- + since 2018

If your answer to this question is **yes**, enter 1. Otherwise, enter 0.

## ii. Date user started taking meds

Does the user specify when he started taking HAART? Consider exact dates, the month and the year, or just the plain year. Pay attention to dates placed adjacent to the list of HIV/AIDS meds outlined earlier.

EXAMPLES

- LTE Feb 18 LZE Dec 19
- On ARVs since 07/14/15
- Aluvia 2014

If your answer to this question is **yes**, enter 1. Otherwise, enter 0.

## CODEBOOK FOR ANALYZING TWITTER BIOS

## iii. Date corresponding to status of HIV biomarkers

Does the user specify a date alongside HIV biomarkers? Consider exact dates, the month and the year, or just the plain year. Pay attention to dates placed adjacent to the list of HIV/AIDS biomarkers outlined earlier.

EXAMPLES

- CD4 as of Dec 2020 is 336
- CD4 151 | 8/29/17 308 | 3/11/18 274 | 11/14/18
- VL less than 40 copies/mL 05.03.17
- UD July 21 2019

If your answer to this question is **yes**, enter 1. Otherwise, enter 0.

## iv. Date without context

Does the user mention a date without any context? Consider exact dates, the month and the year, or just the plain year.

EXAMPLES

- 12/2010
- 04.11.18
- Important dates in my life: Aug 15, 1990, Jul 9, 1992 & Jul 15, 2016

If your answer to this question is **yes**, enter 1. Otherwise, enter 0.

## 7. Other accounts

Examine the bio for links to or details about other accounts the user owns. Consider these indicators:

- Does the user provide details about another social media, instant messaging, or gaming account he owns?

**NOTE:** Please discern whether any series of numbers pertains to CD4 count rather than a user ID.

EXAMPLES

- Locked account: @bloodiebro18
- IG & TG @altered\_wunderkind22
- FB: <https://t.co/N3i2M4pD0o>
- <https://curiouscat.live/yoyokpozzstan>
- Genshin UID: 801378294

## CODEBOOK FOR ANALYZING TWITTER BIOS

- Does the user provide a URL in his bio?

NOTE: All URLs in the provided bios have been disguised for user privacy. If you see a URL in the bio, treat it as an *other account*.

---

EXAMPLES

- <https://t.co/rGrOeICW>
- <https://plhivkb18.blogspot.com>
- <https://plhivdiaries.wordpress.com>

---

If your answer to either question is *yes*, enter 1. Otherwise, enter 0.

**Literature Cited**

Bruckman, A. (2002) 'Studying the amateur artist: A perspective on disguising data collected in human subjects research on the Internet', *Ethics and Information Technology*, 4(3), pp. 217–231. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1021316409277>.

## APPENDIX K: CODEBOOK FOR ANALYSING TWEETS

# Codebook for Analyzing Tweets

## What is this codebook for?

The aim of this study is to categorize the types of tweet content posted by users who identify as Filipino men living with HIV/AIDS (FMLWHA). First, a small sample of tweets posted by high impact users was analyzed to exhaust the range of possible types of content manifested in their tweets. Through multiple passes of coding, a framework was developed to classify tweets posted by these users of interest. This codebook, a product of that pilot study, aims to standardize the process of coding a larger sample of tweets posted by users who identify as FMLWHA.

Analysis is limited to original text-only tweets posted between 21 October 2021–21 April 2022. This means we will not be coding retweets, quote tweets, tweets with @mentions and @replies, and tweets with links and media during this period. Ultimately, this content analysis aims to answer the question: *What types of tweet content do users who identify as FMLWHA tweet post?*

## How do I use this codebook?

This codebook is designed to facilitate an objective description of tweets. Please follow these instructions in using it.

1. Prior to coding, familiarize yourself with the tweet content classification system outlined in this manual. This way, you would know what categorical descriptions to keep an eye out for during coding.
2. Examine each tweet as provided. When coding, answer this overarching question: *What does the user want to accomplish with this tweet?* Is it to broadcast one's thoughts? Connect with other users? Provide a live commentary on an event? Pass along information? If the tweet has no highlighted parts, code it in its entirety. Otherwise, code each highlighted portion in the tweet, as it corresponds to a chunk of codable information. Please refer to the following examples.

### Exhibit A

~~~~~  
Gong xi fa cai!  
~~~~~

Because this tweet has no highlighted parts, treat it as a single chunk of information to be coded.

## CODEBOOK FOR ANALYZING TWEETS

## Exhibit B

Any bloodbro here in Gensan? Hit me up so we can talk about our experiences. Good to know we're not alone in this battle...

This tweet has two highlighted portions. First, code Any bloodbro here in Gensan?. Afterward, code Hit me up so we can talk about our experiences. Good to know we're not alone in this battle....

Please note that the highlighted portions serve to represent separate utterances made in a tweet; they do not necessarily imply different codes. Reflect all codes in the row corresponding to the tweet.

3. The codebook will guide you through different classifications of tweet content. Carefully study the provided examples, which represent tweets posted by Twitter users who identify as FMLWHA. Heavy disguise techniques (Bruckman, 2002) have been applied to ensure users' privacy. Critically assess whether to classify a given chunk of information under one of the categories listed in this manual. To systematize the coding process, always start by considering the variable in the column header of the coding sheet.
  - a. If the tweet has multiple expressions:
    - i. Ask yourself if the variable applies to the first highlighted expression. If the stated conditions are satisfied, enter 1 (yes) and move on to the next variable in the adjacent column. Otherwise, enter 0 (no) and assess whether the variable applies to the next highlighted expression.
    - ii. Repeat the process until you have assessed all variables against each highlighted expression in the tweet.
    - iii. Move on to the next tweet in the succeeding row.
  - b. If the tweet is a single chunk of information:
    - i. Ask yourself if the variable applies to the tweet. If the stated conditions are satisfied, enter 1 (yes). Otherwise, enter 0 (no). Move on to the next variable in the adjacent column.
    - ii. Repeat the process until you have assessed all variables against the tweet.
    - iii. Move on to the next tweet in the succeeding row.
4. Regarding textual content, code only chunks of information written in English or Filipino. Disregard text written in other languages.

## CODEBOOK FOR ANALYZING TWEETS

5. For any concern, please get in touch with the researcher. To maintain impartiality, please do not contact other individuals, including fellow coders.

**What content classifications am I looking for?**

For this study, pay attention to the following classifications of tweet content:

1. **HIV/AIDS content**- post referring to HIV/AIDS
2. **Broadcast**- microblog-style posts about actions/experiences, reflections, scenarios, spiritual communication, game stats, or acontextual expressions
3. **Social presence**- posts directed to an audience; may take the form of ceremonial greetings, information seeking messages, information sharing messages, action seeking messages, other directed messages, and self-referential commentary
4. **Live commentary**- posts concerning an event as it unfolds in real time; may be about election-related events, movies/TV shows, online games, and sporting events
5. **Pass along**- unoriginal content such as bible verses, direct quotations, lyrics, platitudes/sayings/other quotations, and other reposted content
6. **Unclassifiable**- if and only if the preceding four categories do not apply

**Let's code!**

Of the categories outlined in this manual, only the first one—HIV/AIDS content—pertains to topical orientation or aboutness. The other categories refer to types of tweets (rather than topics of tweets).

**1. HIV/AIDS content**

Is the tweet about HIV/AIDS? Consider these indicators:

- Does any part of the tweet pertain to HIV/AIDS clinical details such as confirmatory code, meds, and treatment hub or care facility?

EXAMPLES

- R15
- LTD
- RITM

**Please refer to longer list of examples in the codebook for analyzing Twitter bios.**

## CODEBOOK FOR ANALYZING TWEETS

NOTE: Please discern whether keywords pertain to HIV/AIDS. For example, although Makati Med is an HIV/AIDS treatment center, plainly mentioning "Makati Med" in a tweet does not automatically mean the tweet is about HIV/AIDS. Also, a plain reference to medication must not be equated to HIV/AIDS content. Refer to these examples.

<u>CODE APPLIES TO...</u>	<u>CODE DOES NOT APPLY TO...</u>
OTW Makati Med forda ARV refill	Bukas na lang makapunta sa Makatimed. Dami pang kailangang tapusin
Blood bros, don't forget to take your meds. They are our lifesaver.	Day 1 😔 Ugh these meds really be messing me up...

- Does any part of the tweet pertain to HIV/AIDS biomarkers such as CD4 count, undetectable status, and viral load?

EXAMPLES

- CD4=504
- UD since 2015
- Just got my VL test result. < 50 copies. Praise God!
- As a PLHIV

Please refer to longer list of examples in the codebook for analyzing Twitter bios.

- Does any part of the tweet pertain to HIV/AIDS social identifiers?

EXAMPLES

- Blood bro/brother
- Blood sib/sibling
- Poz
- Pusit
- PLHIV

Please refer to longer list of examples in the codebook for analyzing Twitter bios.

## CODEBOOK FOR ANALYZING TWEETS

NOTE: Please be mindful of context, as certain keywords may not necessarily apply to HIV/AIDS. For example, although the term "pusit" is considered an HIV/AIDS social identifier, the term may be used in non-HIV/AIDS contexts as well. Refer to these examples.

CODE APPLIES TO...CODE DOES NOT APPLY TO...

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Reminder to my fellow pusits, don't forget to take your meds. Happy weekend!</li> <li>✓ Hoping may makilalang friendly poziet dito</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✗ For the third time, i'm covid pusit... haayst life</li> <li>✗ Inihaw na pusit and a San Mig Light. Name a better combo!</li> </ul>
--	---

If your answer to either question is **yes**, enter 1. Otherwise, enter 0.

**2. Broadcast**

Broadcast content is typically manifested in microblog-style tweets wherein the user self-reports actions, experiences, thoughts, feelings, or events that he wants the world to know about (Dann, 2015). Examine the tweet for broadcast content, including acontextual expressions, actions or experiences, reflections, scenarios, spiritual communication, and game stats.

**A. Acontextual expression**

Short expressions in tweets may be unclear without any context provided, making it challenging to grasp their meaning. We call these utterances *acontextual expressions*.

Does the tweet comprise only a socially recognizable utterance without any context? Pay attention to emotive interjections and plain emojis **without** accompanying text.

EXAMPLES

- Yes
- Damn
- Purple.
- 
- Dafuq
- LOL

## CODEBOOK FOR ANALYZING TWEETS

NOTE: The keyword here is *acontextual*. While the tweet certainly serves to express an idea, additional details are unavailable to illuminate such utterance. (It is possible that such information is present in an adjacent tweet, which was not included in this random sample.)

Do not count tweets containing hashtags or other references. In such cases, consider coding them under *Broadcast > Reflection* (see description below).

On the other hand, if the utterance is undecipherable, consider coding it under *Unclassifiable* (see description below). Refer to these examples.

CODE DOES NOT APPLY TO...	SUGGESTED CODE
✗ Haluuuuu	▪ Social presence > Ceremonial greeting
✗ 11:11	▪ Broadcast > Reflection
✗ Dapat sa,,,xsjhsuiaia09999999	▪ Unclassifiable
✗ Flying 🚁	▪ Broadcast > Action or experience

If your answer to this question is **yes**, enter 1. Otherwise, enter 0.

#### B. Action or experience

If the user is broadcasting that he is doing something, the tweet serves to convey action. If the user is articulating that he is experiencing something, the tweet serves to convey experience.

Assign all physical, kinesthetic, and observable actions to this category. Do not count mental and emotional acts here (refer to *Broadcast > Reflection*, the next item).

Usually, verbs are employed to convey actions and experiences so pay attention to action words. But make sure that account owner is the doer or receiver of an action. That is, is the user doing something or is something being done to him? Consider these indicators:

## CODEBOOK FOR ANALYZING TWEETS

- Is the user conveying an action he is doing or an action he needs to do? You may also consider actions stated in the past or future tense.

NOTE: Do not count tweets expressing what the user wants to do (refer to *Broadcast > Reflection*, the next item).

---

EXAMPLES

- OMW to Trinoma for Avengers: Endgame
- Grabe tulog laro kain lang ginawa ko ngayong weekend
- Talked to my partner about past traumas
- Will just go to the doctor
- Counting down the days until I come home
- Stalked an ex on FB and found out he's now engaged 😊

---

- Is the user sharing something that is happening to him? You may also consider experiences stated in the past or future tense.

NOTE: Focus on physical sensations. Do not count cognitive or emotional responses (refer to *Broadcast > Reflection*, the next item).

---

EXAMPLES

- So funny, habang sinaswab ang lakas ng gag reflex ko!
- Yung ginising ka para lang tanunin anong oras ka babangon
- Sakit ng dilang napaso sa sabaw
- Di nakatis, napabili ng mabangong belgian waffles sa mall hehe
- Kapapasok lang pero pagodt na agad
- 3 araw na akong alang tulog
- Nagpanting tanga ko sa mga excuses ng new hires kanina

---

- Is the user describing a physical or physiological experience?

---

EXAMPLES

- Ramdam ko na side effects ng Astra 😊
- Nilalagnat
- Awit kumukulob na tiyan ko!

---

If your answer to any of these questions is *yes*, enter 1. Otherwise, enter 0.

## CODEBOOK FOR ANALYZING TWEETS

## C. Reflection

The purpose of reflection tweets is to convey what a user is thinking or feeling. In contrast to actions or experiences, which are physical and observable, reflections happen in the mind (cognition) and heart (emotion).

NOTE: Please do not count physical and physiological responses (refer to *Broadcast > Action or Experience*, the previous item).

Consider these indicators:

- Is the user expressing his mood or state of mind?

~~~~~  
EXAMPLES

- Tagal matapos ng January eh tapos mamaya lockdown na naman
- Craving for takoyaki
- Sarap talaga ng Lola Nena's
- G na G na akong magbeach please
- Olivia Rodrigo's Déjà vu got me all feeling déjâ vu haha
- What is with this week? Bilis kong matrigger sa lahat ng bagay.
- Some days are hard. Some days don't go your way. Today's one of those days.

~~~~~

- Does the user **want** to do something? Focus on the wanting, not the actual doing.

~~~~~  
EXAMPLES

- Parang gusto kong magretire at 40
- Want to be babied so bad
- Planning to ditch work tomorrow
- Gusto ko na ulit magbiyahe. Summer 2022 pls🙏
- These covid cases rly makin me wanna get boosted now

~~~~~

NOTE: Do not count tweets wherein the user says he is actually going to do something (refer to *Broadcast > Action or Experience*, the previous item).

## CODEBOOK FOR ANALYZING TWEETS

- Is the user conveying his sentiments, musings, or personal manifestations?

EXAMPLES

- Evening thoughts: Was COVID a chance for us to reset?
- Praying for a fresh start this 2022..
- Struggle is real
- When you realize 2022 is 2020 too
- 2020 be tough. All I want for Christmas is good health for my family.
- TF! Wala na kaming ginawa this year kundi magtransition.
- Shucks I'm heartbroken! ❤️ Turns out my boss is an apolo10! 😢😢😢
- 11:11 good health & happy heart

NOTE: Do not count clichés, motherhood statements, and generic quotable quotes.

CODE DOES NOT APPLY TO...SUGGESTED CODE

✗ Happiness is not by chance, but by choice.	▪ Pass along > Platitude, saying, or other quotation
✗ You are stronger than you think.	▪ Pass along > Platitude, saying, or other quotation
✗ Kahit gaano kahirap ang buhay, tuloy pa rin ang pangarap.	▪ Pass along > Platitude, saying, or other quotation

- Is the user asking a rhetorical question, one that serves more to express an idea rather than to actually demand an answer?

EXAMPLES

- Anong meron sa tubig dito sa Davao?
- Bakit ang daming cute?
- Bakit hindi maubos-ubos problema sa buhay ko?
- To gym or not to gym?
- What sorcery is this?

If your answer to any of these questions is *yes*, enter 1. Otherwise, enter 0.

## CODEBOOK FOR ANALYZING TWEETS

## D. Scenario

If a broadcast tweet does not fall under action or experience ("what are you doing/experiencing?") or reflection ("what are you thinking/feeling?"), ask yourself if it answers the question "what's happening?" If it does, treat it as a scenario tweet. You may count scenarios that have already taken place and those that are yet to take place.

Consider these indicators:

- Is the user describing what is happening at the moment **without** explicitly stating any action?

EXAMPLES (consider only highlighted portions)

- Napakaulan. 😊
- #82 sa pila sa bangko. BPI anuna?
- SM Calamba ATM
- On repeat: Butter by BTS #army
- Now playing: The Feels
- Andaming tao sa Vikings.
- EDSA traffic on a Friday booooo
- Lowbat na pero go lang
- Sumasabay talaga ang panahon sa damndamin ko

- Is the user describing a general situation or state of affairs **without** explicitly stating any action?

EXAMPLES (consider only highlighted portions)

- Bilis tumaas ng omicron cases dito sa metro
- Return to office na in one week
- Nagmahal na naman ang gasolina
- Lindol sabay brownout

- Is the user marking a personal event or announcing an occasion **without** greetings (e.g., hello)?

EXAMPLES (consider only highlighted portions)

- Been a year since I quit smoking
- Best first week of the year
- Happy first anniv of being poz to me!
- Malapit na matapos 2021. COVID kaya kailan matatapos?
- Day 8 of no sugar yawa na
- Dalawang tulog na lang Valentines na
- Ber months na, JMC pasook

## CODEBOOK FOR ANALYZING TWEETS

- Is the user recounting a conversation in turn-taking style?

EXAMPLES

- Sup: Why are you tardy again?  
Me: forda explain  
Sup: Next time may pa-pizza na ha.  

- Me: Keep the change na.  
Cashier: Sir, kulang pa po kayo ng bente.
- Eksena kanina sa Tokyo Tokyo:  
Ate (scared and pressured): pahintay na lang po, sir.  
Kuya: what tokyo-tokyo so long?

- Is the user describing an event or situation wherein he is not the subject?

EXAMPLES

- Bagong bili TV kapitbahay namin, araw gabi videoke haist
- Grabe si manong trike driver naka iphone 13
- Consistent talaga tong si ma'am cathy sa pagbibigay ng grades
- So kanina sa wowowin, proud pa si willie na d/ds sya???

## E. Spiritual communication

Is the user addressing a higher being in a conversation or a prayer?

EXAMPLES

- Lord, kung para sa akin ito, bigay mo na sa akin please.
- Mama Mary, I pray that the Ber months are full of growth, blessings, and productivity.
- Praise Jesus for today!

## CODEBOOK FOR ANALYZING TWEETS

NOTE: Count only tweets addressed to a higher being. Refer to these examples for tweets that do not apply.

<u>CODE DOES NOT APPLY TO...</u>	<u>SUGGESTED CODE</u>
✗ Lead me Lord, lead me by the hand and let me face the rising sun	▪ Pass along > Lyrics
✗ Praying for everyone in Bicol...	▪ Broadcast > Reflection
✗ [Psalm 25:2] O my God, in you I trust; let me not be put to shame; let not my enemies exult over me.	▪ Pass along > Bible verse

If your answer to this question is *yes*, enter 1. Otherwise, enter 0.

#### F. Game stats

Is the user sharing his online game scorecard for the day?

EXAMPLE

Wordle 2113/6



If your answer to either question is *yes*, enter 1. Otherwise, enter 0.

#### 3. Social presence

Unlike broadcast content, social presence tweets are conceivably aimed at connecting with other users. Here, messages carry an interpersonal purpose and go beyond merely expressing one's actions, experiences, thoughts, and feelings. Examine the tweet for social presence content, including ceremonial greetings, information seeking messages, information sharing messages, action seeking messages, other directed messages, and self-referential commentary.

##### A. Ceremonial greeting

Ceremonial greetings are tweeted to a broad audience with the purpose of creating a sense of connection (Dann, 2015). Pay attention to such utterances addressed to one's Twitter network at large.

## CODEBOOK FOR ANALYZING TWEETS

Consider these indicators:

- Is the user's greeting conceivably aimed at other Twitter users?

EXAMPLES

- Hello universe and hello world ^-^
- Happy weekend mga paps
- Gmornin Twitter peeps!
- Kaway kaway sa mga wala pang pang exchange gift 😊
- Blessed Sunday to all!
- Wishing you all a merry Xmas

- Is the user's expression of genuine appreciation or gratitude conceivably aimed at other Twitter users?

EXAMPLES

- Maraming salamat sa lahat ng tumulong.
- Thanks in advance
- God bless all your generosity! ❤

- Is the user's friendly expression of concern and goodwill conceivably aimed at other Twitter users?

EXAMPLES

- Ingat kayo palagi! 🎃🎃🎃
- Sana okay kayong lahat ngayong gabi 😊
- Hope everyone is staying safe and dry
- Kaya natin to 💪

NOTE: Please do not count pass along content and greetings addressed to specific individuals or entities. Refer to these examples.

## CODEBOOK FOR ANALYZING TWEETS

<u>CODE DOES NOT APPLY TO...</u>	<u>SUGGESTED CODE</u>
✗ It's me, hi. I'm the problem, it's me.	▪ Pass along > Lyrics
✗ Thank you, thank you, I'm okay.	▪ Pass along > Lyrics
✗ Greet the day with a smile and an open heart.	▪ Pass along > Platitude, saying, or other quotation
✗ Brodie, salamat lagi sa pagtitiwala at pasensiya na sa mga kapalpakan ko the past week.	▪ Social presence > Other directed message
✗ Good day, Boracay!!!	▪ Social presence > Other directed message
✗ Goodbye Jansport bag of 8 years	▪ Social presence > Other directed message

If your answer to any of these questions is **yes**, enter 1. Otherwise, enter 0.

#### B. Information seeking message

The purpose of information seeking messages is to obtain actionable or practical details. Is the user crowdsourcing for information **from other Twitter users**?

##### EXAMPLES

- Cno nasa Baguio now?
- Anyone else on Smart experiencing problems connecting to data?
- Any blood bros here who recently went to Saudi? Have some Qs.
- Gaano katagal valid ang swab test for international travel purpose?
- May support group ba for PLHIVs sa Tacloban? Have a friend who needs help.
- LF bed space Espana area. Sana fellow blood bro din. HMU!

## CODEBOOK FOR ANALYZING TWEETS

NOTE: Please do not count musings and rhetorical questions. Refer to these examples.

<u>CODE DOES NOT APPLY TO...</u>	<u>SUGGESTED CODE</u>
✗ Truths lang, ano bang ginagawa ng gobyerno naten? 😊	▪ Broadcast > Reflection
✗ Bat di ko ramdam presensya ng pangulo?	▪ Broadcast > Reflection
✗ Kung makahusga mga netizens eh. Si Toni maraming achievements... eh kayo?!	▪ Broadcast > Reflection
✗ Requirement bang may podcast na lahat ng celebs ngayon? 😊	▪ Broadcast > Reflection
✗ Ano ba recipe para maka move on?	▪ Broadcast > Reflection

If your answer to this question is *yes*, enter 1. Otherwise, enter 0.

### C. Information sharing message

Is the user supplying practical or actionable information to other Twitter users? Examine the tweet and determine whether the user's intent goes beyond mere expression of one's thoughts. Information sharing tweets are those posted for the purpose of awareness, education, or promotion. This is the opposite of information seeking (the previous item).

NOTE: If the tweet contains a call for action statement, assign it to *Social Presence > Participation Seeking* (the next item).

#### EXAMPLES

- CBS motivator here. Once again: ARV IS FREE. This is not tied to your Philhealth contribution. It is against the law for your hub to refuse to give you ARV because your PhilHealth is not updated.
- Room for rent EXCLUSIVELY FOR POZ para walang kailangang itagong gamot. Makati Poblano area, P3K/mo. For minimalist only, yung walang maraming gamit.
- 1989. This was the last year Gilas Pilipinas failed to bring home the gold in the Southeast Asian Games.
- Important reminder: Ivermectin is not a medicine for COVID-19. Para po ito sa ating mga alagang aso at pusa.



If your answer to this question is *yes*, enter 1. Otherwise, enter 0.

## CODEBOOK FOR ANALYZING TWEETS

## D. Action seeking message

Is the user asking other Twitter users to do something concrete or tangible?

NOTE: Action seeking messages are directed to other users. If the user is conveying what he is doing or experiencing, assign it to *Broadcast > Action or Experience*.

Consider these indicators:

- Is the message a command or a request to do something, beyond providing information? Think of this as an explicit action seeking message.

---

EXAMPLES

- Please DM me
- Huwag puro react lang. I report n'yo sana.
- Pag fully vaxxed ka na at nakalipas na ang 3mos, pa booster ka na. Sa mga di pa vaxxed, pabakuna na.
- Got any change to spare? Donate to the victims of typhoon **#UlyssesPH**.
- Tara inom
- Blood bros, watch The Kangks Show on WeTV (you may download the app for free). Episode 6 is for people like us.
- April 1 na bukas. A gentle reminder not to post jokes about pregnancy, miscarriage, sexuality, or illnesses...

---

- Is the message an invitation to do something?

---

EXAMPLES

- Roadtrip?
- Haluuu baka meron sa inyong gustong sumama sa group tour pa-Abra
- Had a bad day 😔 Can I ask for a hug?

---

NOTE: If the user is asking a question with the goal of obtaining information—not eliciting action—count the tweet as *information seeking*.

If your answer to any of these questions is *yes*, enter 1. Otherwise, enter 0.

## E. Other directed message

Is the user talking to a **specific audience** (whether living or non-living) in a tweet **without** the intention of sharing information, seeking information, or seeking action?

## CODEBOOK FOR ANALYZING TWEETS

Consider these indicators:

- Is the user posting a message addressed to someone for the public to read?

EXAMPLES

- Wow ako pa talaga eh cnu ba satin may ayaw ng label?
- Oh ano ka ngayon Raffy Tulfo basag ka diba?
- Thank you sa partner ko kahit poz ako tanggap nya ako..  
UD + Negative = #SerodiscordantCouple
- Suwerte talaga akong nakilala kita. Bukas ulti. 😊

- Is the user addressing a non-living subject?

EXAMPLES

- Oh Baguio you're so pine 😊
- Hala iPad don't let me down today pls
- Asthma layuan moko 😢
- Hoy Converge umayos ka [#NexplayRoar](#)

If your answer to any of these questions is *yes*, enter 1. Otherwise, enter 0.

#### F. Self-referential commentary

Is the user talking to himself in his tweet? Pay attention to cues such as "note to self" and "reminder to self." Also look for instances where the user addresses himself by his name.

EXAMPLES

- Ano na, self?!
- Exam day. This is it pancit. Ano bang hindi natin nakayanan, Kardo?
- Wala nang magkasya sa aking pantalon! Sige Marlon buffet pa moar!
- Okay self, ligo na tayo. may pasok pa today.
- Another day, another Shopee checkout. Anuna, self?

If your answer to this question is *yes*, enter 1. Otherwise, enter 0.

## CODEBOOK FOR ANALYZING TWEETS

**4. Live commentary**

Users may post updates, thoughts, or reactions about an event as it unfolds in real time. These tweets are live commentaries, which are tweeted conceivably to inform others about the goings-on in an event or to engage others in a discussion about it. Examine the tweet for live commentary on elections-related events, movies or TV shows, online games, and sporting events. The date and time of posting are provided to offer some context when coding. If the tweet is a live commentary, please code *Broadcast > Reflection1* as well.

NOTE: Please count only tweets that were posted in reference to an event unfolding in real time. Do not consider retrospective or anticipatory tweets. **When in doubt, examine the date and time a given tweet was posted and cross-reference it with possible events happening at the time.** Some live commentaries do not indicate the name of the event or use hashtags for context clues.

**A. Elections-related event**

Is the user live-tweeting about an election-related event, such as a debate, rally, or interview? Focus only on the 2022 Philippine national and local elections campaign period. Please refer to the following examples.

**Exhibit A**

~~~~~  
Based sa questions ni Tito Boy, mas naaappreciate ko  
ang ganitong diskusyon

6:43 PM · Jan 25, 2022  
~~~~~

The date and time suggest that this is a live commentary tweet about the 2022 Presidential One-On-One Interviews with Boy Abunda. The interview with then presidential candidate Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr. was aired on 25 January 2022.

**Exhibit B**

~~~~~  
Krisyyy maluha-luha ako sa message mo!  
#TarlacIsPink #KulayRosasAngBukas

7:36 PM · Mar 23, 2022  
~~~~~

The date and time suggest that this is a live commentary tweet about the Puso Tarlac Grand People's Rally to endorse Leni Robredo. During the event, Kris Aquino pledged her support for Robredo.

## CODEBOOK FOR ANALYZING TWEETS

**Exhibit C**

~~~~~  
 Wow laki ng budget para sa grand rally ni yorme sa  
 Lipa

8:16 AM · Mar 26, 2022  
 ~~~~~

The date and time suggest that this is a live commentary tweet about Ang Bagong Lipa grand proclamation rally in support of Isko Moreno Domagoso.

NOTE: Not all tweets about the elections are live commentaries. Refer to these examples.

CODE DOES NOT APPLY TO...SUGGESTED CODE

✗ Gen Trias rally for #LabanLeniKiko2022 this Friday, G?	▪ Social presence > Action seeking message
✗ Day in, day out politics ang topic sa bahay. Okay lang naman eh kaya lang pro-88M at Du'  sila 	▪ Broadcast > Reflection

If your answer to this question is *yes*, enter 1. Otherwise, enter 0.

**B. Movie or TV show**

Is the user live-tweeting about a movie or TV show (aside from elections-related and sporting events) as it was being shown? Please refer to the following examples.

**Exhibit A**

~~~~~  
 WOWWW BEA KAKAPROUD KA!!!! GALING!

9:56 AM · Dec 13, 2021  
 ~~~~~

The date and time suggest that this is a live commentary tweet about the Miss Universe 2021 competition. Miss Philippines, Beatrice Luigi Gomez, placed in the Top 5.

**Exhibit B**

~~~~~  
 Grabe tong The Tinder Swindler!!!

9:36 PM · Feb 6, 2022  
 ~~~~~

The date and time suggest that this is a live commentary tweet about The Tinder Swindler, a true crime documentary released on Netflix on 2 February 2022.

## CODEBOOK FOR ANALYZING TWEETS

**Exhibit C**

~~~~~  
 Haist bakit ligwak?! 😢💔 #MissGrandInternational

8:54 PM · Dec 4, 2021  
 ~~~~~

The date and time suggest that this is a live commentary tweet about Miss Grand International 2021. The user's sentiments are likely in reference to Miss Philippines, Samantha Panlilio, failing to make the semifinals.

NOTE: Not all tweets about movies and TV shows are live commentaries. Refer to these examples.

CODE DOES NOT APPLY TO...SUGGESTED CODE

✗ San ko puwede mapanood #LovePhobia?	▪ Social presence > Information seeking message
✗ Watching Brazen	▪ Broadcast > Action or experience
✗ "Give me half credit. This is Our Song." — Pat #BadBuddySeries	▪ Pass along > Direct quotation

~~~~~  
 If your answer to this question is *yes*, enter 1. Otherwise, enter 0.

**C. Online game**

Is the user live-tweeting about an online game?

EXAMPLES

|                                                |
|------------------------------------------------|
| ▪ Brody tank build lupeeet                     |
| ▪ Pota Dota lose streak 10 games               |
| ▪ Kapagod talaga mag solo queueing sa Valorant |

## CODEBOOK FOR ANALYZING TWEETS

NOTE: Not all tweets about online games are live commentaries. Refer to these examples.

CODE DOES NOT APPLY TO...SUGGESTED CODE

✗ Ayown nakapag Legend din haha ▪ Broadcast > Action or experience

✗ Wordle 257 4/6 ▪ Broadcast > Game stats



✗ Kung makapag dota kala mo walang pasok ▪ Broadcast > Reflection  
bukas hahaha

If your answer to this question is *yes*, enter 1. Otherwise, enter 0.

## D. Sporting event

Is the user live-tweeting about a sporting event?

Exhibit A

Whoa Chery Tiggo out of the semifinals #PVL2022

8:04 PM · Mar 28, 2022

The date and time suggest that this is a live commentary tweet about the Premier Volleyball League quarterfinals. During this match, the Creamline Cool Smashers beat Chery Tiggo Crossovers, the 2021 champion.

Exhibit B

Ginebra na sana eh kaya lang game 6 postponed 😢

8:13 PM · Apr 20, 2022

The date and time suggest that this is a live commentary tweet about Game 6 of the PBA Governors' Cup Finals between Barangay Ginebra San Miguel and Meralco Bolts. Due to a fire incident at the Smart Araneta Coliseum, the game had to be called off.

CODEBOOK FOR ANALYZING TWEETS

**Exhibit C**

LFG @MiamiHEAT 🏀

2:38 AM · Apr 18, 2022

The date and time suggest that this is a live commentary tweet about the Atlanta Hawks vs. Miami Heat NBA game on 17 April 2022 (UTC-4).

NOTE: Not all tweets about sports are live commentaries. Refer to these examples.

| <u>CODE DOES NOT APPLY TO...</u>                                                                              | <u>SUGGESTED CODE</u>              |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| ✗ Got the chance to see Gilas Pilipinas Women's Team training pool scrimmage. Super impressed at nakakaproud! | ▪ Broadcast > Action or experience |
| ✗ Talo pa si Carlos Yulo sa mental gymnastics nitong mga apologists eh                                        | ▪ Broadcast > Reflection           |

If your answer to this question is **yes**, enter 1. Otherwise, enter 0.

**5. Pass along**

Unoriginal material tweeted by users may be categorized as pass along content. Specifically, these are original tweets (i.e., not retweets or quote tweets) containing text lifted from other sources, posted conceivably to echo a given message. Examine the tweet for pass along content such as bible verses, direct quotations, lyrics, platitudes, sayings, and other quotations, and reposted content. When in doubt, use a search engine to check the line.

**A. Bible verse**

Does the user cite a bible passage whether it be a proper scripture or simply the book, chapter, and verse?

**EXAMPLES**

- Ecclesiastes 10:16  
Woe to thee, O land, when thy king is a child, and thy princes eat in the morning!
- “Don’t lust in your heart for her beauty or let her captivate you with her eyelashes.” Proverbs 6:25
- Proverbs 7:35-36 “For whoever finds me finds life and receives favor from the Lord. But those who miss me injure themselves. All who hate me love death.” Accept Christ and His word #PureDoctrineOfChrist

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## CODEBOOK FOR ANALYZING TWEETS

If your answer to this question is *yes*, enter 1. Otherwise, enter 0.

**B. Direct quotation**

Does the user provide an exact copy of words attributed to a source? Please consider only quotations wherein the author or speaker is explicitly cited. If no source is cited, consider coding it under *Pass Along > Platitude, Saying, or Other Quotation* (see description below).

**NOTE:** Please do not count direct quotations that are bible passages or song lyrics (even if the performer or songwriter is named).

**EXAMPLES**

- "Fall in love with someone who will love you unconditionally. Who will accept your flaws, imperfections, shortcomings and make you feel that you're worth having." Thank you, Ej Cenita.
- "Be the change you wish to see in the world." - Mahatma Gandhi

If your answer to this question is *yes*, enter 1. Otherwise, enter 0.

**C. Lyrics**

Does the user cite distinctive lines from a song?

**EXAMPLES**

- Isigaw mo sa hangin, tumindig, at magsilbing liwanag sa dilim
- I'm good, yeah, I'm feelin alright
- Will you still love me tomorrow?

**NOTE:** Some lyrics double as oft-repeated statements. For consistency in coding, assign such statements to *Pass along > Platitude, saying, or other quotation* (the next item). Refer to these examples.

| <u>CODE DOES NOT APPLY TO...</u>      | <u>SUGGESTED CODE</u>                                |
|---------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------|
| ✗ Love is blind                       | ▪ Pass along > Platitude, saying, or other quotation |
| ✗ Spread your wings and fly           | ▪ Pass along > Platitude, saying, or other quotation |
| ✗ Everything is going to be all right | ▪ Pass along > Platitude, saying, or other quotation |

## CODEBOOK FOR ANALYZING TWEETS

If your answer to this question is **yes**, enter 1. Otherwise, enter 0.

**D. Platitude, saying, or other quotation**

Look for clichés, motherhood statements, and generic quotable quotes.

**NOTE:** Please do not count platitudes or sayings that are bible passages.

Consider these indicators.

- Does the user cite words of wisdom, an oft-repeated statement, or an inspirational saying?

---

**EXAMPLES**

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- Everything happens for a reason.
- We can do this!
- The world is your oyster.
- Today's reminder: Let's live life to the fullest.
- Remember to never settle for less.

- Does the user cite what is, plausibly, someone else's words without attributing the quotation to its source?

---

**EXAMPLES**

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- Do yourself a favor and learn how to walk away. When a connection starts to fade learn how to let it go.
- Change brings loss, and loss brings grief, often disguised as anger, fear, anxiety, or resentment.
- Better 'wrong' alone than 'right' with the herd
- Failure is not fatal, but failure to change might be.

If your answer to either question is **yes**, enter 1. Otherwise, enter 0.

**E. Reposted content**

Does the user explicitly mention that the contents of his tweet are reposted?

Authentic retweets and quote tweets are excluded from the random sample. However, it is possible that some users have manually reposted contents from another tweet or source. Pay attention to the markers "RT," "retweeted," "reposted," "reshared," "via," and variations thereof.

## CODEBOOK FOR ANALYZING TWEETS

EXAMPLES (consider only highlighted portions)

- RT What is the number of the parking spot?  
— 24
- Repost

Tell me you're a middle child without telling me you're a middle child.  
 ▪ FIRST PH e-bike factory up and running in Laguna via Inquirer Mobile

If your answer to this question is *yes*, enter 1. Otherwise, enter 0.

**6. Unclassifiable**

Code the tweet *Unclassifiable* if and only if it does not fall under *Broadcast*, *Social Presence*, *Live Commentary*, or *Pass Along*. Treat undecipherable or nonsensical posts as unclassifiable tweets. It is possible that such posts are products of pocket-tweeting or cat-on-keyboard input (Dann, 2015).

EXAMPLES

- Nssnsjsjsjsjsjsjsjsjsjsjsnsjsjsjssnsnnznxnxdndnjssijejejjejekekkekkeskskskm  
smssmmsmkskkksk
- P"
- s.#a.ss.sssnddc ❤ z z s @ 😊 zmz. \* 💋 mmmme 😊 .. 🎉 b;nn a 🎉 month 🎉 my

If your answer to this question is *yes*, enter 1. Otherwise, enter 0.

**Literature Cited**

Bruckman, A. (2002). Studying the amateur artist: A perspective on disguising data collected in human subjects research on the Internet. *Ethics and Information Technology*, 4(3), 217–231. <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1021316409277>

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