

**Wash the hate: An exploratory study of the online  
anti-Asian hate from an Asian-New Zealander  
perspective**

**Psalma Angela A. Zabala**

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## Abstract

This thesis explores the COVID-19-related xenophobia and racism that was directed towards individuals of Asian descent on Facebook and Twitter, better known as ‘Anti-Asian Hate’, in colloquial terms. Three distinct time frames were selected, focusing on New Zealand-based COVID-19 events such as the first detection of COVID-19 in New Zealand, the March 2020 nationwide lockdown, and the first elevation in alert levels for the Auckland region in late 2020 as a response to COVID-19 being detected in the community. The research aimed to explore and answer the question “How can the social media discourse on the emergence of COVID-19 in China be understood by using an Asian-New Zealander lens?”

The findings of the research suggest that factors that may contribute to such negative attitudes include a mistrust of governing bodies, the presence of misinformation on social media websites, an emphasis on the prejudiced views people have, as well as the questioning of the benefits and privileges that come with freedom of speech. The research also further confirmed a finding in previous research that was conducted in the United States, which suggested that social media often plays a role in spreading fake news and misinformation. This would therefore suggest that this spread of misinformation has an influence on people and some of the more recent historic events such as the Freedom Convoy protests that took place around the world. Further research into other Asian-New Zealanders’ experiences (and the experiences of other minorities that may have fallen victim to COVID-19-related scapegoating) would be needed to highlight who may have faced such adversity during the pandemic, where they might have been targeted, and how the comments that have been posted may have affected them.

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## Attestation of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

Signed: ..... Psalma Angela A. Zabala .....

Date: ..... 8/04/2023 .....

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# Chapter 1: Introduction

## 1.1 Overview

Since the introduction of social media sites in the early 2000s, such as the launch of Facebook in 2004 and Twitter in 2006, society has become more reliant on social media sites to communicate. This has also led to an increased awareness of the prejudice seen online, more discourse focused on raising awareness of it, and a push towards a more radical approach towards condemning this prejudice such as attacks on minority groups (Davis et al., 2020; Dill, 2009; Fuchs, 2014). The definition of ‘social media’ that would be the best fit for the purpose of this research was defined in Shirky’s study of technology and social media as “tools that increase our ability to share, to co-operate, with one another, and to take collective action, all outside the framework of traditional institutional institutions and organisations” (as cited in Fuchs, 2014, p. 35).

Because social media platforms are public domains, these sites have become a focal point for obtaining information, with some concern over the validity of the information being provided and whether there is an ulterior motive behind why this information is being posted (Bergstrom & West, 2021; Davis et al., 2020; Dill, 2009). Gabarron et al. (2021) provided a definition for the term ‘misinformation’, which is “information that is known to be inaccurate by the person who is posting the content and has deliberately shared this content on social media with the intent to cause harm or confusion within the wider community.” (p. 455).

This definition and the concerns arising from the work of Bergstrom and West (2021), Davis et al. (2020), and Dill (2009) was emphasised with the spread of fake news and misinformation related to the COVID-19 pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic first became an international issue in December 2019, when it was reported that a mystery illness has been observed in Wuhan, China. This fuelled an international panic when it was discovered that this mystery illness had spread across the globe (Bloom et al., 2021; Mercatelli & Giorgi, 2020).

Another reason why this research is significant is related to the increased recognition that misinformation is available on public platforms such as Facebook and Twitter. Prior to the spread of COVID-19, many people had argued that because the process of searching for information on social media is easy, the authenticity of such information is not always questioned, therefore creating an increase in available misinformation (Davis et al., 2020; Gabarron et al., 2021; Gover et al., 2020). This creates a vicious cycle where more people read the articles or posts, agree with what is being shared, internalise this misinformation as something that can be passed on as factual, and then share the same misinformation within their own circles (Davis et al., 2020; Gabarron et al., 2021; Gover et al., 2020). An example of this has been the increased sharing of ‘fake news’, conspiracy theories related to the origin of the virus, and the so-called remedies that were claimed to fully cure COVID-19 symptoms.

As the virus, now known as the SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus (or, more simply, the coronavirus or COVID-19), spread throughout the world, multiple investigations and studies were conducted to better understand the origins of this contagious and deadly virus (Bloom et al., 2021; World Health Organization [WHO], 2020; Zuo et al., 2019). The findings pointed towards a marketplace located in the city of Wuhan, China, as the likely epicentre from which the first strain of COVID-19 had originated. Specifically, COVID-19 has been speculated to have crossed the species barrier from a species of bats sold in the marketplace as a food ingredient (Bloom et al., 2021; WHO, 2020; Zuo et al., 2019).

The use of such words like ‘Chinese virus’, ‘Asian virus’, ‘Kung Flu’ and ‘Wuhan virus’ were reported to become trending keywords on social media platforms, such as hashtags on Twitter and in comments made in posts on Facebook after the former United States President Donald Trump called the coronavirus ‘the Chinese Virus’ on his Twitter account (Reja, 2021). Donald Trump justified calling the virus ‘the Chinese Virus’ as he emphasised the supposed origin of the virus was from China (Reja, 2021). Given that there is some evidence to suggest that COVID-19 originated in China, this sparked blaming and attacks aimed at the Asian community, specifically Asians of Eastern and/or South-East Asian descent (Chung, 2021; Grover et al., 2020; Hwang & Parreñas, 2021; Reja, 2021; Wright & Duong, 2021). Because of

the evident blaming and targeting of Asians based on misinformation and deeply ingrained perceptions of Asian communities, increased racial tensions often result in some form of hate-related incident. These hate-related incidents can vary from verbal harassment, sexual harassment, physical confrontations, assault or murder, as seen in the Atlanta Spa shooting that took place in Atlanta, Georgia, United States, in March 2021 (Chung, 2021; Grover et al., 2020; Hwang & Parreñas, 2021; Reja, 2021; Wright & Duong, 2021).

Previous research has explored different ideas about where racism and xenophobia towards Asians has stemmed from within Western countries, and especially in the United States (Hwang & Parreñas, 2021; Lu et al., 2021). One theme that has arisen within the literature has been focused on how the gendered radicalisation and sexualisation of Asian women has led to the idea that Asian women are more like villainous temptresses that are inclined to go against what are regarded as typical 'American' values such as being sexually driven, rather than being productive individuals wishing to make a positive economic contribution to the Western countries they are residing in (Hwang & Parreñas, 2021; Lu et al., 2021). Another theme that has arisen in the literature is that immigrant Asian men keep stealing jobs, thus reducing the chances of locals being given the opportunity to work (Hwang & Parreñas, 2021).

Previous statistics suggested a different explanation for the increase in Asian immigrants, which was that because a majority of Asians were individuals with specialist skills and knowledge, this created an environment where there was an increased competition for them in the Western job market (Ongley, 1996; Palat, 1996). Historically speaking, in the research conducted by Ongley (1996) and Palat (1996), it was found that the immigration of skilled workers has not only influenced the global economic status in the long run, but this form of immigration has influenced immigration policies in terms of what kind of immigrants may find the process of moving to Western countries like New Zealand easier. The last point that was interesting to arise in the research conducted by Ongley (1996), both in New Zealand and in other parts of the world such as the United States, is that within the time frame that Asians were immigrating to Western countries in larger waves, immigrants that identified as being Pacific

Islanders were also moving to Western countries for the purpose of pursuing better income and work opportunities.

It has been concerning, especially for our Māori, Pasifika and Asian communities, which seem to have been portrayed as the people to blame for the spread of COVID-19 into the wider community, whereas Pākehā have not received such harsh treatment, even when it was blatantly obvious, they were breaking lockdown restriction rules (Bell, 2021; “Covid 19 Delta Outbreak”, 2021; Sakzewski, 2020). It has been interesting to observe in the different forms of the media, especially in readily available forms such as news bulletins, television coverage and social media, how there has been an emphasis on particular ethnic groups that may be to blame for the spread of the COVID-19 virus around the community, and the attendant portrayals of events that became super-spreaders of the virus. The perception of who has been breaking restriction rules was portrayed to have shifted between ethnicities and specific parts of Auckland (Sakzewski, 2020).

Given how society has a dependence on social media to be able to obtain and discuss information related to the COVID-19 pandemic, studies have examined whether these platforms, the content that is readily available to read and the attached comments have played a significant role in what has become a rise in anti-Asian hate, and an increase in hate crimes against specific ethnic groups (Chung, 2021; Grover et al., 2020; Hwang & Parreñas, 2021; Reja, 2021; Wright & Duong, 2021). The first example of this is the increase in reports of racism and xenophobia towards American-Asian individuals and the rise of derogatory terms such as ‘Wuhan Virus’ and ‘China Virus’ (Hwang & Parreñas, 2021; Reja, 2021; Wright & Duong, 2021).

The second example where there was a significant rise in anti-Asian hate occurred in August 2020. This was the time when then-United States President, Donald Trump, made false comments on live television about the so-called huge rise in COVID-19 cases in New Zealand, and how he did not want the same rise in cases to occur in the United States. These comments caused a controversy online about whether Donald Trump’s assertions regarding case numbers and the effectiveness of New Zealand’s COVID response were correct (Robie, 2021). These

claims were later quashed with the report of less than 20 new cases of COVID-19 recorded on the day Donald Trump made those statements. None the less, the misinformation that New Zealand was struggling with containing and eliminating COVID-19 became a popular topic on social media (Robie, 2021).

The extensive coverage of the origins of COVID-19 has caused international tension between the United States and China, especially since evidence from the WHO suggesting that COVID-19 originated in a market located in Wuhan, China (“Facebook Uncovers Chinese Network Behind Fake Expert,” 2021; WHO, 2020). To date, it has been discovered that the SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus has evolved since the discovery of the first strain of prominent variants that have become widely known across the scientific community as Alpha, Beta, Gamma, Delta and Omicron, with different mutations in each strain (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2021; Mercatelli & Giorgi, 2020; WHO, 2021). It has been interesting to note that when a new strain has been identified or has been found to have a high infection rate, the countries that have made this discovery were labelled as suspected countries of origin and were placed on a blacklist forbidding international travel to and from those identified countries. This has led to people who identified as being from the suspected country of origin being targeted and wrongly accused of being a carrier of the specific strain (Adamu & Busari, 2021).

## **1.2 Research question**

This exploratory study aims to answer the following research question:

“How can the social media discourse on the emergence of COVID-19 in China be understood by using an Asian-New Zealander lens?”

The research aims to explore and review the relevant literature that may be useful in understanding where this discourse may have arisen from historically and how this discourse has been portrayed within a New Zealand context. This exploratory study also reviews more recent literature that has examined the portrayal of the social issues of racism and xenophobia directed towards Asian immigrants and the effects of the usage of terms such as ‘Chinese virus’,

‘Asian virus’, ‘Kung Flu’ and ‘Wuhan virus’ which may have influenced a negative perception of what it means to be an Asian immigrant living in a Western country. The research also aims to answer the research question using the researcher’s ethnic background to better grasp the social issues using an Asian New-Zealander lens.

### **1.3 Personal rationale for the research**

As the researcher is an individual who identifies as a university student and was born and raised in New Zealand while being of Asian descent, the social issues of xenophobia and racism are issues that not only resonated with her, but often have come up in conversation. This became especially frustrating when the racism she had personally experienced was subtle to a point where it was difficult to criticise or condemn these people with these prejudiced views. In more recent times she has been confronted in a more overt manner in public settings. The researcher had been keeping a tally of how many times she has been confronted or verbally attacked for her ethnicity during the pandemic. Disturbingly, within the 26-month period from March 2020 to May 2022 the researcher has experienced 43 incidents where she was verbally abused for being of Asian descent.

For the researcher, this study is not only pertinent to her experiences, but may be beneficial to other Asian-New Zealanders who have faced similar confrontational experiences. This research reflected on the historical origins of racism that may be related to modern day anti-Asian hate, explored COVID-19-related racism and xenophobia in New Zealand, and aimed to better understand the effects these social issues have on individuals who identify as being of Asian descent. This reflection would therefore be useful for these individuals who have faced the same adversity the researcher did during the pandemic.

This personal narrative contributes to the Asian-New Zealander lens that was used for the research as this allowed for a greater understanding of the phenomenon that took place during the COVID-19 pandemic. By having an insider approach, the researcher was able to better connect with this confronting topic. This allowed for a greater understanding as to what people

like her, both age and ethnicity wise, may have struggled with when faced with this relevant social issue (Saidin & Yaacob, 2016; Vaidya, 2010).

#### **1.4 Significance of the research**

Given how the topic of COVID-19 has become ever-present in the mass media, this research is significant in light of the pandemic further emphasising the social issues of xenophobia and racism. In a world where mass media has become a readily available and with terms such as ‘Chinese virus’, ‘Asian virus’, ‘Kung Flu’ and ‘Wuhan virus’ circulating in the public domain, it is has been argued that this has further caused a negative perception of what it means to be an Asian immigrant living in a Western country, or created a sense of fear in those identifying as descendants of immigrants (Chung, 2021; Gover et al., 2020; Hwang & Parreñas, 2021; Reja, 2021; Wright & Duong, 2021). Hwang and Parreñas (2021) and Lu et al. (2021) describe the rise in xenophobia and racism as a social issue that is magnified by recent violent events such as the Atlanta Spa shooting and incidents in which elderly Asians have been assaulted in public (Colorado & Hurd, 2021; Associated Press, 2021). These significant events further highlight and emphasise the negative perceptions some Westerners may have of people who identify as being of Asian descent.

#### **1.5 Scope of the research**

The scope of this research was to look at the online racism directed towards Asians that has been posted on Facebook and Twitter during significant national events in New Zealand related to the COVID-19 pandemic. The research was therefore designed to provide a snapshot of the comments, tweets and subsequent replies that were posted at three significant points during the time when New Zealand was following the alert level system.

The research also aimed to answer the question by following a mixed methods design, which was comprised of both quantitative and qualitative components. The quantitative component was focused on identifying comments, replies and/or tweets. This component also counted how many comments were recorded within each of the original posts released on either Facebook or Twitter. It also examined the intensity of the comments, replies and/or tweets. The intensity

refers to the levels of racist undertones in the comments. Also, the qualitative component of the research aimed to complete a thematic analysis in which the comments were sorted into categories and analysed for meaning. To better understand the extent of this social issue within a New Zealand context, the research also aimed to identify themes and subthemes from within the recorded comments, tweets and subsequent replies.

Given this research was conducted using an Asian-New Zealander lens, this research also aimed to provide some insight where previous research conducted by Jaung et al. (2022) did not explore. The research conducted by Jaung et al. (2022) explored the experiences of racism Asian-New Zealanders experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic, and the association with life satisfaction. This previous research had identified that youth, specifically high school and tertiary students, were not only under-represented in the previous research, but that they were also one of the largest groups that had experienced some form of racism during the COVID-19 pandemic, with data showing 50% of these young people had experienced racism. (Juang et al., 2022). This research fills in a gap from the study conducted by Juang et al. (2022), as this captures a possible origin for where the racist confrontations may have taken place online and what these racist confrontations may have looked like.

## **1.6 Thesis structure**

This thesis has been structured into six chapters, with Chapter 1 aiming to provide the reader with an overview of the thesis, and introduce the research question, the researcher's personal rationale for choosing this specific topic, the scope of the research that has been conducted, as well as discussing the aim of the research. Chapter 2 aims to review and critique three topics related to the research question. The first topic that will be reviewed is the existing literature that may provide some background as to why there is prominent xenophobia and racism within Western countries towards Asians. The second topic aims to review previous literature that may have caused racism to become embedded within New Zealand. Lastly, the third topic highlights theories the academic disciplines that provide an understanding of the racism and xenophobia recorded in the data collected. Chapter 3 introduces the research design and methodology that was used for the research, the pilot tests that were conducted to select the social media

newspaper articles and tweet threads, and the rationale for the sample size. This chapter also aims to outline how the data collected will be processed.

Chapter 4 presents the results from the data collection by providing both a general overview based on the data and a more in-depth analysis based on the thematic analysis that was completed. Chapter 5 discusses the findings from this mixed methods research as well as link between the findings of the study and the previously examined literature both within New Zealand and in other parts of the world where it has been reported these social issues may be occurring. Lastly, Chapter 6 aims to draw a conclusion as well as reflect on possible improvements and recommendations should further research be done on this issue of COVID-19-related racism and the effects it may have on people that have been a victim of unfair treatment throughout the pandemic. Attached at the end of this thesis is an appendix, which provide relevant samples of the raw data from both Facebook and Twitter, screenshots of the Excel document showing the process of sorting and identifying themes, as well as the tables recording the results of the thematic analysis.

# Chapter 2: Literature Review

## 2.1 Introduction

This chapter aims to critically analyse and discuss the available literature that has examined information, events, and theories relevant to the research topic. This is because, outside of the United States, there is a limited number of studies that has been done in relation to COVID-19-related racism and xenophobia experienced by individuals online. Therefore, the research does not focus on viewpoints from other parts of the globe where the issues of xenophobia and racism are also experienced by Asian migrants (Gover et al., 2020; Hswen et al., 2021; Tessler et al., 2020).

Theories such as critical race theory, cultivation theory, orientalism, othering theory and microaggressions have also been looked at to better understand and refine the lens that is used for this research. Due to the limited studies available, this chapter has also been split up into two parts, with the first half aiming to explore literature that has investigated some of the often damaging portrayals of Asian men and women in Western countries. This first half also looks at why immigrants from Asia have migrated to New Zealand, as well as discuss the results from New Zealand's most recent census that show relevant statistics for the New Zealand Asian population and some of the reasons why Asians have chosen to immigrate to New Zealand.

The second part of this literature review attempts to define what ethnic conflict, racism and xenophobia are based on the available literature and how these three social issues have been manifested in New Zealand. This section of the literature review also aims to explore the damaging effects of the increase in misinformation available on popular media. In addition, the sections also aim to explore existing theories that may explain the negative attitudes and behaviours towards Asians, or minority groups. These theories include critical race theory, cultivation theory, microaggressions, orientalism and othering theory. Lastly, the summary of this literature review aims to consolidate the key points discussed in this chapter, and critically analyse possible flaws in previous research on this topic.

## 2.2 Immigration in New Zealand

According to Ongley (1996), New Zealand is a nation where there has been a steady increase in ethnic diversity due to successive waves of immigration over a 50-year period. This has included the influx of European, Oceanian, Asian, American and African immigrants for a variety of reasons such as better employment opportunities, better socioeconomic security as well as knowing there is often safety for themselves and/or their families. This is particularly so if their countries of origin were facing some form of violence or political unrest, such as the aftermath of the Epifanio de los Santos Avenue (EDSA) march and revolution in the Philippines that led to an increase in the immigration of Filipinos into New Zealand to escape the effects of the end of President Marcos's dictatorship (Moratilla, 2019; Ongley, 1996; Palat, 1996; Pearson, 1990).

It should be noted that the ethnicities of immigrants who have moved to New Zealand have been previously categorised into five general groups still commonly used, namely Europeans, Oceanians, Asians, Americans and Africans (Ongley, 1996). From here, the categories are split into the countries of origin. For immigrants of European origin, the seven main countries of origin listed by Ongley were Germany, Netherlands, Italy, Greece, Yugoslavia, Poland, and other European countries (Ongley, 1996). The large group of immigrants who came from the United Kingdom or Ireland has its own separate group. For immigrants who are Oceanians, the countries of origin that listed include Australia, Samoa, Tonga, Fiji (and other Polynesian islands).

For immigrants that are of African origin, South Africa is the only country that is counted, with other African nations such as Zimbabwe counted in the study as 'other Africa' (Ongley, 1996; Palat 1996). The same generalisation is also used in categorising the Americas as both the North and South American countries that are not the United States or Canada are simply grouped together as 'other Americas' (Ongley, 1996; Palat, 1996). For immigrants of Asian origin, this origin list is lengthy, with 11 countries of origin mentioned in Ongley's study and the same generalisation of other Asian countries listed as 'other' to form the 11<sup>th</sup> country of origin. The countries listed included India, China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore, Japan,

Malaysia, Philippines, Cambodia, Vietnam and 'other' Asian countries (Ongley, 1996). The makeup of these categories may in themselves indicate a racial bias indicating which ethnicities are deemed as acceptable by New Zealand society.

The bias towards generalisation of ethnic groups by lumping them together with others, poses a risk of overgeneralising statistics, especially in terms of immigrants from Asian countries and African nations as this does not give a clearer breakdown of where immigrants have come from and what their reasons for wishing to immigrate to New Zealand may be (Pearson, 1990). Ongley (1996) and Pearson (1990) surveyed the number of immigrants and their countries of origins to analyse data that was collected in the 1991 national census in New Zealand and then discussed what conclusions could be drawn based on this data.

It has been stated that the migration of Asians to New Zealand has been influenced by a variety of pressures that these individuals have faced prior to moving country. These pressures have included economic, demographic and political pressures (Ongley, 1996; Palat, 1996; Pearson, 1990). According to Ongley (1996), there are several points that are used to explain Asian migration to New Zealand. The first is the benefits in the world economy that emerged from an influx of Asian migration to Western countries, which in turn worked as a catalyst to integrate Asians into the capitalist economy. The studies conducted by Bolaria (as cited in Ongley, 1996), and Anisef et al. (2003), described how Asian countries adopted Western education systems and economic practices, creating a global reserve of professional workers with skills that could be directly transferrable into Western countries where there was a shortage in the workforce.

The second point that was made related to the need for workers influencing the flow of immigration, as this is adjusted to the requirements for New Zealand's ever changing economic needs. This was because said skilled workers had been educated elsewhere, where the standard of education met New Zealand standards, but did not require the expenditure of resources such as money and time to train these workers in New Zealand, therefore meaning these workers were ready to work. This allowed New Zealand (and other Western countries) to homogenise these immigrant workers to be suitable for the Western workforce, and also allowed for a

greater pool of workers who could immigrate to New Zealand to work (Ongley, 1996; Pearson, 1990). It has been argued that this creates a double standard, between Asians and other ethnic groups, such as Māori, while further emphasising minority stereotypes. A statement was made by the Auckland District Māori Council regarding Asian immigration as follows:

“[The Government’s] enthusiasm for importing Asians is based on racial stereotypes (albeit positive): the theory is that their hardworking [lifestyle], frugality and cunning entrepreneurial brains will drag New Zealand out of the mire, they exaggerate [the] Asian’s virtues and at the same time tell us we are lazy” (Yee, 2003, p. 2019).

### **2.3 Previous portrayals of Asians in Western culture**

Within the popular media, there are many instances where Asian immigrants have been portrayed in television shows and other forms of entertainment by following stereotypes. For example, Asians are shown as: not having a decent ability to speak English; not understanding the dominant food culture, language and customs; being extremely studious; and/or being naïve. Another aspect of this Asian stereotype is characterised by a willingness to assimilate into Western culture and adopt Western behaviour, while forsaking their cultures and traditions, because of the pressure and expectation to conform (Wright & Duong, 2021; Yee, 2003). In Yoo et al.’s (2010), study of the ‘model minority’ myth amongst American college students, it was argued that this stereotype, portrayed Asian-Americans to be more academically, economically and socially successful than other minority groups such as African Americans.

However, the stereotypes of Asians do not stop at simply being a model minority group. It has been suggested in some of the available literature that there is a more enemy-style or fantasy-like perception as to what Asian men and women are like (Hwang & Parreñas, 2021; Kao, 2021; Lu et al., 2021; Ongley, 1996; Palat, 1996; Yee, 2003). It has been argued that these perceptions may in turn have been why there is a negative view of Asian immigrants to Western countries such as the United States and New Zealand (Hwang & Parreñas, 2021; Kao, 2021; Lu et al., 2021). It has been perceived within some societies that Asian immigrants, particularly male Asian immigrants, are the people to blame for stealing all the available jobs (Hwang & Parreñas, 2021; Ongley, 1996; Palat, 1996). An example where this anti-Asian mindset had fuelled violence, occurred on October 24, 1871, when a mob lynching took place in Los

Angeles, USA. Due to the amount of violence directed towards Chinese immigrants, approximately 10% of the community, including the only Chinese doctor available nearby, were brutally killed (Kao, 2021). Another example of this violence towards Asian men, which involved the perception of Asian men stealing jobs, was mentioned in the reflective piece written by Tizon (2014). Tizon wrote about discovering his Asian heritage, where he reflected on a violent event that took place in 1982, where Vincent Chen was brutally murdered by White Americans. It was recorded that one of the people who murdered Vincent Chen yelled loudly at the young man as they were beating him to death, “It’s because of little motherfuckers like you that we’re out of work” (as cited in Hwang & Parreñas, 2021, p. 569).

Secondly, when looking at stereotypes for women of Asian descent, it is apparent that a common portrayal is that Asian women are sexualised in the popular media to be ‘villainous temptresses’ (Hwang & Parreñas, 2021; Lu et al., 2021). This portrayal stems from the ideal of what a South-East Asian prostitute is like, from having a machine-like sex drive to giving a performance of eroticised poverty (Hwang & Parreñas, 2021; Lu et al., 2021). Across popular media, Asian women have been described as being dangerously hypersexual, a homewrecker, as well as being extremely money-oriented. An example of this eroticised poverty and the supposed sex drive is in the portrayal of Asian women in popular Broadway performances. Performances such as *Miss Saigon*, where the main character of the show is a poor Vietnamese woman working as a prostitute (Hwang & Parreñas, 2021; Music Theatre International, n.d.). In Western history, especially within the United States, it has also been found that Asian women have been accused of moral duplicity, given this ideology that Asian women only wish to migrate to the United States to engage in prostitution or other lewd behaviour, which may be against what are considered strong Christian values (Hwang & Parreñas, 2021; Lu et al., 2021)

An example of this racism in terms of United States policy would be in the now-repealed 1875 Page Act. This Act was specifically put in place with racist intentions, which included banning Chinese women from entering the United States as it was assumed they would engage in prostitution and other lewd behaviour, rather than contributing to the growth of the United States economy through legitimate forms of work (Hwang & Parreñas, 2021; Lu et al., 2021).

This negative portrayal of Asian women has been found not only in regard to the Atlanta Spa shooting; in fact, there cases that have been found in Hong Kong and some parts of the United States where Asian women had been tortured, sexually assaulted and/or were murdered. This gives a clear indication that negative portrayals not only further emphasised the negative perceptions of what Asian women are like, but also increase the chances that Asian women are more vulnerable to falling victim to any form of violence (Hwang & Parreñas, 2021).

#### **2.4 What are some available definitions of racism and xenophobia?**

It is apparent that racism and xenophobia are social issues that are prevalent everywhere and there are numerous examples and definitions available to describe them. One issue that has been raised in the literature is that although racism has been present throughout global history, the definition of ‘race’ has changed over time (Pearson, 1990). According to Merriam-Webster’s (2021a), the definition of racism that was provided was “the systemic oppression of a racial group to the social, economic, and political advantage of another ethnic group.” The second available definition, according to Pearson (1990), involves ‘racism’ being broken down into two subtopics, which is racism as an ideology, and institutionalised racism. These subtopics are useful as both can be used to explore the development of racism within New Zealand society and engage in a more focused discussion about institutionalised racism. In short, racism has been defined to be a social issue that not only affects individuals daily but is ingrained in New Zealand society. The third definition that has been considered is from the study conducted by Pierce et al. (as cited in Nairn, 2020), which defined casual racism to be more subtle compared to other forms, as this form of racism is not as obviously shown through actions, but rather through specific wordings within a conversation that aim to subtly emphasise existing stereotypes of a specific ethnic group. For the purpose of this study, the definition that was used in the research is the definition provided by Merriam-Webster (2021a).

It should be considered that often xenophobia and racism go hand in hand, as xenophobia is considered to be the fear and/or hatred of foreigners, or anything of foreign origin (Pearson, 1990). Racism refers to the systematic oppression a specific racial group, while giving another ethnic group some form of advantage (Merriam-Webster, 2021b). For example, it was found

that due to the increased presence of asylum seekers in Europe, there was an increase in hostility and xenophobia towards these asylum seekers (Peterie and Neil, 2020). It was also found that with this rise in xenophobia and hostility, policies in Europe were put in place to control the entry of asylum seekers into Europe (Peterie and Neil, 2020).

## **2.5 How are racism and xenophobia portrayed in New Zealand?**

It should be noted that there are not just the two social issues that have been highlighted in the literature that is focused within a New Zealand setting related to the inequality between people of European descent versus people who identify as being a part of any of the minority groups. Pearson (1990) suggested that there are two social issues that are to be considered within a New Zealand perspective, which are racism and xenophobia. It is important to consider that all three social issues that have been highlighted by previous research, as the research suggested that ethnic conflict, racism and xenophobia may have been engrained into New Zealand society during the process of modernising and introducing more cultures into New Zealand as the country became more industrialised (Henderson, 2003; Pearson, 1990).

Xenophobia and racism towards Asians have been harboured by a substantial proportion of the population, especially with early Chinese immigrants arriving in New Zealand (Palat, 1996). This is further emphasised by prominent instances in New Zealand's history such as in 1857, where an Anti-Chinese Committee was formulated in Nelson prior to the arrival of any Chinese individuals to "fight the Mongolian Filth" (Palat, 1996, p. 36). Another portrayal of racism in a New Zealand perspective is when Japanese exchange students were barred from participating in 50th anniversary celebrations commemorating the Second World War by the Royal New Zealand Returned and Services' Associations of Rangiora and Rotorua, yet students of German descent were allowed to take part in the celebrations (Palat, 1996). Welch (as cited by Palat, 1996) pointed out an example where racism has been seen within official literature, as it was recorded in the second edition of the *Oxford History of New Zealand*, which had one entry for the word Asia in the index of the dictionary. This entry directed readers to "See Immigration; Xenophobia" (p. 35)., rather than having a definition for Asia at all in the dictionary (as cited by Palat, 1996). An explanation for racism towards Asian immigrants is that discrimination is

more personal. This is especially the case if the discrimination comes from people who may have had loved ones who perished in the Asian regions during World War II (Vasil & Yoon, 1996). According to Yee (2003), an issue that has been raised in terms of Asian immigrants, specifically Chinese immigrants, adjusting to living in New Zealand is the pressure to conform with and assimilate into New Zealand society. This has created a mindset where immigrants lower their efforts at work or at school to avoid being targeted for being too enthusiastic, as it was believed that this enthusiasm was a threat to other colleagues and classmates in terms of job opportunities, educational achievements and financial gains (Yee, 2003).

The social issues of xenophobia and racism are still rampant in New Zealand society, with social media being one of the platforms where these prejudices are often expressed as casual, everyday racism. It became apparent the microaggressions, racism, xenophobia and ethnic conflict were being identified and therefore were commonly being used on social media platforms (Sue, 2013, 2015). In 2017, the New Zealand Human Rights Commission launched a social marketing campaign titled 'Give Nothing to Racism'. This campaign aimed to raise awareness of casual racism and the increased presence of this social issue in New Zealand society. According to Nairn (2020), this campaign highlighted four recurring themes. These were 'it starts at the top', 'White people are victims too', 'what is racism anyway?' and 'we are all equal'.

The first recurring theme that was found in the campaign was 'It starts at the top'. It should be considered that this theme has two competing subtopics, which are 'Māori are privileged by structures in society' and 'Māori are disadvantaged by institutionalised racism', which would suggest that critical race theory may be in play within these themes. Although these two statements contradict each other, both are statements that suggests that critical race theory may better explain this phenomenon taking place. A key feature of critical race theory (or CRT) is that the racism is visible in public spaces is also ingrained in law making and current policies to oppress, control, and further disadvantage minority groups. These two subtopics suggested that Māori are often disadvantaged because they are the minority group within New Zealand, and therefore CRT would be a theory that explains what is occurring in both subtopics.

The second theme was ‘White people are victims too’. According to Nairn (2020), it was found that the comments from the campaign suggested that the White audience members believed the campaign was designed for them exclusively as a method to convince them to change their inferred racist attitudes. The third theme that appeared was ‘what is racism anyway?’ It was found in the campaign that there were different definitions audience members had for the word ‘racism’, which then in turn created ambiguity as to how racism should be defined, which also created conflict as each individual has their own definition of what the word ‘racism’ means to them. The fourth and final recurring theme ‘we are all equal’. This theme suggested that instead of embracing the belief that all humans are one species, it is apparent that people believed that racism is the product of seeing differences between groups rather than considering the context of what racism is within society today and how it is portrayed (Nairn, 2020).

## **2.6 The media and common issues that have been raised by previous research**

Before exploring the root of the issues of ‘xenophobia’ and ‘racism’ within New Zealand, another concept that must be considered is the effects different forms of media have on the wider international community. The more traditional forms of media that have often had a profound effect on the migrant community in the past has included television news headlines, radio segments, magazine articles and other text-based media (Pearson, 1990; Shu et al., 2021; Simmons, 2012). As technology developed, relevant forms of media also included posts, tweets and alerts that could be readily accessed via social media and other internet platforms (Davis et al., 2020). It has been emphasised in previous research that, in more recent times, many people have become more reliant on social media to be able to obtain news and supposed information. According to Davis et al. (2020), approximately two-thirds of American adults obtain news about current events from social media sites, even though there are concerns about the authenticity of the information and news that has been made available on these social media platforms (Davis et al., 2020; Simmons 2012; Wright & Duong, 2021). The Pew Research Centre’s study (as cited in Wright & Duong, 2021) about the news usage across social media platforms has also discussed how the different genders within the two-thirds of Americans may

obtain news from different social media platforms. According to Wright & Duong (2021), American men were more reliant on acquiring news and current events from YouTube (57%), LinkedIn (64%) and Reddit (72%), while women were more inclined to acquire the news from Instagram (51%), Facebook (61%), and Snapchat (63%). The same research also found that White Americans were most likely to obtain the news from the social media sites Reddit (57%), Twitter (60%), and Facebook (62%) rather than other social sites or looking at traditional news media channels directly.

Social media has become one of the main tools used to stay in touch with others, as well as to obtain information (Davis et al., 2020). Social media shapes our world perceptions such as political and personal views, as well as how we may perceive others, especially people who may be receiving negative attention (Davis et al., 2020; Fuchs, 2014; Simmons, 2012; Tessler et al., 2020; Wright & Duong, 2021). One example is where social media has been linked to the rise of people being radicalised by what they are viewing online, which leads to an increase in the numbers of radicals committing violent acts against minority groups (Royal Commission of Inquiry into the Attack on Christchurch Mosques on 15 March 2019, 2020; Wright & Duong, 2021).

## **2.7 The emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic and the rise of COVID-19-related misinformation and hate crimes**

In December 2019, the words ‘mystery illness reported in a market located in Wuhan, China’ became one of the prominent headlines across the world and later were confirmed to be a new disease caused by the SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus (Bloom et al., 2021; WHO, 2020; Zuo et al., 2019). As the virus spread throughout the world causing widespread infection and panic, multiple investigations pointed towards the outbreak originating in Wuhan, China (Bloom et al., 2021; WHO, 2020). The studies also suggested that COVID-19 was a virus that was likely transmitted to humans through exposure to bats. Further questioning indicated that a marketplace in Wuhan, China where species like bats were being sold was where the virus originated (WHO, 2020). It has also been argued that the origin of the COVID-19 virus is not as straightforward as has been claimed by the media, and which has caused conflict and unrest,

especially between the United States and China (“Facebook Uncovers Chinese Network Behind Fake Expert,” 2021).

After these reports became public and the virus spread from China to the rest of the world, it is apparent that, in Western countries such as the United States, the resentment against the Asian-American community was heightened, causing an increase in violent and verbal attacks against this minority group (Hwang & Parreñas, 2021; Tessler et al., 2020; Wright & Duong, 2021; Yu et al., 2021). According to Hswen et al. (2021), the negative attitudes towards the Asian-American community became more apparent. This is because as these negative perceptions became more obvious, racists and those with prejudiced views became bolder and more violent in their physical and online interactions with the Asian-American community.

It has been argued that Facebook and Twitter are places where a considerable amount of misinformation is available, which has led to an increase in violent confrontations with Asians residing in Western countries like the United States (A. Davis et al., 2020; Gabarron et al., 2021; Gover et al., 2020). Given that these public platforms are now among the tools commonly used to gain news and information from official sources such as the local or national government, one of the significant issues that has been identified is that it is difficult to distinguish what may be misinformation and what may be official advice from agencies (A. Davis et al., 2020; Gabarron et al., 2021; Gover et al., 2020; Yellow Horse, 2021). This is especially the case with issues of misinformation related to COVID-19 vaccinations. The misinformation relates to the supposed side effects of the vaccine and to deaths that may have coincided with the fact the person had recently been inoculated against COVID-19, thus fuelling a divide in the international community about the effectiveness of the vaccine (Gabarron et al., 2021; Gover et al., 2020; Hwang & Parreñas, 2021; Tessler et al., 2020; Wright & Duong, 2021; Yellow Horse, 2021).

Over the years, the world has seen horrific events where hate crimes took place, ultimately causing trauma through injury or death and creating a sense of a divide within the community. These events have not only further highlighted xenophobia and racism but have also stressed that racism is far from being resolved (Lu et al., 2021). After Donald Trump’s comments in

March 2020 that essentially blamed Asians for the spread of COVID-19 to the rest of the world, the Stop Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) Hate Organisation recorded almost 3,800 hate-related incidents have taken place. These incidents ranged from verbal confrontation, physical confrontations, with the worst case scenarios including violent confrontations in public places and murders (Gover et al., 2020).

Given that race-related crimes occur in all parts of the world, multiple definitions describe what hate crimes are and who may be the target for such acts. From a United States perspective, the American Department of Justice (2022, para. 9.), defines hate crime as “At the federal level, a crime motivated by bias against race, color, religion, national origin, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, or disability.’ From a New Zealand perspective, the Royal Commission of Inquiry into the Attack on Christchurch Mosques on 15 March 2019 (2021) has attempted to provide a definition of hate crime as “an offence that is motivated by the offender’s hostility to the victim as a member of a group that has a common characteristic, such as race, religion or sexual orientation” (para. 3).

A recent event that was fuelled by xenophobia took place on March 16, 2021, where a 21-year-old who described himself as a sex addict went into three massage parlours located in Atlanta, Georgia, in the US, and gunned down eight people, with six of the victims being women of Asian descent (Hwang & Parreñas, 2021; Lu et al., 2021). It is thought that the three massage parlours were chosen as the perpetrator believed that, by killing people who may have been employed at the massage parlours, he would help to “eliminate the temptation” and curb his sex addiction (Hwang & Parreñas, 2021, p. 567). This incident alone has raised concerns as to what ideals may already be present within the online public domains. The accessibility of such radical materials, as well as the current treatment of people of Asian descent, especially for Asian women for whom such negative perceptions are still present (Hwang & Parreñas, 2021; Lu et al., 2021).

## **2.8 Existing theories that are relevant for the purpose of this study**

Because the literature has suggested that the issues of racism and xenophobia are broad social issues and they have multiple definitions available, five theories were selected to better refine the Asian-New Zealander lens that was used in the study. The five theories that are discussed in terms of the central ideas within each theory and how each theory is relevant to the research question.

### **2.8.1 *Critical race theory***

The central theory that has been adopted to help examine and provide a possible explanation of where xenophobia and racism has stemmed from is critical race theory (sometimes called CRT). This theory was developed by Bell and Freeman to better understand the links between race, racism and power, while suggesting that race is a social construct (as cited by Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). It is argued that racism and xenophobia are issues seen in public spaces and are also ingrained in law making and policies to further disadvantage people of colour, especially African Americans in the US. It has been argued that critical race theory is applicable to other minority groups, especially where oppression has been ingrained in legislation that was influenced by historical events such as the immigration of Asians to Western countries (Davis et al., 2020; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Essed, 2002; Stefancic, 2013).

This theory is one of the theories that has been adopted for the purpose of better refining the lens that was used in this study as this theory would be best at explaining why aggression towards and hate for Asian immigrants is deeply ingrained. This theory would also further attest to the suggestions in previous research that certain perceptions of Asians are deeply embedded within society, and not only in terms of individual attitudes. Rather, critical race theory suggests that the social issues of xenophobia and racism are deeply embedded within society in terms of policy, both in current and developing policies, as seen in the statement made by the Auckland District Māori Council (quoted in section 2.2). This would therefore further highlight the stereotypes of Asian immigrants as something that has been embedded in New Zealand

immigration policies. This in turn creates a double standard and further portrays Asian immigrants to be the model minority group (Essed, 2002; Stefancic, 2013; Yee, 2003).

### **2.8.2 *Cultivation theory***

Cultivation theory is the second theory that can be applied to better understand how racism and xenophobia are still prevalent within society, and further amplified in public spaces such as social media platforms. In the study conducted by Gerbner et al. (1986), on television drama and social reality, the central point of this theory is that the media works as a socialising agent within society. What is shown on different media such as television and social media is what helps to formulate the social reality of individuals (Park et al., 2022). This therefore suggests that users of social media use the content that is shown to them on their social media accounts to better understand what may be happening around the world, and better develop their sense of reality. Cultivation theory is therefore applicable to the research question of the present study because of the concern for radicalisation and the fact negative perceptions of Asians are still being portrayed on all forms of entertainment media, and feed into how social media users form their social reality (Hwang & Parreñas, 2021; Lu et al., 2021; Park et al., 2022; Wright & Duong, 2021).

### **2.8.3 *Orientalism***

The third theory that is considered for the purpose of this research as an explanation for xenophobia and racism is the notion of orientalism. This theory argues that the existence and evolution of all cultures inspire the unavoidable distinction of the ‘other’ as a point of difference (Said, 2014), with orientalism being described as “a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between ‘the Orient’ and (most of the time) ‘the Occident’ ” (p. 26). People in Europe, for example, constructed places like the Middle East to be the ‘other’. From a Western perspective, the Occident has been simply described to be Western society, while the Orient has been described to be anything from the ‘East’ such as culture, people, practices and objects. These practices and people are considered to be the ‘other’. In short, they are a difference that should be controlled and therefore the Occident should feel

suspicious and apprehensive towards anything that may have originated in the Orient (Said, 2014).

This theory is applicable when considering how the Western world has viewed Asia, and immigrants from anywhere other than Western society, and how these immigrants are negatively treated once they are residing in Western countries. Both Asian men and women have also been considered with suspicion, due to negatively perceived assumptions about Asians. One assumption is that Asian immigrants have been thought to be taking all job opportunities (Wright & Duong, 2021). The second perception is that Asian women are engaging in immoral behaviours such as prostitution, which would then compromise ingrained Christian values by causing some form of sexual temptation for Western men (Hwang & Parreñas, 2021; Lu et al., 2021; Wright & Duong, 2021; Yellow Horse, 2021).

#### **2.8.4 *Othering theory***

Another theory that could be used for the purpose of this study is othering theory. This theory would be useful to explain the behaviours that are fuelled by the social issues of racism and xenophobia. The central concept of this theory is the identification of an individual or a group which is believed to not fit into a specific set of norms or expectations, and which would then pose a threat to the supposed normalcy that has been defined by the in-group. This leads to the construction of a definition of who may be considered to be a part of the group that is favoured, and who would be considered to be an outcast (Brons, 2015; Gover et al., 2020). This may be relevant in understanding the thought processes behind the behaviours related to the racism and xenophobia, why they continue and why it has become common to alienate others who may not fit what is considered to be the dominant group (Gover et al., 2020). In terms of race, the idea that has surfaced is that Asians (and other minority groups) are considered to be the 'other', whereas Europeans consider themselves to be the majority (Gover et al., 2020).

#### **2.8.5 *Microaggressions***

According to Sue et al. (2007), microaggressions are split into three subcomponents which consists of microassaults, microinsults, and microinvalidations. Microassaults are attacks which

occur when a person feels they have made an outburst or seemingly have support for racist views. These could be verbal or a non-verbal and are aimed to make the person who is being attacked feel inferior (Sue et al., 2007, p. 274). Microinsults occur when a person is rude or insensitive when referring to another's racial background or ethnic identity. The final component, microinvalidations, takes place when communications "exclude, negate, or nullify the psychological thoughts, feelings, or experiential reality of a person of colour" (Sue et al., 2007, p. 274). This theory may be relevant when considering the comments found in the data, and if the researcher was to consider how she has been attacked for comments that she made on social media sites prior to this study commencing, especially as there is a clear distinction between the three forms of microaggressions that can take place online.

## **2.9 Summary**

This chapter has discussed why there has been an influx of Asian immigrants to New Zealand, as well as where the racism and xenophobia may have stemmed from in both the United States and New Zealand. The negative perception of Asian men and women that has been portrayed has led to violence or unfair policies being passed in places like the United States (Bloom et al., 2021; Chung, 2021; "Facebook Uncovers Chinese Network Behind Fake Expert," 2021; Gover et al., 2020; Hwang & Parreñas, 2021; Hswen et al., Lu et al., 2021; Reja, 2021; Robie, 2021; Wright & Duong, 2021; Yee, 2003) . Available definitions from previous studies to define the terms racism and xenophobia have been considered. Also examined is the rise of misinformation through social media, as well as the theories that explain critical race theory, cultivation theory, orientalism, othering theory and microaggressions.

Based on the available literature it is apparent that most of the research that is even remotely relevant to the present study, has been situated in the United States. (Gover et al., 2020; Hswen et al., 2021; Tessler et al., 2020). Secondly, the discussion has covered the relevant theories which are relevant in guiding the perspective this research takes, and in understanding and possibly explaining where the social issues of racism and xenophobia towards individuals of Asian descent may have stemmed from. These five theories are critical race theory, microaggressions, orientalism, cultivation theory and othering theory. All five theories provide

insights into where this discourse originated and why it arose, as well as why it is present in online discussions regarding COVID-19 (Butcher et al., 2006; Ongley, 1996; Palat, 1996; Pearson, 1990; Spoonley, 2015).

In a New Zealand context, it is apparent that a lot of the literature is dated and does not focus on the issue of xenophobia and racism using an Asian-New Zealander lens. Rather, the research was mostly completed by Pakeha researchers, therefore suggesting the previous research was completed using a New Zealand-European lens (Butcher et al., 2006; Ongley, 1996; Spoonley, 2015; Spoonley & Trlin, 2004). This therefore further supports the idea of using of an Asian-New Zealander lens to provide an alternative viewpoint of racism and xenophobia during the COVID-19 pandemic. The majority of the literature focused on the social issues of xenophobia and racism has not looked at how social media and misinformation has played a role in the discourse on COVID-19 (Gover et al., 2020; Hwang & Parreñas, 2021; Hswen et al., Lu et al., 2021). Previous research explored the extent of racism and xenophobia to measure the severity of the problem and took a statistical approach in measuring the frequency of the racist and xenophobic comments, rather than focusing on the nature and the tone that was used in the comments themselves (Gabarron et al., 2021; Gover et al., 2020; Hwang & Parreñas, 2021; Hswen et al., 2021; Tessler et al., 2020).

Moreover, previous research that has been conducted in New Zealand that is focused on the racism and xenophobia towards Asian-New Zealanders has been completed by researchers from ethnic groups that are not Asian. In that work, the researcher was male and/or the research was completed before 2019, and therefore it is not entirely relevant to the contemporary context (Butcher et al., 2006; Elers, 2018; Gendall et al., 2007; Ghosh, 2015; Ongley, 1996; Palat, 1996; Pearson, 1990; Spoonley, 1987, 1994, 2015; Spoonley & Trlin, 2004).

Based on all the observations and what have been discussed as obvious gaps within the literature, especially in terms of viewing the issues raised through an Asian-New Zealander lens, this study aims to answer the research question, “How can the social media discourse on the emergence of COVID-19 in China be understood by using an Asian-New Zealander lens?”

## Chapter 3: Research Design and Methodology

### 3.1 Introduction

As New Zealand is one of many nations where there have been a lot of social restrictions due to COVID-19, the research design used for this study did not involve direct input from people who may have had negative confrontational experiences. Rather, the research was focused on analysing comments that have been posted by people in the public domain, specifically on the social media platforms Facebook and Twitter. This chapter discusses the components that formed the research design such as the pie charts that were used to show a visual of the data collected and the results from the thematic analysis that was conducted.

Previous research exploring the social media discourse of the emergence of COVID-19 has looked at multiple social media platforms, where the need for information and news increased as the pandemic continued to spread globally. During this time social media became one of the most important tools for the sharing of this information (Gabarron et al., 2021). Given the lack of research on this topic, it is important to survey this contemporary situation, as it was previously suggested there may be possible lasting effects on victims of racist and xenophobic attacks due to the pandemic, such as a lowered life satisfaction and lowered self-esteem (Jaung et al., 2022).

The research design also aimed to capture comments and tweets that were posted on Facebook and Twitter during three chosen time frames. These comments then served as an indicator of whether specific time periods may have had an association with what may have been said and whether there may have been some form of scapegoating occurring online. This is based on the American studies conducted by Gabarron et al. (2021), Gover et al. (2020), Hswen et al. (2021), and Li and Nicholson (2021), where all of the studies observed the scapegoating of Asian-Americans on multiple social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. Based on the researcher's personal experiences and from what had already been observed online during the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic, it was considered to be possible that the specific periods in time during the pandemic may play role in who may have received the blame for the

outbreak of COVID-19 within New Zealand. It was also possible that this blame would have shifted during another significant event which would have influenced the negative atmosphere that was already online during the initial lockdown. In the New Zealand context, this significant event would have been the Auckland-wide lockdown that took place in late 2020 due to a citywide outbreak of the virus.

## **3.2 Research design**

### **3.2.1 *Initial research design development***

When the researcher first developed the design for the research, multiple social media platforms were used to canvas the best sites suited to complete mixed methods research, such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube and Reddit. The researcher created accounts, if she did not have one already, and it was also decided when canvassing the different platforms, she was not to comment on anything that was posted. These were the five websites that were considered, given high percentages of American adults are obtaining the news from them (Wright & Duong, 2021). In the study conducted by Kim and Dennis (2019), it has been suggested that in countries like the US and New Zealand, 62% of people that have access to the internet obtain the news from social media sites, especially Facebook. Prior to selecting the two websites that were to be used, an initial search was conducted on each of the five websites to check that it was possible to narrow down the posts that would be relevant to the research and therefore be able to correctly capture the comments and their replies in the right time frames, and in the right context.

It became apparent that Facebook and Twitter were the social media sites best suited to gather data from. This reflected the multiple studies that suggested that there were high percentages of people obtaining COVID-19-related news from Facebook and Twitter, and it had also been suggested they were the two most common social media sites where people looked for information in pre-COVID times (A. Davis et al., 2020; J. F. Davis, 2018; Gabarron et al., 2021; Hswen et al., 2021; Hwang & Parreñas, 2021; McBrayer, 2021; Nairn, 2020; Ogden et al., 2020; Robie, 2021; Wright & Duong, 2021). Previous studies conducted by Gabarron et al.

(2021), Hswen et al. (2021) and Hwang and Parreñas (2021) also highlighted the high volume of xenophobic and racist comments that were more often than not also linked to comments that were spreading further misinformation online. For these reasons, Facebook and Twitter were the two social media sites selected for data collection.

The initial study design was focused on three specific time frames, which served as focus points for data collection. The time frames that were initially selected were one month long in each case: December 2019, March 2020, and September 2020. All three time frames are significant within a New Zealand context. In December 2019, the initial panic about COVID-19 was reported in the media (Bloom et al., 2021; Unite Against COVID-19, 2021; WHO, 2020; Strongman et al., 2021; Zuo et al., 2019). In March 2020, New Zealand went into a nationwide lockdown due to a large number of cases of COVID-19 becoming present throughout New Zealand (Unite Against COVID-19, 2021). The third time frame selected focused on September 2020, which is when Auckland went into an elevation in alert levels due to a regional outbreak of COVID-19 (Unite Against COVID-19, 2021). This research design consisted of six sets of approximately 500 comment samples for each of the time frames and the two platforms that were chosen in the original research design. The original research design therefore aimed to have a total sample of 3,000 comments, tweets and the subsequent replies that were recorded from Facebook and Twitter. As a basic indicator, a nominal scale works to allocate items into non-numerical categories (Salkind, 2010) such as racist and non-racist. For this research, this was used to score the comments that were recorded, with the data being placed onto pie charts for analysis in Chapter 4.

For the quantitative component, it was important that prior to completing the thematic analysis there was some indications of what comments were to be collected, as well determining the method to be used to identify the common discourses that emerge from the data. In the study conducted by Hsieh and Shannon (2005), there were three possible approaches that could be applied to complete the qualitative component of this study, namely conventional, directed, or summative thematic analysis. Of the three approaches, the conventional approach was the most appropriate for the purpose of the research as this type of design is best suited for research

where there is not enough literature and/or theories that may be relevant to the event the research is based upon; furthermore, the focus of this component is on counting and comparing recurring themes, as well as discuss the underlying context that is being suggested by the data that was collected (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

### **3.2.2 Pilot tests of the research design methods**

Given that there is little in the way of research into online xenophobia that focuses on the portrayal of COVID-19 in social media and its influence on racism, it is important to conduct pilot tests before proceeding with the main study. Two pilot tests needed to be conducted, to provide insight into how data is best collected from both Facebook and Twitter. This allowed the researcher to see if the original research design would be the best fit for the research that was to be conducted, as well as implement any changes that these pilot tests indicated would be necessary for when the actual data collection took place, so as to be able to obtain the best possible data for the analyses that were to be conducted.

#### *3.2.2.1 Pilot test completed for Facebook*

For the pilot test that was conducted on Facebook, it was decided that the search for newspaper articles being uploaded on Facebook would be done on the *New Zealand Herald* Facebook page. This was chosen because this not only removed any personal biases the researcher may have due to metadata on her account, which would select what articles and content to show her, but also improved the chances that the articles would better capture comments made by New Zealanders as the newspaper is based in New Zealand.

A search was completed in the page search bar for the *New Zealand Herald* Facebook page, which included some of the key words that would be used in the actual data collection such as xenophobia, racism, anti-Asian hate, China and Asians. The search was then narrowed down by selecting the year the article was published to the page. An article was selected that was about racism towards Asians, but this was from April 2019, which is a few months prior to the first time frame that would be studied. It became apparent that there were not a lot of articles available at this point in time. Therefore, a note was made to expand the time frames to three to

four months after the original dates that were mentioned (please refer to section 3.2.1), depending on what articles were being released. In the pilot test that was conducted, 100 comments and the subsequent replies from the article that was posted in April 2019 were then recorded and scored to serve as the pilot test. Each comment was recorded using a scale (please refer to section 3.4.4 for a breakdown of the scoring system that was used).

#### *3.2.2.2 Pilot test completed for Twitter*

For the pilot test that was completed on Twitter, the search was completed by entering the relevant key words, hashtags and dates into the fields that were prompted in the advanced search and entered the dates December 1, 2019, to December 31, 2019. It was apparent that there was a very limited number of tweets available that would have been relevant to the thematic analysis to be able to formulate a decent comparison between any of the tweets that were posted during that time frame and was relevant to the research. An attempt was made to expand the time frames to match the first time frame that was made for Facebook, which was to change the time frame from focusing solely on December 2019 to the new time frame covering the months December 2019 to February 2020. Unfortunately, this did not produce a significant increase in tweets that would have been relevant to the study. Therefore, the pilot test for Twitter was stopped, and the first time frame, which would have been December 2019 to February 2020, was completely discarded from the Twitter segment of the data collection. Another consideration after the pilot test was completed was that, due to the low numbers of tweets, it would be best to also remove the dates when they were posted, as it would have been possible to identify the original tweets and therefore identify who made specific replies.

#### **3.2.3 *Changes made to the research design methods based on the pilot tests***

Based on the pilot test that was conducted on the *New Zealand Herald* Facebook page, there were several changes that were made to the original time frames, which had originally focused on the months December 2019, March 2020, and September 2020. Instead, the time frames were modified slightly to follow the time frames (i) December 2019 to February 2020, (ii) March 2020 to June 2020, and (iii) July 2020 to October 2020. This allowed for news articles

that are relevant to the research but were uploaded on Facebook within the three-to-four-month periods after the originally proposed start dates, to be included in the research; and it also allowed for the research to still have the three distinct time frames and allow for points of comparison. Time frame one (December 2019 to February 2020) was discarded from the data collection for Twitter, as the initial search did not produce any relevant tweets that would have been particularly useful for the purpose of the research.

The last change that was implemented prior to data collection commencing was the removal of the dates that articles and tweets were posted on their respected social media sites. This was due to this being a possible method for people who made comments, tweets or replies being identified. Therefore, the number of data sets was reduced from six to five, and the number of comments that were collected were reduced from 3,000 to 2,500 comments collected for the whole study.

### **3.3 Sampling and data collection**

For this study, a sample of 2,500 comments was collected from the social media sites Facebook and Twitter. These two social media platforms were specifically chosen based on the availability of misinformation and racism that can be readily accessed within the comments sections of both these sites. Previous studies, such as the one conducted by Hswen et al. (2021), have suggested that Twitter would be a social media site that would be suitable for this study, given how specific hashtags such as #chinesevirus, #kungflu, #asianvirus, #wuhانvirus and #covid19 were found to have been used together when people post a tweet. Therefore, the hashtags emphasise and reinforce the ideas that COVID-19 had originated in China and/or the blame was pinned on Asian communities for the spread of COVID-19 across the globe. Each sample of the comments that were made during the three time frames would also allow for a snapshot that would show what possible general themes and trends were present within the comments sections of both social media platforms. Due to the time constraints only a limited number of tweets and Facebook comments, which had a total of 2,500, were collected. Because of the increased number of articles, posts and tweets as COVID-19 became more prominent, there was an imbalance in the numbers of available posts, comments and/or tweets made in

different time frames that were relevant to the research question. An example of this imbalance is that there were 430 comments recorded in time frame one from *New Zealand Herald* articles that were posted on Facebook during December 2019 to February 2020, whereas 550 comments were recorded in time frame two from *New Zealand Herald* articles that were posted on Facebook during March 2020 to June 2020. For this study, only a portion of comments from each article was taken, with the most popular comments on the articles being recorded for the samples taken.

### **3.4 Research components**

#### **3.4.4 *The quantitative component***

For the quantitative component of the mixed method research design, the comments that were collected from Facebook and Twitter were counted as well as sorted in terms of the xenophobic words and/or phrases present in each comment. This data was recorded on an Excel spreadsheet. For this component of the research, each comment was counted, allocated an ID to remove any possibility that the people who made the comment could be identified, such as through their Facebook name, Twitter username or profile picture. The second part of this component used a nominal scale to identify whether the comment is to be counted as a negative and/or threatening comment, or as a positive comment and/or a comment defending the ethnic group being targeted online.

This was completed by giving a score from one to three where,

1. a score of one indicated the comment did not have any words or phrases that are racist and/or xenophobic or that it was defending a particular minority group,
2. a score of two indicated the comment was neutral or had contradictory statements or words in the comment, and
3. a score of three indicated that the comment contained words or phrases that are racist and/or xenophobic or that it was attacking a particular minority group.

Comments with a score of three were flagged using a bold red font, and the cell in the spreadsheet was coloured red, whereas comments with a score of one were colour-coded with

green cells. The same comments and replies were then analysed for recurring themes, and subsequent subthemes.

### **3.4.5 *The qualitative component***

For the qualitative component of the research design, a thematic analysis was conducted on the comments that were collected from Facebook and Twitter for the quantitative component. According to Hsieh and Shannon (2005), a conventional thematic analysis would be a research design that would be suitable when the existing theory or available literature on a phenomenon is severely limited. The conventional content analysis would also involve counting and contrasting of key words in the data, which would provide the underlying context behind the themes and subthemes that appeared in the study. An extreme example of comments, or in this case tweets and the attached hashtags, that could be recorded and could have an influence on both the scale and the conventional thematic analysis was recorded by Hsven et al. (2021):

“Fuck the ding dongs. Fuck the ching chongs. And most definitely, fuck the god damn chinks. #chinaliedpeopledied #coronavirus #fuckchina #chinesevirus #wuhanvirus #burnwuhan #bombchina” (p. 961)

The negatively charged comments could have an influence on both research components as negative comments would score high on the scale, therefore further increasing the size of the sample having a high score and would influence what themes would have been recorded for the purpose of the conventional thematic analysis.

Although this is an exploratory study and the number of comments, tweets and replies was recorded for the purpose of the quantitative and qualitative components of the research, there was no restriction on the themes and subthemes that emerged from the thematic analysis. The researcher allowed for the themes to surface as the research progressed.

## **3.5 Methodology**

Prior to the collection of the data from the chosen social media platforms, four spreadsheets were formatted on Excel to set up the workbook that was used to complete the thematic analysis and provide numerical data for analysis (see Appendix B). For the first two spreadsheets, one contains the raw data and the mixed methods results for the analyses conducted on Facebook,

and the second contains the raw data for the analyses conducted on Twitter. The columns were laid out with headings identifying the time frame within which the articles originated, and based on this an ID was allocated to match the time frame within which the social media platform comments originated. For example, a comment that was recorded in time frame three which originated on Facebook was given the time frame ID 3FB. Finally, themes were identified and then tidied into a column, and any further subthemes that were relevant were then placed into a final column.

### **3.5.6 Facebook**

For Facebook, the researcher chose to focus on taking comments from posts made on the *New Zealand Herald* Facebook page. These were narrowed down to match the three time frames mentioned (December 2019 to February 2020, March 2020 to June 2020, and July 2020 to October 2020). On the *New Zealand Herald* Facebook page, it was possible to filter the posted news articles to match specific dates and to match the articles to specific key words. Some of the words included in the searches were COVID-19, pandemic xenophobia, racism, anti-Asian hate, coronavirus, Chinese virus, Wuhan, China, Asians, lockdown, and other words that were related to the pandemic. For each time frame, a second search was completed to record the comments made on each of the chosen articles. The number of comments that were made on each relevant article were then noted down.

Eight articles were chosen based on the article being published within one of the specific time frames, the number of comments made on the article, and the article's relevance to the research question.

### **3.5.7 Twitter**

Like Facebook, on the social media site Twitter, there is an option to complete an advanced search of key words; this was used to narrow the search and included the words COVID-19, xenophobia, racism, anti-Asian hate, coronavirus, Chinese virus, Wuhan, China, Asians and lockdown. It is also possible to narrow down a search to include hashtags; terms that could have been employed by users included #StoptheAntiAsianHate, #wasthehate, #chinavirus and

#covid19. The search on Twitter also used hashtags found in the study conducted by Hswen et al. (2021) such as #chinaliedpeople, #coronavirus, #fuckchina, #chinesevirus #wuhavirus, #burnwuhan and #bombchina. Tweet threads that had at least 200 replies were viewed and flagged to be sorted into the spreadsheets.

### **3.5.8 Coding and tidying for both data sets**

Screenshots of approximately 200 comments per article or tweet threads for the three time frames allocated for the two social media sites were recorded (although this number was flexible as there may have been many replies to a comment that would have been relevant to the research that would have been cut off, otherwise the 200 comment limit was strictly followed). The comments were ordered by the times the comments they were published, which would have influenced which comments were recorded for the study. From here, each of the comments or tweets were allocated an ID, and all comments and tweets were also counted to ensure the correct number had been recorded for each time frame. Comments that had multiple replies were colour coded with a bold red ID and the comment itself, once copied into the column, was also coded with bold red font. Any blanks where comments were not copied in, or where further comments about the observations were not included, were simply marked with an 'x'. The comments were then scored (see section 3.4.4 for the scale used to score the comments).

Once the data was tidied, the thematic analysis was conducted. The Facebook comments and tweets were reread for any key words or phrases, which were then copied into the next column. Recurring similar themes were then colour coded into groups, subthemes were identified and placed in a separate column, and recurring hashtags were also put into a separate column. The themes, recurring tweets and the relevant subthemes were then copied onto a Word document with the relevant quotes that were previously identified using the nominal scale.

## **3.6 Summary**

This chapter has covered the rationale for the social media platforms used to collect data, the chosen method of data collection, the time frames that were used during the data collection process as well as the methodology used to analyse the data after collection. The chapter also

explained why the number of comments that were collected for the research in each time frame has an imbalance. An explanation was also provided for why a limit was put in place for the number of comments that were chosen for the purpose of this study. Because there is little to no research on this topic, it was important that a pilot test was conducted to see if this mixed methods design would produce relevant results for the research. After the initial search, changes were made to the research design, such as discarding the use of time frame one for the data collection for Twitter, and the expansion in the time frames from December 2019, March 2020, and September 2020 to December 2019 to February 2020, March 2020 to June 2020, and July 2020 to October 2020. This chapter has also described the scoring system that was used for this part of the research.

## Chapter 4: Results

### 4.1 Introduction

Because the research was completed using mixed methods, the results chapter is presented in five sections. Part one has a table listing the *New Zealand Herald* articles that were selected for each time frame. Part two provides the total number of comments that were collected, as well as a breakdown of how the total was split amongst the time frames. The third part of this chapter presents five pie graphs describing both the Facebook and Twitter comments, and provides a basic description of the comments that were recorded in each time frame. The fourth section presents the descriptive statistics of each time frame. Finally, in the fifth section, the results from the thematic analysis of these social media posts shows the recurring themes and subthemes, and provides an explanation for why each theme was chosen (see Appendix B for the tables showing this process).

### 4.2 Table showing the article names used per time frame

This table contains the eight *New Zealand Herald* articles that were identified from Facebook based on the keywords and time frames. These articles were later used to collect samples of the comments that were posted for both the quantitative and qualitative components of the research (as discussed in section 3.3.1).

**Table 1:** Time frames used to narrow down the search and the *New Zealand Herald* article titles selected to collect data from

<b>Time Frame</b>	<b><i>NZ Herald</i> article title</b>
<b>Time Frame One</b>	Racism row: Comment on Auckland café receipt leaves woman shocked
	Coronavirus: Fears grow for citizen journalist Chen Qiushi missing in Wuhan
<b>Time Frame Two</b>	“Big spike in racism’ during lockdown
	‘Do not travel’: China warns citizens not to go to Australia because of racism
	Covid 19 coronavirus: So Auckland is moving into level 3 - what does that mean for you?

<b>Time Frame Three</b>	Covid 19 coronavirus: Jacinda Ardern defends lockdown extension as businesses warn of closures, job losses
	Hipkins hits out at ‘deliberate’ Covid-19 misinformation
	Covid 19 coronavirus: South Auckland principals want to cancel NCEA exams for Auckland students this year

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### 4.3 Number of comments collected from each time frame

There were 1500 comments and replies were taken from Facebook for analysis, with Table 2 showing that the breakdown of this total was 430 comments and replies from the first time frame, 550 comments and replies from the second time frame, and 520 comments and replies from the third time frame (which was when Auckland went into an elevated alert level due to the detection of COVID-19 in Auckland). These comments and replies were spread over the eight articles that were selected from the search that was completed to identify the relevant articles for the study.

**Table 2:** Number of comments and replies recorded from the three time frames that were used to collect data obtained from Facebook

<b>Time frame number and time period</b>	<b>Number of comments and replies recorded</b>
One: December 2019 to February 2020	430
Two: March 2020 to June 2020	550
Three: July 2020 to October 2020	520

In time frame one, which corresponds with the period when the COVID-19 outbreak was just starting all over the world, it appears that there were multiple *New Zealand Herald* articles focusing more on racism towards Māori, rather than the COVID-19-related racism that was occurring towards Asians. In the second time frame, the first COVID-19 outbreak across New Zealand had occurred, prompting a nationwide lockdown. In the third time frame, which is when Auckland went into Alert level 4 due to an outbreak of COVID-19 in the city, authorities were unsure about where this outbreak had originated.

**Table 3:** Number of tweets and/or replies recorded from the two time frames that were used to collect data obtained from Twitter

<b>Time frame number and time period</b>	<b>Number of tweets and/or replies recorded</b>
Two: March 2020 to June 2020	440
Three: July 2020 to October 2020	560

Table 3 shows a breakdown of the number of tweets that were recorded for each time frame, with 440 tweets and replies recorded from time frame two. At the start of this time frame, COVID-19 had spread around the New Zealand community, and at the end of time frame two, the country was slowly coming out of the tough restrictions that had been put in place to slow the spread of the virus. Online, there was a backlash with what seemed a lot of mistrust of those in power and a lack of information into the severity of COVID-19 and symptoms people may experience if they were to contract the virus. 560 tweets and replies were recorded from time frame three, which was the time when Auckland went into a city-wide elevation in alert levels due to the spread of COVID-19 within the city. It is also important to acknowledge that from an international perspective, the New Zealand relevant event details that are related to the chosen time frames may not be relevant to the observations made from the data that was collected during those times.

#### **4.4 Comment score results**

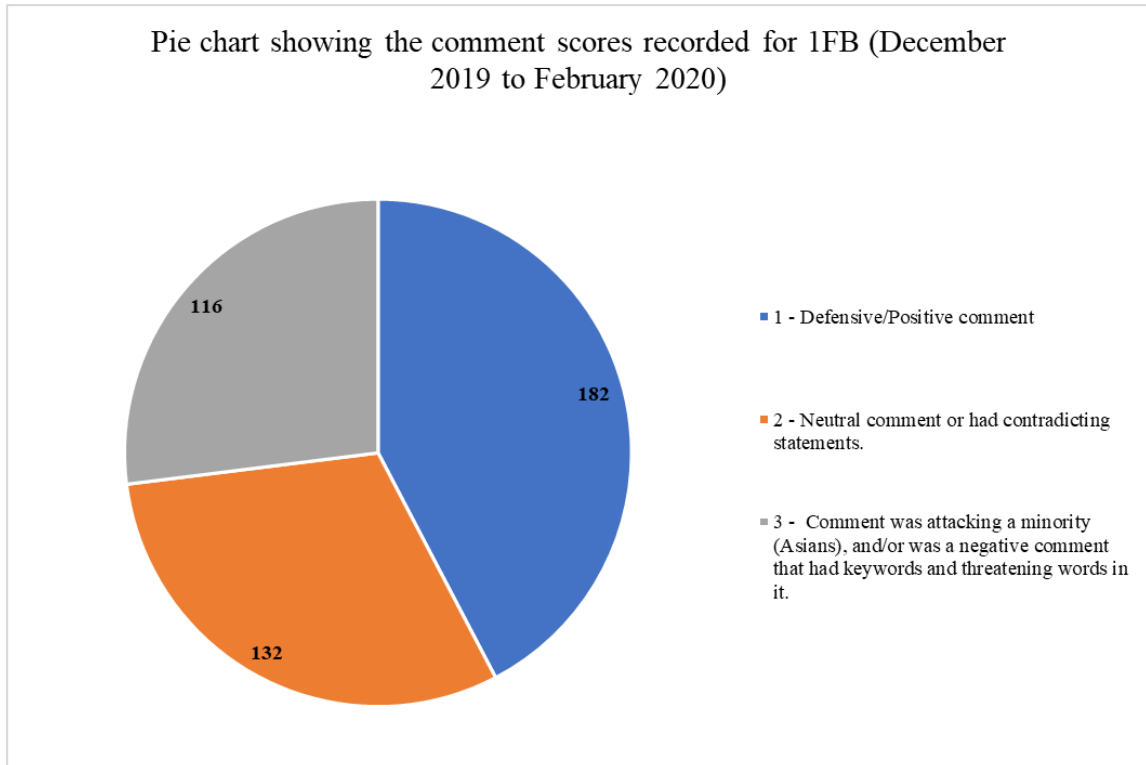
##### **4.4.1 *Pie charts for Facebook***

For this section, the pie charts serve as a visual representation of the distribution of the comment scores recorded, and which time frame the data was related to (see section 3.4.4 for a breakdown of what the scores represent).

Figure 1 is a pie chart that shows the frequency of comment scores for the first time frame (1FB) which covered the period from December 2019 to February 2020. If a comment was scored a 1, this indicated the comment was defending an ethnic group or did not use any threatening words, and this score is colour-coded blue in all five pie charts. A score of 2 indicated that the comment was either a neutral comment or had contradicting statements and

this score is colour-coded orange in the charts. A score of 3 indicated that the comment had threatening words or was a negative comment, and this score is colour-coded grey.

**Figure 1:** Pie chart showing the frequency of comment score results for the comments and replies that were collected from Facebook during time frame one



In the first time frame, which corresponds with the period when the COVID-19 outbreak was just starting, there were 182 recorded comments that scored a 1, 132 comments that scored a 2, and 116 recorded comments that scored a 3. This would suggest that based off the 430 comment sample that was taken for time frame one, 43% of the comments were positive and/or defensive comments, 30% of the comments were contradictory or were neutral, while 27% of comments that were recorded were attacking a minority, and in this case, the negative comments were attacking Asians.

**Figure 2:** Pie chart showing the frequency of comment score results for the comments and replies that were collected from Facebook during time frame two

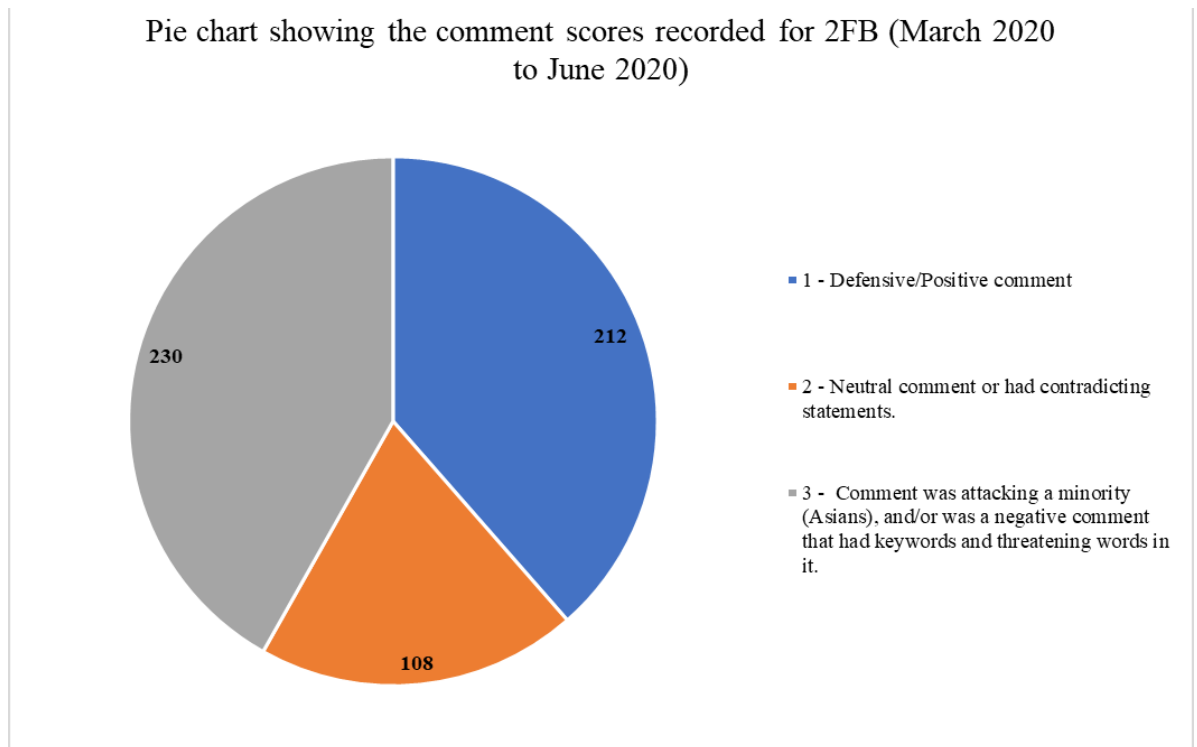
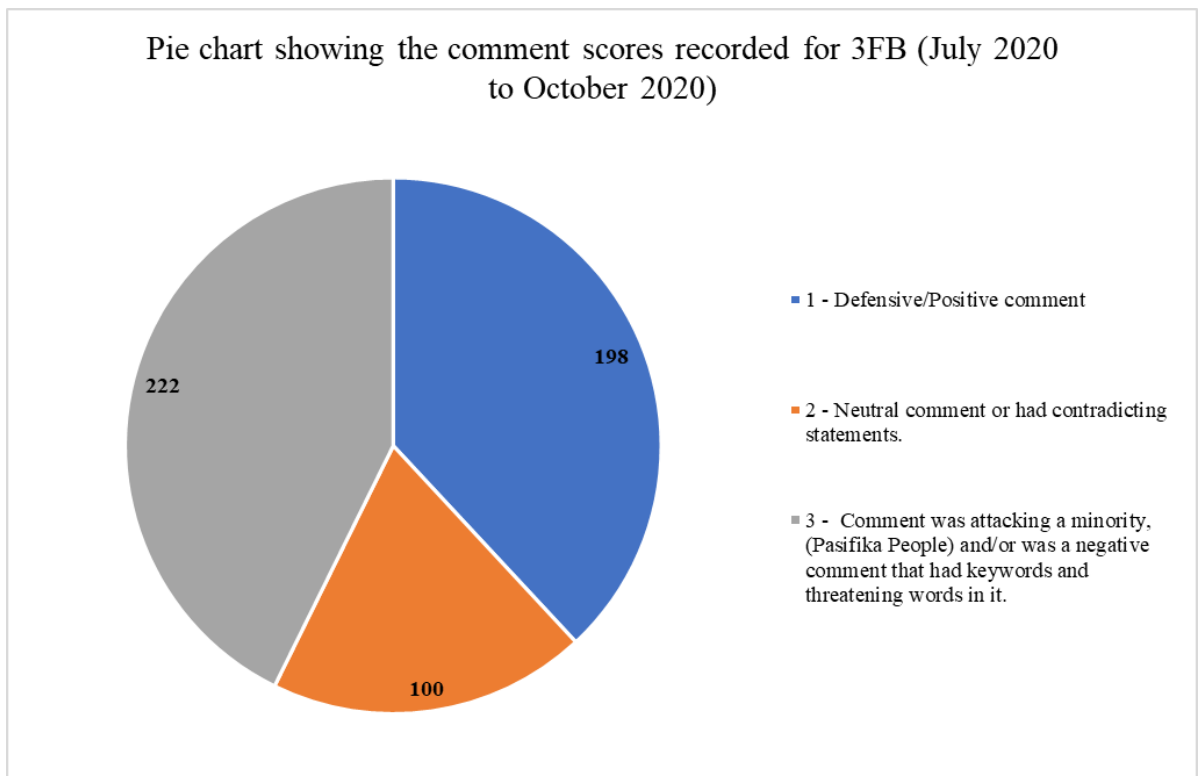


Figure 2 is a pie chart showing the comment scores that were recorded for time frame two (2FB). In total, 550 comments were recorded as a sample, with 38% of the recorded comments being scored a 1, 20% of the comments scored a 2, and 42% comments were scored a 3. Compared to time frame one, there was a 10% drop in neutral comments, and an increase in negative comments that were recorded during this particular time frame.

These results would suggest that the discourse between those with racists opinions and those who defended the position of minorities such as the Asian community were equal. During this time COVID-19 was active in the New Zealand community, and the nation was in the stages of being in lockdown or was starting to transition out of the strict lockdown rules into what was a 'new normal', where restrictions were still in place to protect the wider community while there were still COVID-19 cases throughout New Zealand.

**Figure 3:** Pie chart showing the frequency of comment score results for the comments and replies that were collected from Facebook during time frame three



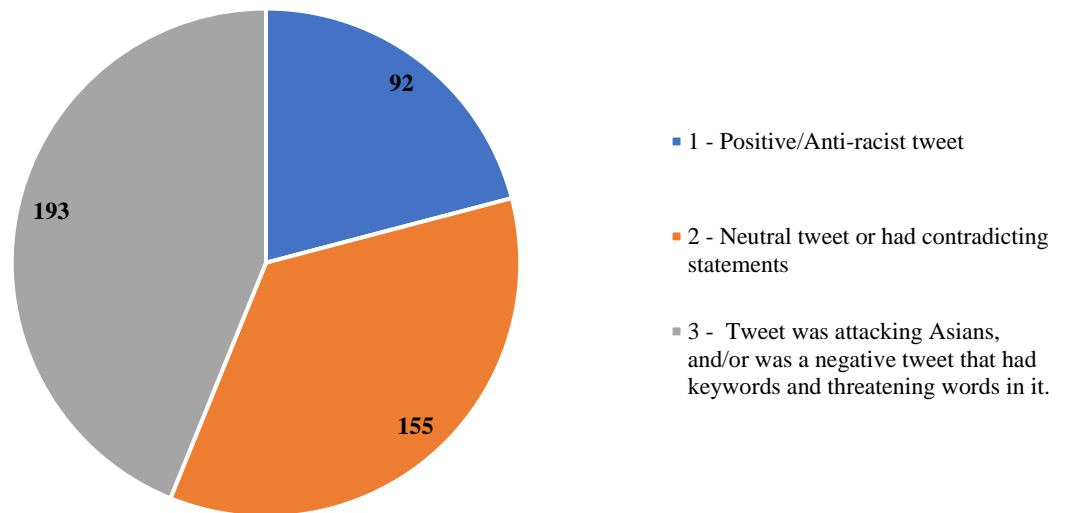
During time frame three (3FB), Auckland went into a city-wide lockdown due to an outbreak of COVID-19 in the wider Auckland community, which was thought to have originated in South Auckland. Figure 3 shows a there was an increase in negative comments, but the minority that was being blamed and attacked on social media were more often Pasifika people, rather than the Asian-New Zealander community. In total, 520 comments were recorded as a sample for this time frame, with 38% of comments scoring a 1, 19% of comments scored a 2, and 43% of the recorded comments scored a 3.

#### 4.4.2 Pie charts for Twitter

Figure 4 is a pie chart that shows the frequency of the tweet score results obtained from the 440 tweets and subsequent replies that were collected from Twitter during the second time frame.

**Figure 4:** Pie chart showing the frequency of tweet score results for the tweets and replies that were collected from Twitter during time frame two

Pie chart showing the comment scores recorded for 2T (March 2020 to June 2020)



From this 440 tweet sample for this time frame, 20% of the recorded tweets and/or replies scored a 1, 36% of the recorded tweets scored a 2, and 44% of the tweets recorded scored a 3. Out of the 440 tweets and their subsequent replies that were recorded, 348 tweets and/or replies scored a two or higher, which would also suggest there is a lot of neutral, contradictory and/or negative comments that were made during this time frame attacking Asians.

**Figure 5:** Pie chart showing the frequency of tweet score results for the tweets and replies that were collected from Twitter during time frame three

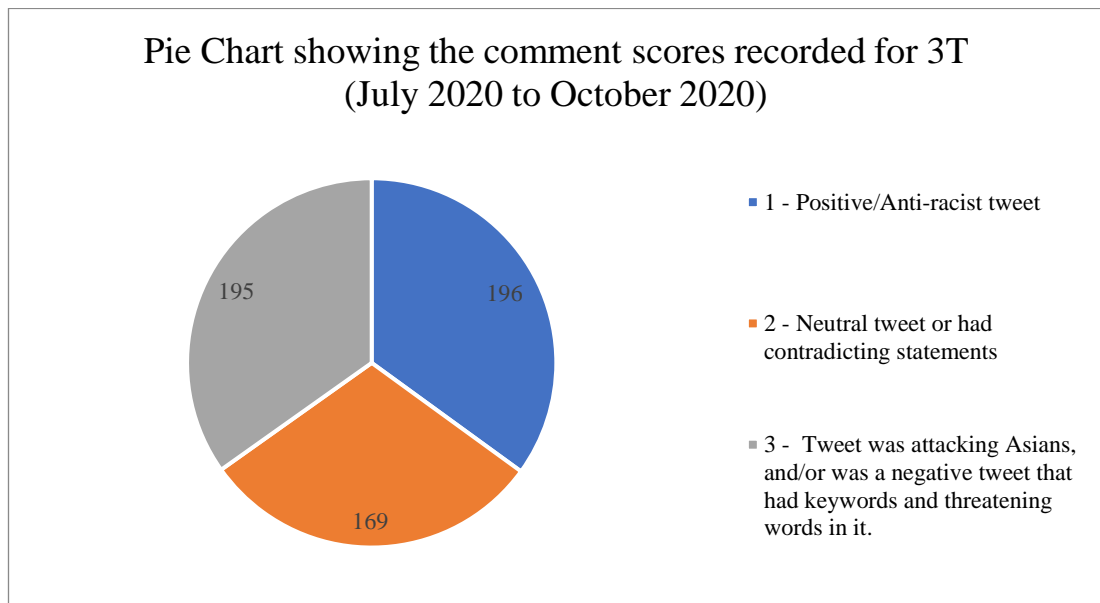


Figure 5 displays the frequency of the tweet score results obtained from the 560 tweets and subsequent replies that were collected from Twitter during the third time frame. This corresponds to the time when Auckland had experienced its first city-wide lockdown and, on a more global scale, COVID-19 was more widely spread across the globe. From the 560 tweets that were recorded as a snapshot, 35% of the recorded tweets scored a 1, 30% of the recorded tweets scored a 2, and 35% of the recorded tweets scored a 3. Out of all five pie charts, this was the only pie chart that seems to show a fairly even distribution amongst the three comment score categories.

## 4.5 Descriptive statistics

### 4.5.1 Facebook

Table 4 shows the descriptive statistics for the three time frames that were used for collecting data on Facebook.

**Table 4:** Mean results for the three time frames that were used to collect data obtained from Facebook

<b>Time frame</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>
One: December 2019 to February 2020	430	1.98
Two: March 2020 to June 2020	550	2.03
Three: July 2020 to October 2020	520	2.05

*Note.* Values for the mean and the standard deviation have been rounded to the nearest two decimal places.

The mean score for comments had a slight increase between the three time frames, with time frame one having a mean of 1.98, time frame two having a mean of 2.03, and time frame three having a mean of 2.05. This would suggest that, as time progressed, the comments that were recorded were either more contradictory, neutral, or negative and more racist; comments in the later time frames were scoring higher in the 3-point scale, which would be indicating there was an increase in racist comments over time.

### 4.5.2 Twitter

Table 5 shows the descriptive statistics for the two time frames that were used to collect data from Twitter.

**Table 5:** Mean and standard deviation results for the two time frames that were used to collect data obtained from Twitter

<b>Time frame</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>
Two: March 2020 to June 2020	440	2.23
Three: July 2020 to November 2020	560	2.10

*Note.* Values for the mean and the standard deviation have been rounded to the nearest two decimal places.

Unlike Table 4, the mean score for the comments decreased between the two time frames, with time frame two having a mean of 2.23, and time frame three had an average score of 2.10. This may suggest that as time progressed, there were more comments recorded in time frame three that were defending the minority being attacked or were contradictory/neutral comments, therefore they would have scored lower in the comment score scale. The means that were recorded for both Twitter time frames also had a higher mean than all Facebook time frames.

#### **4.6 Themes and subthemes identified from the thematic analyses completed for Facebook**

##### **4.6.1 *Time frame one (December 2019 to February 2020)***

The time frame was specifically chosen to be a point of reference and comparison, especially since this was the time when COVID-19 was still relatively new as a health concern and was not an issue of great concern across the globe. Rather, this time frame served as a pre-COVID snapshot of what attitudes were like as the virus emerged, as it was not yet known to have spread within the New Zealand community in a national outbreak, and as speculation about where the virus originated was only just beginning to emerge (Bloom et al., 2021; Unite Against COVID-19, 2021).

###### **4.6.1.1 *'It came from where?'***

The central idea for this theme is based around the panic that took place when it became apparent that COVID-19 originated in Wuhan in China. There was an increase in searches asking where exactly Wuhan is in China. This increased search interest also increased the presence of misinformation in terms of how the outbreak of COVID-19 first started; searches for a possible explanation as to where COVID-19 originated as well as for more information about Wuhan, China increased (Hswen et al., 2021; Hwang & Parreñas, 2021). An example of this is the overgeneralisation of where the city is located, which further fuelled the emphasis on Wuhan as the city of origin, but the emphasis changed from just being fixated on China to blanket the whole continent of Asia. An example of the overgeneralisation included comments such as,

“So 1FB368 Wuhan? Now we know where not to go for OE... If we can figure out where tf that is” (Participant 1FB367)

“1FB367 it might be better to just cut Asia out of our OE plans entirely...” (Participant 1FB368)

“Anyone know where this ‘Woohan’ is? Wonder if it would be better to just do the world a favour and stop importing all goods from Asia” (Participant 1FB381)

Within this theme, the subtheme of ‘bat soup’ came about. This subtheme is solely centred on the stereotypes and other derogatory comments that were made on the chosen articles that focused on the initial information available about the origins of COVID-19, such as the assumption that COVID-19 came from bats that were being sold in a marketplace in Wuhan. An example of these derogatory comments included one made by participants 1FB377 1FB380, and 1FB383 who said,

“Collagen is supposed to fix shit, so surely some bat soup dumplings are going to fix the fuck up China made and boost the health?” (Participant 1FB377)

“So bat soup isn’t going to relieve any COVID-19 symptoms?! Maybe we should ask the chinks if they have any other ‘herbal’ remedies to fix the mess they made.” (Participant 1FB380)

“Why the fuck are the chinks using some perfectly healthy bats for food. Surely with how rich China is they don’t need to be making soup with bats. Or are they that desperate to destroy everyone so they’ve with their stupid bat soup” (Participant 1FB383)

The comments and the theme that appeared would suggest that racism moved from inference to being overt with the use of the word ‘chink’, which is a derogatory term used to refer to an individual of Chinese heritage. This behaviour could be linked to the othering theory, especially since there is an emphasis on Chinese people or, as the comments have emphasised, ‘chinks’, which further highlights that they are not considered to be active members of New Zealand society.

#### 4.6.1.2 *‘Not our problem yet’*

Another theme that was identified in time frame one, which links up to the theme ‘It came from where?’, is the theme ‘Not our problem yet’. As more comments were recorded in the last month within time frame one, this theme is related to the New Zealand ‘she’ll be right’ attitude,

where it is often believed that whatever issue is happening will fix itself in due time (Collins Dictionary, 2022) . This attitude was prevalent in the comments, as COVID-19 was still not an active health crisis in New Zealand. Therefore, the slightly optimistic view that the problem would resolve was still prevalent, whilst further emphasising information about supposed symptoms of the virus. Comments in the articles had people tagging their friends, whilst highlighting the attitude that people were optimistic COVID-19 would not cause any issues such as the comment made by participant 1FB414, who tagged their friend 1FB415, and ending with participant 1FB417 replying to participants 1FB414 and 1FB415 due to another participant attempting to throw a racist view into a comment thread they were not directly tagged in.

“1FB415, 1FB417! They said the ronas like the flu! Surely we just keep the vitamin c and staying hydrated habits up so we’ll be okay if it does hit us?” (Participant 1FB414)

“1FB414, maybe covid isn’t going to hit us in the first place cause New Zealand is far from everywhere so I don’t think there’s anything to worry about?” (Participant 1FB415)

“1FB414, 1FB415, as long as the chinks are being allowed into our country, the China Flu will spread. Just like the diseased people who are bringing it into what was a beautiful country” (Participant 1FB416)

“1FB416 we’re talking about Rona entering New Zealand. Not your racist rubbish opinions that have nothing to do with what we’re talking about. So fuck right off” (Participant 1FB417)

It was interesting to note that the racist comment above links more to views of immigration, and the idea of keeping out people who participant 1FB416 considered to be less than human, that it was best to keep them out of ‘pure and righteous New Zealand’. It was also interesting to see that this view was not challenged in that comment exchange, rather it seemed to have been ignored or overlooked.

#### *4.6.1.3 ‘I have every right to say what I want’*

The last theme that transpired from the comment sample that was collected from time frame one was ‘I have every right to say what I want’. The issue this theme highlights concerns where society should be drawing the line as to what is considered freedom of speech, and what is not. When observing the comments that were recorded for the content analysis, most of the

comments that were recorded not only scored a two in the comment scale, but these comments were defended as the right to freedom of speech:

“Lol I have every right to write whatever gets me off and say what I want. He probably had it coming for snitching” (Participant 1FB201)

“Isn't it my right to be able to say whatever I want? That's the point of 'basic human rights', or is tht something the circus government wants to control so everyone will disappear like the whistle-blower?” (Participant 1FB225)

“Clearly the dumb fool didnt think to go to Western media first. He'd have probably have the right to say whatever he wanted then” (Participant 1FB231)

The comments above (and other similar comments) related to the topic of the freedom of speech tended to have a more political tone. These same participants who made such comments cited the freedom of speech as a means of defence if they were called out for being racist or for negatively critiquing the New Zealand Government for their response to the pandemic. Participant 1FB231 also made the interesting claim that because the Western world had more freedom of speech rights, this made Western media far superior.

#### **4.6.2 Time frame two (March 2020 to May 2020)**

##### *4.6.2.1 'Resentment towards Asians'*

The first theme that was identified in the second time frame was 'Resentment towards Asians'. As the theme name implies, this theme became more apparent as there was more evidence that supported the speculation that the virus originated in Wuhan, China. In one of the articles that was selected for this time frame, there was a focus and a discussion about the rise of such hate fuelled anti-Asian hate. This focused on the idea that immigrants, especially those who came from a country in Asia, were not welcome in New Zealand. Examples of this resentment included comments such as,

“First they steal our jobs, then our properties. And now they're stealing our right to peace and quiet without any health issues? What more do these Asian fuckers want?” (Participant 2FB419)

“Maybe its better all the chinks and their other Asian trash friends get on their little expensive jets and go back to where they came from. Them being here brought covid and all this other bullshit we dont need.” (Participant 2FB420)

Within this debate, the subtheme of ‘Send them back’ also appeared in the comments, which had some Facebook users suggesting that because they believed all Asians were infected with COVID-19, it would be better to send all people residing in New Zealand of Asian origin back to their ‘home countries’. Examples of comments that emphasised this included this exchange between two Facebook users (Comment IDs 2FB422, 2FB423, 2FB424 and 2FB425),

“If you don’t like it here you can go back to your own country nobody asked you to come here. Why do you come here and expect us to respect your lifestyle above our own.” (Participant 2FB422)

“2FB422, I see you’re an Aussie. Why don’t you go back to your joke of a country? Some Asians in this country have lived here all their lives so where do you want them to go?” (Participant 2FB423)

“So fucking what if I’m an Aussie. Clearly the chinks dont belong here and neither do you” (Participant 2FB424)

“People like you shouldn’t have a Facebook account cause you clearly don’t have anything in that skull of yours, and shows you don’t belong here, and in your little convict country. Not me or Asians having to go ‘home’ ” (Participant 2FB425).

In the sample above, it was interesting to see how the anti-Asian racism was being called out and combatted by a person who seemed to have racist opinions about Australians. The sample also brings the question whether it was intentional for participant 2FB423 to have used racism to combat racism, or if this was done without any other intention.

#### 4.6.2.2 *‘I have every right to say what I want’*

This theme of ‘I have every right to say what I want’ also appeared within the second time frame. However, the concepts also expanded to include the idea that people who were commenting on articles regarding a spike in racism and xenophobia due to the origin of COVID-19 becoming common knowledge were claiming that making such comments was part of their right to a freedom of speech. Therefore, the argument that the comment itself was racist was invalid. This theme also seems to further affirm the theory of microaggressions, where all three forms of microaggressions, specifically microassaults, were being used to make people who are attempting to hold a person accountable feel as if their argument was invalidated (Sue, 2013, 2015; Sue et al., 2007).

“I’m ‘European’ and I’ve never been to Europe. Sure, we may have played a part in the colonialism problem, but Asians should be owning up for spreading the virus everywhere. Call me someone whose part of the cancel culture or whatever but that’s my two cents.” (Participant 2FB2).

“Us Pakeha have nothing to do with this bullshit. We just helped to develop New Zealand into a better place. Why don’t we just lock up all the Asians and have them pay for this virus for entering our beautiful country?” (Participant 2FB156).

“Clearly the Asians have some apologising to do for creating and spreading this annoying virus. Seriously grateful for being Pakeha, cause there is no way we Europeans could have done something this stupid” (Participant 2FB352).

These comments ally the participants with a link to Europe that does not exist but affirms European supremacy by playing down the impact of colonisation while accusing Asian peoples of spreading COVID-19 everywhere. There is no distinction made between Asian countries, and yet they are all blamed. Then to validate their opinion they imply that any person with an opposing view as victimising them by cancelling them.

#### **4.6.3 Time frame three (July 2020 to October 2020)**

##### *4.6.3.1 ‘China should be held accountable’*

The first theme that was identified from within the final time frame is ‘China should be held accountable’. This subtheme still is centred around how people in power should feel responsible for the spread of COVID-19; however, this subtheme is more focused on how China may also have a role in being responsible. This was based on news articles that discussed how China had downplayed the severity of COVID-19. Specifically, China did this by claiming that the virus was not something that humans could catch, and how this reassurance was then broadcasted to the rest of the world. Quotes that are relevant to the subtheme in terms of the central idea included comments such as,

“Forget the WHO. The real questions I wanna ask is why did China not disclose how horrible COVID-19 is in the first place and why do they think they can sweep it under the rug and blame America when the damn thing came from one of their cities.” (Participant 3FB58)

“why tf isn’t China saying anything to own up for their fuckery? They clearly had something to do with it so they should say something” (Participant 3FB67)

While the *New Zealand Herald* Facebook page was chosen to minimise the number of people from other countries commenting on the articles, it was apparent that there were still Americans commenting on the posts made by the *New Zealand Herald*. The reason for this was not clear, but it was apparent these views, which were seen in America, were translated in some of the comments recorded in the research.

#### 4.6.3.2 'Any solution to COVID-19 should not come from China'

The second theme that arose from the content analysis is the lack of trust of products coming from China, especially at this point where there is a lot of reports, both from the media and official organisations, noting that it was highly likely that COVID-19 had originated in China. This made some consumers more wary of purchasing and using products that originated in China. This wariness became more strongly emphasised when there were some suggestions the possible antidote, or vaccine, could be produced in China. This would have further heightened fears that Western pharmaceutical companies were not in control of finding a solution, exacerbating the sense of unease. An example of this panic, around the possibility the vaccine could be manufactured in China, was seen in part of a small discussion within the comments below,

“If the solution is coming from China, I don’t want it. For all I fking know they could be injecting nanobots or 5G emitting microchips into my body. I’m boycotting that until the US, hell even the UK or Aussie have a solution. I’m also getting rid of all the stuff that’s made in that shithole of a country too” (Participant FB103)

“Well too bad 3FB103, if you’re going to be ‘boycotting’ all the things made in China I hope you’re prepared to chuck out most if not all your furniture, clothes, electronics and maybe even your condoms. Which would be a shame cause we don’t need more of you idiots populating the earth.” (Participant 3FB115)

“So you’re meaning to tell me that the country where the Coronavirus came from is also where a vaccine or medication will come from...? Yeah I’ll take my chances with dying instead. Not worth gambling my life for a drug that’s from a country I cant trust.” (Participant 3FB234)

With the mention of nanobots and 5G, the comments would suggest the presence and the knowledge of the conspiracy theories that were floating around during the pandemic (and are still being circulated online at present). In the news, these conspiracy theories are usually used as a means to attack the home government of the people posting, but this online attack had

shifted to a foreign government, such as the Chinese Government, to justify being racist with their comments.

#### 4.6.3.3 *'Pasifika people are being blamed'*

The last theme that arose from the content analysis was the fact that it was not the Asian community that was being attacked for the COVID-19 outbreak that occurred in the third time frame. Rather it was the Pasifika community that received the blame, especially with news reports claiming that there were people that had contracted COVID-19 who identified as Pasifika. These reports led to a shift in the scapegoating of Asians onto Pasifika people instead, in comments such as,

“Of course we’re getting blamed for some sort of inconvenience within Auckland. If it’s not us, it’s our Māori friends who get told they’ve done something horrible. What are them people coming back from Europe getting for probably bring the dumb virus with em? Fuck all!” (Participant 3FB494)

“First the Asians bring COVID-19 into the community, and now the coconuts wanna steal the show? They have big families so them spreading the rona round doesn’t bloody surprise me.” (Participant 3FB497)

“Haven’t the coconuts learned not to bunch together? Them being so bunched together definitely had something to do with covid spreading so easily amongst them and spreadin it elsewhere (other than South Auckland) in Auckland” (Participant 3FB499)

The above quotes further emphasised that the blame for COVID-19 spreading across places like Auckland was no longer being pinned only on people of Asian descent, but the blame was now also pinned on Pasifika people, especially since it was revealed that a lot of the locations of interest were linked back to the Pasifika community (please refer to section 3.5.8 for an explanation of the coding process). The subsequent subtheme that arose from this theme was ‘South Auckland again?’ While both the main theme and the subtheme are focused on the fact that using Asians as a scapegoat for the COVID-19 had shifted to blaming Pasifika people, the subtheme is more fixated on the fact that South Auckland was used as a stereotypical geographic area to ‘pinpoint’ where and how COVID-19 spread within the Auckland community. Examples of how this geographic area was used to comment on their frustration about this was provided by several users who made comments such as,

“Of fucking course... Pasifika people and South Auckland. Were we Aucklanders expecting any better?” (Participant 3FB504)

“Why doesn’t it surprise me the outbreak came from South Auckland. With all the gang shit and the amount of islanders bunching up and ignoring social distancing I’m surprised they haven’t talked about more islanders dying with covid over there” (Participant 3FB507)

“Always South Auckland that gets the bad fuking press. If the airport was in West, East or on the shore I bet the response would be 100% different because all the Pakeha lives that way.” (Participant 3FB510)

The above comments that mention larger family sizes, a greater value on community, church and gang involvement compared to Pākehā, used those stereotypes of Pasifika culture to explain why Pasifika people are “bunched together”, and may exacerbate the racist and stereotypical views people have of Pasifika people and of South Auckland suburbs.

#### **4.7 Themes and subthemes identified from the thematic analyses completed for Twitter**

##### **4.7.1 *Time frame two***

###### *4.7.1.1 ‘Extermination of the Chinese’*

This theme is rather self-explanatory, given there has been a lot of tweets that have been posted within this time frame related to exterminating all Chinese, which then expanded into exterminating all Asians, for the benefit of removing COVID-19. It should also be remembered that in the first month of this time frame (March 2020), former United States President Donald Trump publicly called COVID-19 the ‘China Virus’, which added to the COVID-19 misinformation that was already circulating. It was observed that explicit hashtags such as #fuckchina, #bombwuhan, #ChinaVirus and other hashtags with a similar tone were often used to further highlight this theme. Tweets that emphasised this blunt hatred of the Chinese included:

“Fuck the ching chongs. The god damn chinks should fucking rot in hell. #chinaliedpeopledied #fuckasia #fuckchina #chinesevirus #wuhanvirus #burninhellchina #bombchina” (User 2T2).

“Something tells me a \*little\* genocide of the chinks and the rest of the Asians would do the world some good. #bombchina #fuckchina #chinesevirus #wuhanvirus #chinaliedpeopledied” (User 2T6)

“Getting rid of the #asianvirus as a whole would do all us a fucking favour. #bombchina #chinaliedpeopledied #bombasia #chinesevirus” (User 2T8)

“Maybe getting Asia permanently off the globe will stop the chink virus from evolving? Maybe its better to #bombchina! #chinaliedpeopledied #bombasia #chinesevirus” (User 3T38)

Unlike Facebook, Twitter is known for tweets being blunter, which is reflected in the tweets that were recorded. Twitter also has fewer filters limiting who could post and reply, therefore each of these tweets would have had views and replies from all over the world from users who share the same views about Asians, specifically Chinese. This theme emphasises the extreme expressions of racism posted on Twitter during the time when the pandemic was affecting many countries due to the high numbers of COVID cases.

#### 4.7.1.2 *‘WHO and China are both to blame’*

Like the third theme that was identified in the third time frame on Facebook, this mistrust and blaming of the WHO for downplaying COVID-19 is a view that was translated to Twitter, with more explicit wordings being used by people expressing their disappointment for a lack of transparency from an organisation people thought they could trust. At this point in time, it had transpired that the WHO has reassured both people in power and the public that COVID-19 was not an issue that should give them any cause for concern. When this virus spread, the WHO officials who had made these reassurances were scrutinised, bringing forward accusations that they were incompetent in not understanding how infectious COVID-19 was. The organisation was also accused of being vague in providing any overview of the severity of symptoms. People also questioned whether the WHO provided world leaders with the proper warnings to be able to prepare for this outbreak. Hashtags that appeared to have been related to this theme included #ChinaLiedPeopleDied and #WHOLied. Examples of these tweets include:

“The #WorldHealthOrganisation is supposed to be working for the best interests of the WORLD. Clearly they aren’t putting the health of the world first and China doesn’t give a shit either #ChinaLiedPeopleDied #chinavirus #COVID19” (User 2T91)

“#China assured the #WorldHealthOrganisation that #COVID19 could not be transmitted human-to-human. The WHO transmitted the Chinese assurance to the world #ChinaLiedPeopleDied.” (User 2T180)

“Asia central assured EVREYONE- including the WHO that #COVID19 could not be spread in our communities. The WHO reiterated this to us and now look. People are dying from all the lies #ChinaLiedPeopleDied #WHO #fuckChina.” (User 2T221)

“Seems we cant trust anyone anymore. The #WHO told us that the chingchong virus wouldn't hurt anyone. And surprise. China told them that that stupid virus wasn't killing anyone #fuckchina #WHOaretheidiots” (User 2T311)

The tweets recorded further emphasised the racism against Chinese people, as well as the political dislike of globalisation, and any other form of international rules or accountability, as shown in the dislike of the WHO. These comments became cruder and further emphasised the blaming of international rules and organisations due to the political discourse related to the topic of countries having to go into national isolation to stop the spread of the virus.

#### 4.7.1.3 *'Just desserts'*

The third theme that was identified in the content analysis had the central concept that Asians, with an emphasis on Chinese individuals, received their 'just desserts' by being attacked and abused. There was a belief among some Twitter users that all Asians played a part in the spread of COVID-19, therefore it was morally correct for people to be acting out of spite to create a sense of shame and a feeling of being outcasts within online communities. Hashtags that appeared to have been linked to these posts also seemed to further emphasise the idea that COVID-19 was China's fault, therefore it was 'about right' that China was suffering with COVID-19-related issues.

“The chinks had this karma waiting for them. Their government hasn't been telling the world the truth, so theyre getting what they deserve- death! #chinksgotwhatscoming #burnchina #ChinaLiedPeopleDied” (User 2T192)

“Are we really surprised. The #chinese and all of Asia are getting the blame. As they SHOULD. They lied, they pay the consequences #chinadesrvedthis #asiansdeservethis #justwhattheydeserve #ChinaLiedPeopleDied” (User 2T256)

“What did the #chingchongs expect? Flowers and a thank you card for spreading the #ChinaVirus to the rest of the world? They're finally fucking getting what they deserve. The extermination and the end to them #fuckchina #chinksgotwhatscoming” (User 2T440)

“The chinks had this shit coming for them. Their secrecy and shitty quality products were going to get back to them somehow. #chinksgotwhatscoming #ChinaLiedPeopleDied” (User 2T458)

Again, the topic of racial genocide as an extreme expression of racism was shown in this time frame. This theme also highlights the extreme views some people have against minority groups, which can be argued to have been similar to those held by the Nazis during the Second World War, with the target being people of Asian descent.

#### **4.7.2 *Time frame three***

##### *4.7.2.1 “We stand in solidarity”*

This theme was one that was very pronounced in time frame three. It is a theme focused on the online response to the anti-Asian hate being portrayed and reshared on Twitter, which was characterised by hashtags such as #WashTheHate, #StopTheHate, #AAPI and other similarly worded hashtags. These messages also served as responses to people who may have been targeting specific users identified to be individuals of Asian descent. A particular example of the use of this theme to further highlight that people did not agree with the extremities of the tweets that were being targeted at them was by 3T12, with a reply from 3T21 who also tagged Stop AAPI Hate, an American non-profit organisation focused on advocating an end to the AAPI hate occurring in the United States:

“My grandparents came here [to America] to give my mum and their future grandchildren the chance to have a better life. I can’t change the colour of my skin or my heritage, but I know for one thing. I didn’t cause #COVID. My ethnic group didn’t cause COVID. Minority groups didn’t cause COVID. This bullshit needs to stop #StopTheHate #WashTheHate” (User 3T12)

“I see you @3T12 @StopAAPIHate. It’s shocking to see people actually believe that crap that #minoritygroups had something to do with the spread of #COVID. Maybe these rednecked idiots should look in the mirror and see the REAL problem. Being an Asian-American or American Pacific-Islander doesn’t mean we are the problem to be fixed #AAPI #StopTheHate #WashTheHate” (User 3T21)

##### *4.7.2.2 ‘A homemade remedy will cure COVID-19’*

The second theme came about due to the number of homemade remedies that surfaced whilst completing the content analysis for Twitter. This is the theme of ‘a homemade remedy will cure COVID-19’. This theme highlights the issue of misinformation that was readily available for people to access, as well as further attesting to the suggestion that social media is one of the tools available to canvass the social setting. Hashtags that made an appearance in this theme

included #batsoup and other derogatory hashtags essentially mocking Asians and reiterating the supposed origin of COVID-19 coming from bats. Example quotes that helped to formulate this theme came from several users who said,

“Just putting it out there that tin foil hats, bat soup and burning oranges are some of the best ways to fix the shit the rona side effects have. Maybe the #chinks were onto something #curecovid #chingchongremedy” (User 2T224)

“Surely sticking a dive mask on when heading out, then inhaling lavender oil vapour when your losing yor sense of smell will fix the supposed symptom of losing your sense of smell when you catch the stupid thing” (User 2T231)

“Ofc the China virus has us out here covering our faces with plastic cups, inhaling rosemary oil and looking up recipes for bat soup to keep the stupid flu away #chinaflu #fuckchina #asianflu” (User 2T233)

The comments above are just some of the examples that show how misinformation has fuelled COVID-19-related conspiracy theories. These COVID-19-related conspiracy theories mock Chinese culture and cuisine by posting up such tweets and adding in a throwaway comment about bat soup, while also further emphasising the word ‘chink’ in their posts.

#### **4.8 Summary**

This chapter has presented the results from the study by breaking down the comments that were recorded from each time frame by their comment scores and showing what the average comment score for each time frame was. The results therefore show that, for the comments that were collected from Facebook, and compared to the first time frame, there was an increase in the number of contradictory and negative comments in the second time frame when COVID-19 was first detected in New Zealand, and during time frame three when Auckland went into a region-wide lockdown.

The results from Twitter attest to the common knowledge that Twitter posts are cruder, but also show the comments highlighted a mistrust in the WHO, governing bodies such as the New Zealand Government and further highlighted the call to exterminate Chinese and Asians as the pandemic worsened.

This chapter also provided the themes and subthemes that surfaced during the thematic analysis that was conducted, as well as providing an explanation and supporting quotes for each theme and subtheme (the tables that were used to initially identify the themes and subthemes can be found in Appendix B). Although the Facebook comments and the tweets were not equal in terms of sample sizes, the results still showed that, as significant COVID-related events took place, there was a difference in how people responded to the lockdowns and alert level changes online as well as the switch from using Asians as the scapegoat to blame for the outbreak of COVID-19 to Pasifika focused racism during the increase in alert levels in Auckland during the third time frame.

# Chapter 5: Discussion

## 5.1 Introduction

This chapter aims to discuss and draw conclusions from the results provided in the previous chapter. The next section of this chapter compares the pie charts (see section 4.4), while also linking them to the time frames they match up with, the COVID-19-related events that were taking place at the time, and the general patterns that were observed within the time frames. The third and fourth sections discuss the similarities and differences that were observed related to the racism that was posted online in the research time frames. The fifth section looks at how the themes and subthemes are relevant to the COVID-19-related events, and how they can be linked back to the theories that were discussed in the literature review.

## 5.2 Observations from the pie charts

Time frame one, which was from December 2019 to February 2020, was the three-month period in which COVID-19 was relatively new to New Zealand, and across the globe. Facebook was the only social media platform that had data recorded for this time frame, due to the earlier decision to not record any tweets and subsequent replies from Twitter as there were not many tweets related to the research question that were appearing during the research process (see section 3.2.3). Although the Facebook data from time frame one could not be compared to any tweets and replies from Twitter, it was interesting to see that the largest group of comments that were recorded for the sample scored a 1, which suggested a higher number of anti-racist and/or defensive comments were recorded, compared to the number of neutral and racist comments recorded, for time frame one (please refer to section 4.4.1).

Time frame two was the period in which New Zealand (and other nations around the world) were placed into either nationwide lockdowns or had strict rules in place to slow the spread of COVID-19 within communities, and therefore it was easier to find comments/tweets relevant to the research that could be compared. For the sample that was taken for 2FB (see section 4.4, Figure 2), there was an increase in the number of anti-racist/positive comments recorded. However, when comparing the negative comments recorded between 1FB and 2FB, there was a

decrease in the proportion between these time frames, due to the different number of as there was 43% of the comments recorded in 1FB that were recorded as negative, and 38% of the comments recorded in 2FB were recorded as negative (please refer to section 4.2, table 2 for the number of comments and replies recorded for each time frame). There was also an increase in the proportion of negative/racist comments being made during time frame two, which would suggest that there were more comments attacking Asians or that were very negative with the wording of the comments. Again, there was an increase in the number of comments recorded, but a decrease in the proportion of neutral comments in the sample, with 30% of the comments for 1FB recorded as neutral, and 20% of comments for 2FB were recorded as neutral. This would suggest that fewer people were sitting on the fence, which creates more division in attitudes.

For Twitter (see section 4.4, Figure 4), it was apparent that there were more negative and/or racist comments being made on this platform, and fewer non-racist tweets being posted at that time. This sample illustrates Twitter's feature of being able to share thoughts freely and offering people a better opportunity to form a discussion online about their racist and negative thoughts with like-minded people (Fuchs, 2014). Because a large proportion of the tweets that were taken as a sample for this time frame had scored so highly, this would suggest that a lot of the recorded tweets were either racist, negative, contradictory and/or were neutral tweets. Across the two platforms, both time frame two and time frame three had an increase in the recorded negative comments or tweets being made, and also in what seemed to be the practice of scapegoating. This is because of the news reports that were being released mentioned that COVID-19 had originated in China, which led to an increase in the blaming of Chinese and Asians as a whole for the spread of the virus, and the deaths of the people who contracted COVID-19.

During time frame three, Auckland was placed into a city-wide lockdown due to an outbreak of COVID-19 that appeared to have originated in South Auckland, where the city's international and domestic airports are located, as well as where some of the country's largest Managed Isolation and Quarantine (MIQ) facilities were located (Ministry of Business, Innovation and

Employment, n.d.). On Facebook, it was apparent that the blame for the spread of COVID-19 was no longer concentrated on Asians, but shifted to Pasifika people and people who reside in South Auckland. This was due to news reports that the two possible ‘patient zeroes’ for this community outbreak were both Pasifika and resided in South Auckland. Because there was a large portion of the tweets and replies that scored highly, this suggests that the racist and xenophobic tweets were still present online in the sample that was taken for time frame three. A possible explanation for an increase in the positive/anti-racist tweets and replies is the establishment of online organisations that aimed to spread awareness and openly campaign online against ‘Anti-Asian Hate’, which was a widespread response to the physical and online abuse Asians have faced on Twitter (Stop AAPI Hate, 2021). The large proportion of high-scoring tweets therefore would suggest that there was still a considerable number of the crude, violent and/or racist tweets being shared on Twitter compared to Facebook, with both social media sites further illustrating the behaviour of many people using minority groups as a scapegoat for the issue of the spread of COVID-19.

### **5.3 Similarities identified between the two social media platforms**

Although there were differences between the two social media platforms in terms of the themes and subthemes that surfaced, it was also apparent that there were some similarities. The first similarity that can be seen across both social media platforms is the theme of mistrust of governing bodies, both local and international. This raises the issue that users of social media sites are likely to turn to their social media accounts as a means to obtain information about COVID-19 and other current events. This emphasis further accentuates the view, which indicates that cultivation theory is relevant in terms of context for both social media platforms, as people turned to social media to socialise and to be able to find out more information about the virus and what was happening around world while borders were closed (Gerber et al., 1986; Park et al., 2022). This mistrust was first highlighted when there were reports released that China had reassured the WHO that COVID-19 was a virus that was not transmissible to humans. As the virus spread, the mistrust became more localised, as the responses and actions made by local governments varied, which influenced how fast the virus was able to spread in

the community. When some governments failed to put sufficiently tough rules in place to stop the spread, people blamed those in power for not doing enough and allowing such tragedies to occur.

The second similarity that was noted was the debate about freedom of speech and where society as a whole should draw a line in terms of the balance between where people have the right to speak freely and where they do not. On one side, their views were that no matter how bigoted or offensive their comment, tweet, or reply was, people had the right to freely speak, which is considered to be a fundamental right. In the New Zealand context, this would be under the New Zealand Bill of Rights 1990, where everyone has the right to freedom of expression, where people can seek, receive, and pass on information and/or opinions of any kind. On the other side of the coin is the question of whether a line should be drawn in terms of opinions that are causing more harm than good and/or are creating an extremely uncomfortable situation for the people who become the target of the opinions being shared. Another aspect to consider with this issue is the fact that there is a fine balance between what can be free speech and where the consequences of free speech outweigh this fundamental human right (Royal Commission of Inquiry into the Attack on Christchurch Mosques on 15 March 2019, 2020).

The third noticeable similarity is that a lot of the comments either tagged other people or were from people simply replying to those who had tagged them. For social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter, algorithms would play a large role as to how readily available these posts and tweets would have been for users looking for COVID-19 related information. These algorithms are usually used for marketing purposes and have an influence on what users may see on their newsfeeds (Gabore & Xiujun, 2018; Hermida et al., 2012; Maniou & Papa, 2023; Murrell, 2018). Other factors that influence what users see on their feed are informed by past posting behaviours such as, the interactions on the posts. For example, the popularity of posts being shared. During the COVID-19 pandemic, there was an increased need for the public to know the latest news related to COVID-19 such as deaths, case numbers and COVID-related restrictions, while also sharing this information and thoughts on this emerging news through comments on the news being posted (Gabarron et al., 2021; Hswen et al., 2021). This

unconsciously spread whatever the article or original tweet was about to other people, which would in turn bring up other related content on their newsfeeds. This became a vicious cycle, especially if the comment or surrounding content was related to some form of misinformation or if other people in their networks were genuinely looking for information.

#### **5.4 Differences between the two social media platforms**

There were a few differences that were noticed when comparing the comments that were collected as well as the themes and subthemes that surfaced during the content analysis. The first and most obvious difference is that because the focus of the research on Facebook was on *New Zealand Herald* articles, the comments and replies that followed were more likely to have been more in line with a New Zealand context, as well as the critique of the New Zealand Government's response to the COVID-19 outbreak and the actions of the Prime Minister. Twitter and the subsequent tweets that were recorded did not have the same New Zealand focus, rather the focus was more internationally focused. The second difference that was also considered was the format in which the comments and replies appeared, as these were selected based on the article headlines that were narrowed down with the search terms that were identified on Facebook, and the keywords that matched tweets that were posted on Twitter.

Compared to Facebook, Twitter allowed users more freedom to be harsher, both in terms of the comments being made and in the language or the attachments such as GIFs or images that could be posted alongside the tweet or subsequent reply. The final difference that was identified between the two platforms was the appearance on Twitter of the increasingly trending topic and related hashtags further promoting organisations such as the Stop AAPI Hate organisation (Gover et al., 2020). On Facebook, there was no option to see what trending keywords or hashtags were predominant during the time frames.

#### **5.5 How can the themes be related to theories previously discussed?**

In the literature review, three theories were selected to assist in using the lens chosen to understand the social issues related to the discourse that has been taking place online. These were critical race theory, cultivation theory and orientalism. Furthermore, two theories were

selected to better understand the behaviours that may be a result of people being influenced by xenophobia and racism, namely orientalism and microaggressions. Overall, it is apparent that cultivation theory is one theory that is applicable across all the themes and subthemes that arose, as well as when observing the comments that were taken as a sample for the research. To reiterate the central idea of cultivation theory, it is believed that the media serves as the main socialising agent for society, and what is shown in the different forms of the media, such as social media, television programmes or news reports, are tools that are used by consumers to better understand the world around them (Park et al., 2022). Social media is designed to sort posts based upon their relevance to the user, and Facebook and Twitter algorithms directly relate content to what friends and/or followers may be interacting with. In this way, people are more inclined to formulate their understanding of current events and social issues based on content they interact with (Fuchs, 2014).

The theme 'Any solution for COVID-19 should not come from China' is a theme that is related to the theory orientalism. This is a theme that was prevalent during time frame three, where the search for a viable solution to manage COVID-19 was what all nations that were affected by the virus were focusing on doing, while also trying to stop the virus from rapidly spreading across the country's population. This was made more difficult by mistrusting a solution coming from China, as it was viewed to be the exotic Orient that the Western world was hoping to avoid. This wariness arose from the possibility that a solution could originate from China, which has been alienated and has been viewed as the Orient, rather than the Occident, which in this case, would be considered to be a Western country that has the pharmaceutical advancement in place to develop a vaccine. The theory of orientalism would therefore explain that something that seems so foreign and morally wrong, such as the possibility that a viable remedy for controlling COVID-19 coming from China or another Asian country, is something to feel apprehensive towards since it is a remedy that Western pharmaceutical companies have no control over (Said, 2014).

There were two theories that are relevant to better understanding the themes that were centred around a resentment towards Asians (and even people who identify as being of Pasifika

descent) and the actions that may have taken place around the time the comments were made. Prior to discussing the relevant theories, it must be remembered that in time frames two and three, where the theme was identified, there were increased reports of harassment, violence, and anti-AAPI-related hate crimes being committed around the globe which were related to the outbreak of COVID-19. There were lockdowns and/or strict rules in place to slow the spread of COVID-19 amongst the wider community (Chung, 2021; Hswen et al., 2021; Kao, 2021; Reja, 2021; Tessler et al., 2020; Wright & Duong, 2021). Othering theory is a suitable theory that would be relevant in better understanding the behaviours that are related to the xenophobia and racism that has occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic. This was emphasised when there were comments made that Asians were not a part of New Zealand society. Asian immigrants did not match the mental definition other people may have regarding what being a New Zealander is. Asian immigrants were therefore considered to be a threat to the supposed normalcy, which was defined online as living life without any COVID-19-related restrictions or without a fear of contracting or spreading the disease to others. This would relate the theory of othering, as Asian (and later Pasifika people) were considered to be outsiders and the minority, whereas the general White New Zealand population were considered to be favoured by society (Brons, 2015; Gover et al., 2020).

The second theory that may be beneficial in better understanding the themes related to the resentment towards Asians (and the resentment later directed at people who identify as being of Pasifika descent) investigates how microaggressions have played a role in the types of comments that were collected and analysed. The central idea is that there are three components that make up microaggressions, and all three components appeared across all the time frames for both Facebook and Twitter. Across all three time frames, negative comments or tweets were posted to attack Asians and later Pasifika people and/or were posted to spread misinformation related to the COVID-19 pandemic often based on racist assumptions. The first component of microaggressions consists of microinsults, which occur when a person is either rude or insensitive when referring to another's racial background or ethnic identity. An example of where this occurred during the study was when some social media users would reply to

comments made by other users of Asian descent by saying “how good their English is for an Asian”. This would indicate the user assumed that the Asian making the comment would have poor English skills.

The second component of microaggressions is microinvalidations, which occur when communicators unconsciously “exclude, negate, or nullify the psychological thoughts, feelings, or experiential reality of a person of colour” (Sue et al., 2007, p. 274). An example of where this would have occurred is when users would defend each other, when one person has clearly made a remark that is racist and is not owning up to their actions. The last component of microaggressions is microassaults, which are deliberate attacks that are used when a person feels they have lost control of the conversation or seemingly have support for their racist views. These could either be verbal or a non-verbal, that aims to make the person who is being attacked to feel inferior (Sue 2013; Sue, 2015; Sue et al., 2007, p.274). An example where microassaults was apparent was when people who seemed to be of Asian descent were attempting to defend themselves were being told to “go back to their country”.

Lastly, the theory that can assist in terms of better understanding the theme related to the freedom of speech, as well as further discussing how and why the social issues of racism and xenophobia are still prevalent and have been further amplified during the pandemic, is critical race theory. To reiterate the central idea behind critical race theory, the social issues of racism and xenophobia are not just a surface-level problem, they are embedded within society’s laws and policies aimed to further disadvantage minority groups (Davis et al., 2020; Essed, 2002; Stefancic, 2013). This is linked to the debate about the freedom of speech. Due to an unclear definition of hate crimes and concerns about oppressing people’s right to the freedom of speech, it would be more beneficial to simply allow for further oppression of minority groups. This raises concerns, as this ignorance is causing more harm to people who identify with minority groups as these racist and xenophobic opinions, posts, and information (or misinformation) continue to circulate.

Based on the observations made and the results from the data, another factor that was considered is how power dynamics have an influence on the spread of misinformation and the

racist commentary. Power dynamics, as understood through critical race theory, have an influence as to what policies and laws are put in place, and also influence the attitudes people have towards what is considered to be a minority group and further oppress this minority group (Davis et al., 2020; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Essed, 2002; Stefancic, 2013). Firstly, cultivation theory is a theory influenced by this power dynamic. While the media is used as a socialising agent within society, social media algorithms aim to put popular posts that have a high interaction rate, such as the COVID-19 daily updates which were run by news media and fronted by the government, became more prevalent for social media users to view and comment on. Secondly, orientalism and othering theory also are influenced by this power dynamic as the power dynamic also has an influence as to which groups within society are considered to be the outsiders, and who is considered to be favoured by society as a whole (Said, 2014; Lu et al., 2021; Wright & Duong, 2021). Lastly, the theory of microaggressions also was influenced by power dynamics. Microaggressions has three components which are microassaults, microinsults and microinvalidations (Sue et al., 2007). This theory is influenced by power dynamics, as all three components have a power dynamic in play with one party that is usually someone that identifies as part of a predominant demographic group, that usually shows condescending behaviour towards another party. This other party usually identifies as being part of a minority group that may relate to their ethnicity or gender.

## **5.6 Summary**

This chapter has presented the results from the mixed methods research that was conducted on the three time frames that were used to extract data from Facebook and Twitter. Section 5.2 further discussed the results obtained in each time frame and how the proportions of the pie charts are related to the events that took place within each time frame. Sections 5.3 and 5.4 discussed the similarities and differences in the Facebook and Twitter data that were observed while completing the research, while section 5.5 discussed how the COVID-19-related events, and the time frames were relevant in the themes and subthemes that surfaced while completing the thematic analysis. Section 5.5 also reflected on how it appeared that power dynamics was

something that was prevalent in both the results, and all 5 theories that were referred to, all shared in common.

This chapter highlighted that, especially during time frame three, the blame seemed to be shifted towards Māori/Pasifika people, more particularly Pasifika people as this minority group has also faced online hate. The findings also highlighted ‘local’ stereotypes, such as the ‘South Auckland’ stereotype, where the assumption is made that more Pasifika people reside in this part of Auckland. This therefore put a negative label on that neighbourhood and the residents, as they were identified as the people supposedly responsible for spreading COVID-19 across Auckland for the second time in 2020. This section also emphasised the observation that when the social issues of racism and xenophobia are issues that people are arguing and discussing, they should perhaps look no further than their own backyard, rather than just considering the online hate and global discussions about the violence and abuse towards minority groups such as Asian-New Zealanders and Pasifika-New Zealanders.

## **Chapter 6: Conclusion**

### **6.1 Introduction**

This section answers the research question based on the results, and discusses the implications of the research, as well as whether the research findings are relevant for the purpose of the exploratory study that was conducted. Secondly, this chapter reflects on how the practical implications could be better implemented within New Zealand organisations and on social media sites. Thirdly, this chapter also reflects on any limitations that may have arisen throughout the research process and any flaws that have become obvious as this study was conducted. Finally, any recommendations that could be considered if the research was to be repeated are also discussed, and concluding remarks round off this exploratory study.

### **6.2 How can the social media discourse on the emergence of COVID-19 in China be understood by using an Asian-New Zealander lens?**

This study focused on answering the research question “How can the social media discourse on the emergence of COVID-19 in China be understood by using an Asian-New Zealander lens?” Based on the literature that was used for the purpose of this research, it is apparent that the negative perception of Asian immigrants is not a concept that had been introduced only when COVID-19 first broke out in New Zealand. Rather, the literature identified the concepts of critical race theory and casual racism have been present within a New Zealand context in a more subtle way and play an indirect role in influencing the current legislation and policies within New Zealand, such as immigration policy, as the country requires more skilled workers (Ongley, 1996; Palat, 1996). These immigration policies appear to be racist in a sense where the preference is for more skilled workers, which seems to favour immigrant workers from Asia, as these workers are often highly educated and/or have specialised skillsets that are needed within job markets in New Zealand (Ongley, 1996; Palat, 1996). Because of this influx and the apparent pattern that Asian immigrants were filling in highly skilled positions, a string of misconceptions arose such as Asians were stealing all the jobs, and that Asian women were

being overly sexualised by the popular media, suggesting Asian women were engaging in prostitution rather than being skilled migrants (Hwang & Parreñas, 2021; Kao, 2021).

This negative perception of Asians and blaming them for the consequences of major historic events was also found to have been occurring in an online setting; the recent example in a New Zealand context occurred when COVID-19 first spread throughout the country. On social media, it appeared that people of Asian descent were all grouped together as 'Chinese' and that deporting all Asian residents to their supposed country of origin would slow the spread of the virus. The presence of readily available misinformation further increased the presence of racist and negative comments appearing on social media. From the viewpoint of the victims of this COVID-19-related racism, a recent New Zealand study also concluded that, of the participants completing a survey who identified as either a tertiary or high school student, 50% reported having experienced some form of racism during the pandemic (Juang et al., 2022).

The results from the present research suggested that with the emergence of COVID-19, there was a change in the emphasis of who to blame for the spread of the virus, where the racist and xenophobic remarks focus became fixated on individuals that identified as being of Asian and (later) Pacific Islander descent. The results also have further suggested that given the time frames that were chosen and the themes that have surfaced, the theories that have been discussed in the literature review such as critical race theory, orientalism and cultivation theory may be relevant to explaining why these social issues are still prevalent within public domains such as Facebook and Twitter. Also, othering theory and the concept of microaggressions may play a role in better identifying and influencing the behaviours that are exhibited on these social media sites. The themes that were recorded highlighted wider issues such as the mistrust in governing bodies both locally and internationally, and the constant debate about where the line must be drawn for the right balance between what is considered to be a basic human right within society in terms of the freedom of speech, and where societal morals should be applied to condemn racist hate speech posted online.

### 6.3 Implications

Based on the results and what has already been discussed in the previous research, there are several possible implications that could be put into practice, whether this is government-run and/or other relevant organisations that support the Asian-New Zealander community, to better resolve the issue of racism and xenophobia within New Zealand. Although it is apparent that these social issues are deeply embedded within New Zealand history, one suggestion is to explore where further studies and better policies can work towards creating real change. This would then be possible to influence better attitudes towards New Zealand residents that identify within a minority group such as Māori, Pacific Islander or, in this case, Asian.

One implication that can be suggested from this research is to investigate current policies and laws such as the Harmful Digital Communications Act 2015 and the Human Rights Act 1990, where it is apparent that there is no proper definition available for hate crimes, and therefore be difficult for anyone to be prosecuted for a hate crime, especially if the crime was committed online. This would indicate that it may be beneficial to properly develop such definitions that could be used within a New Zealand context, and within a legal setting. These suggested amendments to the law also come with flaws, given the delicate balance between putting changes in the law in place. On one hand, this would better protect minority ethnic groups that may already be affected by hate crimes and may address the generational mistrust some ethnic groups may have towards governing bodies. On the other hand, these amendments also do run the risk of completely removing the right to freedom of speech.

The second possible implementation that could be considered is formulating a community focused, non-profit organisation between the Pacific Islander and Asian communities, modelled on the Stop AAPI Hate organisation (Gover et al., 2020). This organisation could also be overseen by the Human Rights Commission, as the main purpose of the organisation is to provide moral support, as well as centralising a method for minority groups to report racist behaviour and therefore bringing more culturally appropriate methods and possible remedies to bear where they are needed.

#### **6.4 Limitations of the research**

The main limitation of this research is the fact the researcher is a person of Asian descent who has experienced several forms of racist confrontations herself. Therefore, this may have caused some form of bias in terms of what may have been offensive or racist compared to her fellow researchers who may view the same data and not find the same comments within the content racist. However, this perspective can be argued to be a good thing, given there are different views on what is considered to be racist and xenophobic. Furthermore, the point of the research was that it was to be done by looking through an Asian-New Zealander lens.

This research also focused on racism within New Zealand using an insider researcher perspective, which came with benefits and drawbacks. Previous research has suggested that there are limitations for using an insider researcher perspective. A limitation that was identified was that the overall research may not have the same results if this study was to be conducted by a supposedly objective outside researcher who is of a different ethnic background (Adikaram et al., 2022; Unluer, 2012; Vaidya, 2010). On the other hand, some of the benefits of having this insider researcher perspective has included a better understanding of this sensitive topic and the researcher being in a unique position to reflect on this social issue, especially since the researcher had personal experiences with COVID-19 related racism, she was able to emotionally connect well with the research (Adikaram et al., 2022; Saidin & Yaacob, 2016; Unluer, 2012; Vaidya, 2010).

Another limitation to be considered is the fact the Facebook data was collected solely from the New Zealand Herald Facebook page. News media sites often become a main source for information in the first few hours of a significant event being reported. This news report develops as more information becomes available, like the first national outbreak of COVID-19 in New Zealand (Gabore & Xiujun, 2018; Maniou & Papa, 2023). Because the New Zealand Herald Facebook page aims to inform an audience that predominantly resides in New Zealand, this would have created a bias in the collected data, as the readership would have been influenced by the high number of New Zealand based readers. However, gaining a better understanding of the New Zealand context was the focus of this study.

The fourth limitation of this research that was considered, is the time this study was being conducted. When this research started, New Zealand went into a nationwide lockdown from August 17, 2021, to September 7. From September 8 onwards, Auckland remained at Alert Level 4 until September 21. At the start of 2022, New Zealand then transferred to a new system called the Traffic Light System. This therefore further increases the chance of the researcher holding a bias, given the COVID-19 pandemic is still an active issue she is learning to adapt to as she completes her postgraduate studies.

## **6.5 Recommendations for future research**

### **6.5.1 *Potential recommendations for future study***

Recommendations for future research have been categorised into two groups, with the first being directly linked to improvements in the research design that was used in the present study, and the second group of recommendations being linked to different methods for conducting the research.

One suggestion is to lengthen the time between time frames and possibly complete this study by using articles from the *New Zealand Herald* from the years 2019 to 2022. This is because, in the initial search for news articles on the *New Zealand Herald* Facebook page, an advanced search did not allow for articles that were published prior to the dates chosen, such as articles published before the December 2019 time frame, to be filtered out. This would also allow for articles that were published after October 2 and were related to the 107-day lockdown Auckland endured in 2021 during the Omicron outbreak.

A second possible suggestion is to look into more dates, such as the detection and outbreak of the Delta variant in New Zealand, which took place in mid-August, 2021, or the detection of the Omicron variant in the international community, and the events that took place afterwards. Again, these specific time frames may further attest to the racism and xenophobia present within sites that may be used to gain information, or in public spaces such as social media where misinformation can easily be spread. A third possible recommendation that could possibly be explored is how different regions of cities such as Auckland may have experienced racism

during the pandemic. It was noticed in the research that there was some particular focus on South Auckland, compared to other parts of Auckland such as North Shore suburbs, West Auckland suburbs and East Auckland suburbs, which seemed to have had less media coverage. This brings the question as to how these geographic locations may play a role in how the cases and people that broke COVID-19 restriction rules were portrayed. Another topic that could be explored is the degree of racism that may be seen when the location of new cases is in the headlines on news bulletins and social media, as found in the data that was recorded on the *New Zealand Herald* page on Facebook when the articles were related to the COVID-19 outbreak in South Auckland.

### **6.5.2 Recommendations if this study was to be repeated**

One recommendation that may be specifically beneficial should another researcher wish to repeat this research that has been reported here is to investigate the experiences of a specific age and/or demographic group that has been affected during the COVID-19 pandemic. Examples of specific age and demographic groups that could be researched are Asian-New Zealand university students or working class Asian-New Zealanders, using a different research method such as interviews or focus groups as the main data collection method and conducting a thematic analysis based on the responses. Also, another recommendation is to investigate repeating this research by focusing on the Pasifika population as they are the other ethnic group that have been targeted by the media and public in relation to COVID-19 issues within New Zealand. The third recommendation that could be considered for future research is how racist attitudes are transferred from one ethnicity to another, such as the transfer of the blame for the spread of COVID-19 from Asian people to Pasifika people.

The final recommendation that could be considered if this research was to be repeated would be to conduct a similar project once the COVID-19 pandemic is not as prominent on news headlines and on social media platforms and is no longer a lingering crisis in terms of causing international health concerns. Perhaps, repeating this research in 5 to 10 years, or when COVID-19 is no longer a serious issue worldwide, could provide an idea of what the online discourse may be then.

## 6.6 Conclusion

In conclusion, this research has attested to the idea that the chosen words people may use when commenting, tweeting, or using hashtags may have an influence on the already disastrous misinformation that is circulating on public domains such as Facebook and Twitter. With the COVID-19 pandemic still rampant across the globe and within New Zealand, the racist and xenophobic misinformation and fake news related to COVID-19 will be something that will unfortunately continue to be readily available on public websites.

Events that are important to note that have been identified to be, at least partially, fuelled by misinformation are the Freedom Convoys that have taken place in Canada, the United States, Europe, Australia and even in parts of New Zealand, where people have taken to public places such as the New Zealand Parliament grounds. While these events have been beneficial to some degree in terms of making governing bodies aware that there is a mistrust in scientific evidence, experts and governing bodies, they have also further highlighted the issue of how misinformation and mistrust has further caused a divide between ordinary citizens and people in power alike.

At the time this research was being conducted, there were over 247 million active cases of COVID-19 across the globe, and new variants of the COVID-19 virus such as the Delta and Omicron variants have further emphasised racism, xenophobia within society and the divide between nations as the blame for the virus is shifted around (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2021). It has been particularly interesting to watch the way nations have handled the news that other variants have been found to be active, such as the actions that were taken to essentially bar people who have come from countries where such new variants have originated. An example of this occurred when nations like the United States paused the entry of people who were coming from African nations such as South Africa, due to the discovery of the Omicron variant by South African labs (Adamu & Busari, 2021). Because racism and xenophobia are social issues that are embedded within New Zealand society and in other Western countries, challenging these social issues in a public setting seem to be difficult in many aspects. This is made more confronting with the proliferation of misinformation and pre-conceived stereotypes

about how people of different ethnic groups are supposed to fit into society. It will take not only a collective effort to find methods that would fully eradicate the unfair treatment of minority groups, but it will also take a great effort to fully implement such methods so that the attitudes of society will also change.

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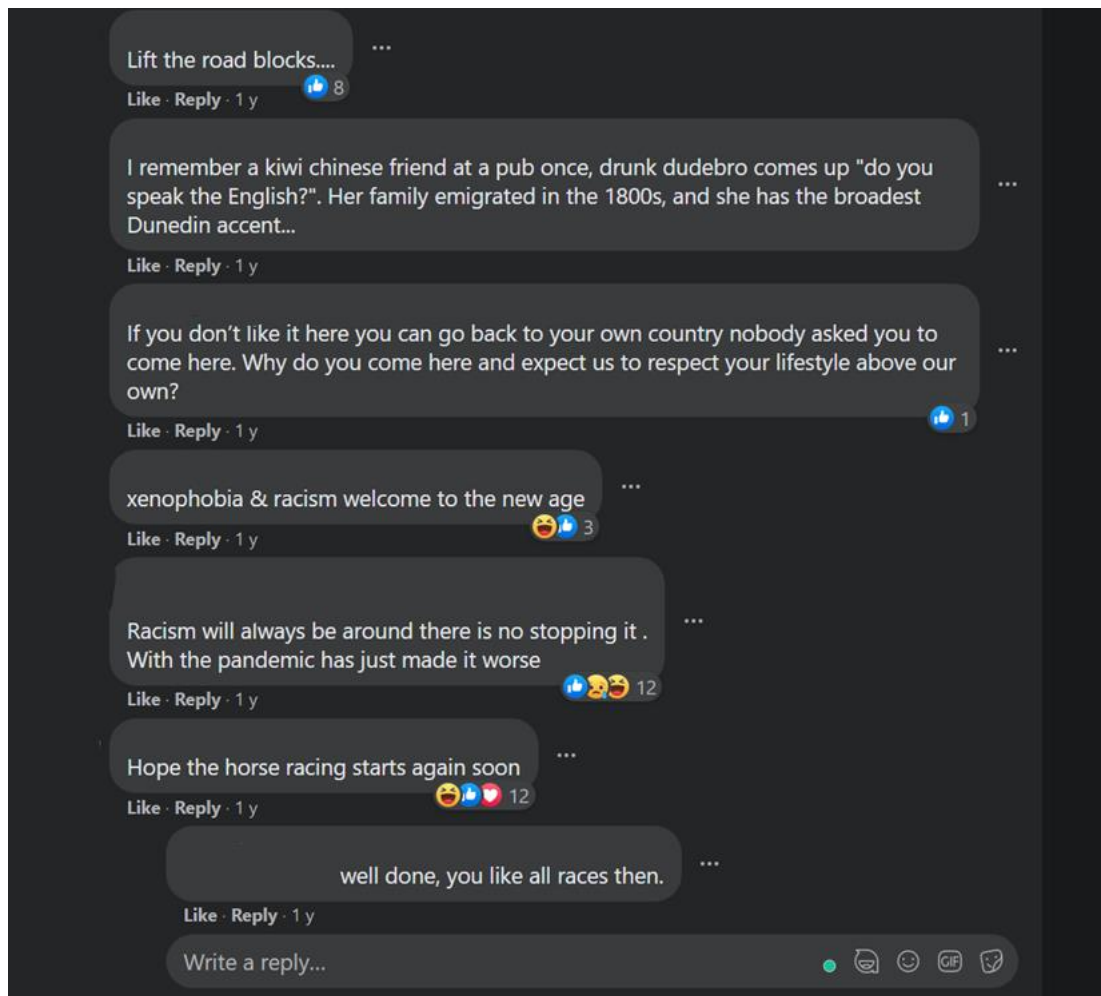
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# Appendices

## Appendix A: Samples of the raw data

### *Sample of the comments from Facebook*



Sample of the comments from Twitter

...  
#China assured the #WorldHealthOrganization that #COVID19 could not be transmitted human-to-human. The WHO on January 14 transmitted the Chinese assurance to the world. #ChinaLiedPeopleDied

**The Federalist** @FDRLST · Apr 1, 2020  
While the WHO gives China its imprimatur, evidence continues to mount of China's malign role in every aspect of this pandemic. [fdrl.st/f86](https://fdrl.st/f86)

6:29 AM · Apr 1, 2020 · Twitter for iPhone

113 Retweets 3 Quote Tweets 212 Likes

Reply

Apr 1, 2020

Checkout the source WHO is run by a bunch of##PaidOffLiars#ChinaWantsTo RunTheBigMachine I say 🗣️👊👁️👤  
#WuhanVirusMadeInChinaForYourPersonalUse 🇨🇳🦠🩸



Apr 1, 2020

And Trudeau is getting all his advice from WHO head and his acolyte Dr Tam.

Apr 1, 2020

a perfect excuse for the regime to unleash hell on earth, also a way for them to shift blame to the virus instead of their mismanage the economy.  
#spy #es\_f #spx #trading #trader #future #pivot #usdjpy #forex #forexnews #forexmarket

## Appendix B: Samples of the Excel spreadsheets

### Sample of the Excel spreadsheet for Facebook

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I
Time Frame	Comment Score (1-3)	ID	Mean (Zhp)	Original Comment (if applicable)	Is the comment directed at someone	Key Words/Phrases	Themselves asked up	Solutions (if applicable)
December 2019 to February	Defensive/Positive comment	1831	1.98		x	x		x
December 2019 to February	Defensive/Positive comment	1832	1.96	"They couldn't be less neat with what they put on the receipt?"	Tagged someone	What's their deal?	Dislike!	x
December 2019 to February	Defensive/Positive comment	1833	1.98	"There HAS to be an explanation for this"	x	"What?"	Dislike!	x
December 2019 to February	Defensive/Positive comment	1834	1.98	"Why tf did they pay that much for a ginger beer...?"	Tagged someone	Tourism, culture	Disgust	x
December 2019 to February	Defensive/Positive comment	1835	1.98		Tagged someone	x	x	x
December 2019 to February	Defensive/Positive comment	1836	1.98	"They didn't put Cing Chang, so what's the issue?"	Directed at 1792	Tourism, culture	Why should we care?	x
December 2019 to February	Defensive/Positive comment	1837	1.97		Tagged someone	x	x	x
December 2019 to February	Defensive/Positive comment	1838	1.98	"I'd who pays \$7 for a ginger beer?"	Tagged someone	x	x	x
December 2019 to February	Defensive/Positive comment	1839	1.98		Tagged someone	x	x	x
December 2019 to February	Defensive/Positive comment	1840	1.98		Tagged someone	x	x	x
December 2019 to February	Defensive/Positive comment	1841	1.98		Tagged someone	x	x	x
December 2019 to February	Defensive/Positive comment	1842	1.98		Tagged someone	x	x	x
December 2019 to February	Defensive/Positive comment	1843	1.98		Directed at 1792	Sick tip	Why should we care?	x
December 2019 to February	Defensive/Positive comment	1844	1.98	"After bulshit, they called it as it was. A drink"	x	x	x	x
December 2019 to February	Defensive/Positive comment	1845	1.98		Tagged someone	x	x	x
December 2019 to February	Defensive/Positive comment	1846	1.98		Tagged someone	x	x	x
December 2019 to February	Defensive/Positive comment	1847	1.98		Tagged someone	x	x	x
December 2019 to February	Defensive/Positive comment	1848	1.98		Tagged someone	x	x	x
December 2019 to February	Defensive/Positive comment	1849	1.98		Tagged someone	x	x	x
December 2019 to February	Defensive/Positive comment	1850	1.98		Tagged someone	x	x	x
December 2019 to February	Defensive/Positive comment	1851	1.98		x	x	x	x
December 2019 to February	Defensive/Positive comment	1852	1.98	"And? That's exactly why racism is an issue here in NZ, you think?"	Tagged someone (replied to 17925)	x	Dislike!	x
December 2019 to February	Defensive/Positive comment	1853	1.98		x	x	x	x
December 2019 to February	Defensive/Positive comment	1854	1.98		Directed at 1792	Sick tip	Why should we care?	x
December 2019 to February	Defensive/Positive comment	1855	1.98		x	x	x	x
December 2019 to February	Defensive/Positive comment	1856	1.98		Tagged someone	x	x	x
December 2019 to February	Defensive/Positive comment	1857	1.98		Tagged someone	x	x	x
December 2019 to February	Defensive/Positive comment	1858	1.98		x	x	x	x
December 2019 to February	Defensive/Positive comment	1859	1.98		x	x	x	x
December 2019 to February	Defensive/Positive comment	1860	1.98		x	x	x	x
December 2019 to February	Defensive/Positive comment	1861	1.98		x	x	x	x
December 2019 to February	Defensive/Positive comment	1862	1.98		x	x	x	x
December 2019 to February	Defensive/Positive comment	1863	1.98		x	x	x	x
December 2019 to February	Defensive/Positive comment	1864	1.98		x	x	x	x
December 2019 to February	Defensive/Positive comment	1865	1.98		x	x	x	x
December 2019 to February	Defensive/Positive comment	1866	1.98		x	x	x	x
December 2019 to February	Defensive/Positive comment	1867	1.98		x	x	x	x
December 2019 to February	Defensive/Positive comment	1868	1.98		x	x	x	x
December 2019 to February	Defensive/Positive comment	1869	1.98		x	x	x	x
December 2019 to February	Defensive/Positive comment	1870	1.98		x	x	x	x
December 2019 to February	Defensive/Positive comment	1871	1.98		x	x	x	x
December 2019 to February	Defensive/Positive comment	1872	1.98		x	x	x	x
December 2019 to February	Defensive/Positive comment	1873	1.98		x	x	x	x
December 2019 to February	Defensive/Positive comment	1874	1.98		Tagged someone	x	x	x
December 2019 to February	Defensive/Positive comment	1875	1.98	"And? Chinese people have a lot of money anyway?"	Directed at 1795	Tourism, culture	Why should we care?	x
December 2019 to February	Defensive/Positive comment	1876	1.98		x	x	x	x
December 2019 to February	Defensive/Positive comment	1877	1.98		x	x	x	x
December 2019 to February	Defensive/Positive comment	1878	1.98		x	x	x	x
December 2019 to February	Defensive/Positive comment	1879	1.98		x	x	x	x
December 2019 to February	Defensive/Positive comment	1880	1.98		x	x	x	x
December 2019 to February	Defensive/Positive comment	1881	1.98		x	x	x	x
December 2019 to February	Defensive/Positive comment	1882	1.98		x	x	x	x
December 2019 to February	Defensive/Positive comment	1883	1.98		x	x	x	x
December 2019 to February	Defensive/Positive comment	1884	1.98		x	x	x	x
December 2019 to February	Defensive/Positive comment	1885	1.98		Tagged someone	x	x	x
December 2019 to February	Defensive/Positive comment	1886	1.98		Tagged someone	x	x	x
December 2019 to February	Defensive/Positive comment	1887	1.98		x	x	x	x
December 2019 to February	Defensive/Positive comment	1888	1.98		x	x	x	x
December 2019 to February	Defensive/Positive comment	1889	1.98		x	x	x	x
December 2019 to February	Defensive/Positive comment	1890	1.98		Tagged someone	x	x	x
December 2019 to February	Defensive/Positive comment	1891	1.98		x	x	x	x
December 2019 to February	Defensive/Positive comment	1892	1.98		x	x	x	x
December 2019 to February	Defensive/Positive comment	1893	1.98		x	x	x	x
December 2019 to February	Defensive/Positive comment	1894	1.98	"They can afford \$7 ginger beer the others. NZ Herald, post up real news. Not this trash"	x	x	Disgust	x
December 2019 to February	Defensive/Positive comment	1895	1.98		x	x	x	x
December 2019 to February	Defensive/Positive comment	1896	1.98		x	x	x	x
December 2019 to February	Defensive/Positive comment	1897	1.98		Tagged someone	x	x	x
December 2019 to February	Defensive/Positive comment	1898	1.98		x	x	x	x
December 2019 to February	Defensive/Positive comment	1899	1.98		x	x	x	x
December 2019 to February	Defensive/Positive comment	1900	1.98		Tagged someone	x	x	x
December 2019 to February	Defensive/Positive comment	1901	1.98		x	x	x	x
December 2019 to February	Defensive/Positive comment	1902	1.98		x	x	x	x
December 2019 to February	Defensive/Positive comment	1903	1.98		x	x	x	x
December 2019 to February	Defensive/Positive comment	1904	1.98		x	x	x	x
December 2019 to February	Defensive/Positive comment	1905	1.98		x	x	x	x
December 2019 to February	Defensive/Positive comment	1906	1.98		x	x	x	x
December 2019 to February	Defensive/Positive comment	1907	1.98		x	x	x	x
December 2019 to February	Defensive/Positive comment	1908	1.98		x	x	x	x
December 2019 to February	Defensive/Positive comment	1909	1.98		x	x	x	x
December 2019 to February	Defensive/Positive comment	1910	1.98		x	x	x	x
December 2019 to February	Defensive/Positive comment	1911	1.98		x	x	x	x
December 2019 to February	Defensive/Positive comment	1912	1.98		x	x	x	x
December 2019 to February	Defensive/Positive comment	1913	1.98		x	x	x	x
December 2019 to February	Defensive/Positive comment	1914	1.98		x	x	x	x
December 2019 to February	Defensive/Positive comment	1915	1.98		x	x	x	x
December 2019 to February	Defensive/Positive comment	1916	1.98		x	x	x	x
December 2019 to February	Defensive/Positive comment	1917	1.98		x	x	x	x
December 2019 to February	Defensive/Positive comment	1918	1.98		x	x	x	x
December 2019 to February	Defensive/Positive comment	1919	1.98		x	x	x	x
December 2019 to February	Defensive/Positive comment	1920	1.98		Tagged someone	x	x	x
December 2019 to February	Defensive/Positive comment	1921	1.98		Tagged someone (17926)	x	x	x
December 2019 to February	Defensive/Positive comment	1922	1.98		Tagged someone	x	x	x
December 2019 to February	Defensive/Positive comment	1923	1.98		Tagged someone	x	x	x
December 2019 to February	Defensive/Positive comment	1924	1.98		Tagged someone	x	x	x
December 2019 to February	Defensive/Positive comment	1925	1.98		Tagged someone	x	x	x
December 2019 to February	Defensive/Positive comment	1926	1.98		Directed at 1795	Tourism, culture	Why should we care?	x
December 2019 to February	Defensive/Positive comment	1927	1.98		x	x	x	x
December 2019 to February	Defensive/Positive comment	1928	1.98		x	x	x	x
December 2019 to February	Defensive/Positive comment	1929	1.98		x	x	x	x
December 2019 to February	Defensive/Positive comment	1930	1.98		x	x	x	x
December 2019 to February	Defensive/Positive comment	1931	1.98		x	x	x	x
December 2019 to February	Defensive/Positive comment	1932	1.98		Tagged someone (replied to 17925)	x	Dislike!	x
December 2019 to February	Defensive/Positive comment	1933	1.98		x	x	x	x
December 2019 to February	Defensive/Positive comment	1934	1.98		Directed at 1792	Sick tip	Why should we care?	x
December 2019 to February	Defensive/Positive comment	1935	1.98		x	x	x	x
December 2019 to February	Defensive/Positive comment	1936	1.98		Tagged someone	x	x	x
December 2019 to February	Defensive/Positive comment	1937	1.98		Tagged someone	x	x	x
December 2019 to February	Defensive/Positive comment	1938	1.98		x	x	x	x
December 2019 to February	Defensive/Positive comment	1939	1.98		x	x	x	x
December 2019 to February	Defensive/Positive comment	1940	1.98		x	x	x	x
December 2019 to February	Defensive/Positive comment	1941	1.98		x	x	x	x
December 2019 to February	Defensive/Positive comment	1942	1.98		x	x	x	x
December 2019 to February	Defensive/Positive comment	1943	1.98		x	x	x	x
December 2019 to February	Defensive/Positive comment	1944	1.98		x	x	x	x
December 2019 to February	Defensive/Positive comment	1945	1.98		x	x	x	x
December 2019 to February	Defensive/Positive comment	1946	1.98		Tagged someone	x	x	x
December 2019 to February	Defensive/Positive comment	1947	1.98		Tagged someone	x	x	x
December 2019 to February	Defensive/Positive comment	1948	1.98		x	x	x	x
December 2019 to February	Defensive/Positive comment	1949	1.98		x	x	x	x
December 2019 to February	Defensive/Positive comment	1950	1.98		Tagged someone	x	x	x
December 2019 to February	Defensive/Positive comment	1951	1.98		x	x	x	x

Sample of the Excel spreadsheet for Twitter

Time Frame	Scale Score	ID	Mean	Original Tweet (for scores of 1 and 3)	Is this a reply? (if so who are they reply)	Any hashtags used?	Theme	Sub Theme
27 (March 2020 to 31)	Neutral comment or had contradicting statements	217	2.23					
27 (March 2020 to 31)	Neutral comment or had contradicting statements	217	2.23	Fuck the china change. The god damn chinks should fucking rot in hell.	x	#godspokestealid #hdiss	Disturb	x
27 (March 2020 to 31)	Comment was attacking Asians and/or was a negative of	213	2.23	God this site's become a circus with all the dumb shit you're all posting		#sunracha	Extermination of the Chinese	x
27 (March 2020 to 31)	Neutral comment or had contradicting statements	214	2.23	All of them are lying in power. But who says we should blame the Asians for the virus?		#godspokestealid	People in power have failed us	x
27 (March 2020 to 31)	Comment was attacking Asians and/or was a negative of	215	2.23	The WHO and China are at a bunch of lies. They all have blood on their hands for the deaths of people		#godspokestealid	China Lied	x
27 (March 2020 to 31)	Comment was attacking Asians and/or was a negative of	216	2.23	Something tells me a "little" genocide of the chinks and the rest of the Asians would do the world some good		#china #kdcchina #hdiss #hdiss #hdiss #hdiss #hdiss	Extermination of the Chinese	x
27 (March 2020 to 31)	Post-vehr-racist comment	217	2.23	215 they aren't worth it. Just some white trash spouting shit.		#burndowns #hasm	x	x
27 (March 2020 to 31)	Comment was attacking Asians and/or was a negative of	218	2.23	Getting rid of the Bacterivirus as a whole would do us a fucking favour.		#china #hdiss #hdiss #hdiss #hdiss #hdiss	Extermination of the Chinese	x
27 (March 2020 to 31)	Post-vehr-racist comment	219	2.23	Y'all need to calm the fuck down. You racist clowns are the real monsters		x	x	x
27 (March 2020 to 31)	Neutral comment or had contradicting statements	210	2.23			#godspokestealid	x	x
27 (March 2020 to 31)	Post-vehr-racist comment	211	2.23	Keep your pants on 212. Whats your pussy skin gonna do Nothing. Like the annoying orange		x	x	x
27 (March 2020 to 31)	Comment was attacking Asians and/or was a negative of	212	2.23	How stupid are you Americans? Asians aren't to blame for the mistakes your president made.		#COVID9	x	x
27 (March 2020 to 31)	Comment was attacking Asians and/or was a negative of	213	2.23	The government lied. The WHO lied. Everyone we thought we can trust has failed us.		#hdiss #hdiss #hdiss #hdiss #hdiss #hdiss	People in power have failed us	x
27 (March 2020 to 31)	Comment was attacking Asians and/or was a negative of	214	2.23	Don't be a drama queen 218. You're just an idiot that needs to grow up.		#godspokestealid	x	x
27 (March 2020 to 31)	Post-vehr-racist comment	215	2.23	Well this is entertaining.		#godspokestealid	x	x
27 (March 2020 to 31)	Comment was attacking Asians and/or was a negative of	216	2.23	Getting rid of all the chinks will be the best step to get rid of the china virus. No more china full		#hdiss #hdiss #hdiss #hdiss #hdiss #hdiss	Extermination of the Chinese	x
27 (March 2020 to 31)	Post-vehr-racist comment	217	2.23	Anyone else finding it hard with all the restrictions and where to find information?		#hdiss #hdiss #hdiss #hdiss #hdiss #hdiss	x	x
27 (March 2020 to 31)	Comment was attacking Asians and/or was a negative of	218	2.23	The US president is the one to blame for this stupidity. Not Asians. Not Chinese.		#COVID9	People in power have failed us	x
27 (March 2020 to 31)	Neutral comment or had contradicting statements	219	2.23			#godspokestealid	x	x
27 (March 2020 to 31)	Post-vehr-racist comment	220	2.23	Ferrit you all need to grow the fuck up.		#godspokestealid	x	x
27 (March 2020 to 31)	Post-vehr-racist comment	221	2.23	Grow the fuck up. Tanluns and blaming Chinese for something they didn't do isn't going to solve anything		#COVID9	x	x
27 (March 2020 to 31)	Neutral comment or had contradicting statements	222	2.23			x	x	x
27 (March 2020 to 31)	Comment was attacking Asians and/or was a negative of	223	2.23	Suddenly bombing Asia doesn't sound like a bad idea eh? Burn down all of the virus and the chinks that are		#hdiss #hdiss #hdiss #hdiss #hdiss #hdiss	Extermination of the Chinese	x
27 (March 2020 to 31)	Post-vehr-racist comment	224	2.23	And whilst bombing Asia gonna do? You're all just trying to repeat history as if we didn't learn anything fro		#COVID9	Extermination of the Chinese	x
27 (March 2020 to 31)	Comment was attacking Asians and/or was a negative of	225	2.23	Where's a lincoln hat when we need one? Oh well. The stupid government has restrictions in place so we can		#hdiss #hdiss #hdiss #hdiss #hdiss #hdiss	Penalties	x
27 (March 2020 to 31)	Neutral comment or had contradicting statements	226	2.23			x	x	x
27 (March 2020 to 31)	Comment was attacking Asians and/or was a negative of	227	2.23	2124 you're right. People think genocide and scapegoating is going to fix anything. They need to shut up or		#COVID9	x	x
27 (March 2020 to 31)	Neutral comment or had contradicting statements	228	2.23			x	x	x
27 (March 2020 to 31)	Neutral comment or had contradicting statements	229	2.23	The chinks had this shit coming for them. They lied so they got exactly what they deserved		x	Penalties	x
27 (March 2020 to 31)	Neutral comment or had contradicting statements	230	2.23	What were the ching change exposing? Flowers and a thank you card for their fuck up?		x	Penalties	x
27 (March 2020 to 31)	Comment was attacking Asians and/or was a negative of	231	2.23	2131 they were wanting a round of applause for killing all of us off!		#hdiss #hdiss #hdiss #hdiss #hdiss #hdiss	Penalties	x
27 (March 2020 to 31)	Neutral comment or had contradicting statements	232	2.23			x	x	x
27 (March 2020 to 31)	Neutral comment or had contradicting statements	233	2.23			x	x	x
27 (March 2020 to 31)	Neutral comment or had contradicting statements	234	2.23	2131. SOMEONE gets it. The Chinks want to exterminate us. We should kill them first!		#hdiss #hdiss #hdiss #hdiss #hdiss #hdiss	Penalties	x
27 (March 2020 to 31)	Comment was attacking Asians and/or was a negative of	235	2.23			x	x	x
27 (March 2020 to 31)	Neutral comment or had contradicting statements	236	2.23			x	x	x
27 (March 2020 to 31)	Neutral comment or had contradicting statements	237	2.23	2133 we should send a little gift of a bomb or something.		#hdiss #hdiss #hdiss #hdiss #hdiss #hdiss	Penalties	x
27 (March 2020 to 31)	Comment was attacking Asians and/or was a negative of	238	2.23	At this rate, you're all going to get your cake - look like a bunch of idiots for scapegoating Asians.		#hdiss #hdiss #hdiss #hdiss #hdiss #hdiss	Penalties	x
27 (March 2020 to 31)	Neutral comment or had contradicting statements	239	2.23			x	x	x
27 (March 2020 to 31)	Neutral comment or had contradicting statements	240	2.23			x	x	x
27 (March 2020 to 31)	Comment was attacking Asians and/or was a negative of	241	2.23	I thought the virus wasn't something we couldn't catch from each other? WHO lied to us. So did everyone el		#hdiss #hdiss #hdiss #hdiss #hdiss #hdiss	Penalties	x
27 (March 2020 to 31)	Comment was attacking Asians and/or was a negative of	242	2.23	Where are other people going to realise China lied to us on purpose. We're all gonna die from the Asian viru		#hdiss #hdiss #hdiss #hdiss #hdiss #hdiss	Penalties	x
27 (March 2020 to 31)	Neutral comment or had contradicting statements	243	2.23			x	x	x
27 (March 2020 to 31)	Comment was attacking Asians and/or was a negative of	244	2.23	WHO and China promised all of us it wasn't contagious. Now we're all dying		#hdiss #hdiss #hdiss #hdiss #hdiss #hdiss	Penalties	x
27 (March 2020 to 31)	Neutral comment or had contradicting statements	245	2.23			x	x	x
27 (March 2020 to 31)	Neutral comment or had contradicting statements	246	2.23			x	x	x
27 (March 2020 to 31)	Comment was attacking Asians and/or was a negative of	247	2.23	Surely bat soup will fix the china virus they started. Or was it any of their shit remedies that'll fix their mistk		#hdiss #hdiss #hdiss #hdiss #hdiss #hdiss	Penalties	x
27 (March 2020 to 31)	Neutral comment or had contradicting statements	248	2.23			x	x	x
27 (March 2020 to 31)	Neutral comment or had contradicting statements	249	2.23			x	x	x
27 (March 2020 to 31)	Neutral comment or had contradicting statements	250	2.23			x	x	x

## Appendix C: Thematic analysis tables

### *Thematic analysis results tables using data collected from the New Zealand Herald*

#### *Facebook page*

*Time frame one (December 2019 to February 2020)*

**Table 6:** *Themes, subthemes and example quotes that surfaced from articles selected in time frame one (December 2019 to February 2020)*

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Subtheme(s), if applicable</b>	<b>Example quote(s)</b>
“Why should we care?”	-	1FB6: “What's the difference? We're showing their fucking culture to tourists are we not?”.
“I have every right say what I want” *	“They should know better”	1FB225: “Isn't it my right to be able to say whatever I want? That's the point of ‘basic human rights’, or is Cindy the horse and this circus government wanting that too?”  1FB290: “Young one’s these days. All the social media like toktok and the internet available they should be able to understand whats real and what isn’t.”
“It came from where?”	“Bat soup”	1FB368: “So 1FB368 Wuhan? Now we know where not to go for

OE... If we can figure out where  
tf that is ”

1FB380: “So bat soup isn’t going  
to relieve any COVID-19  
symptoms?! Maybe we should ask  
the chinks if they have any other  
‘herbal’ remedies to fix the mess  
they made.”

“Not our problem yet”

-

1FB414: “1FB419! They said the  
ronas like the flu! Surely we just  
keep the vitamin c and staying  
hydrated habits up so we’ll be  
okay if it does hit us?”

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*Note.* Theme(s) that have an asterisk (\*) next to them have been identified to have been present in other time frames. This is expanded upon in the results chapter.

*Time frame two (March 2020 to May 2020)*

**Table 7:** *Themes and subthemes that surfaced from articles selected in time frame two (March 2020 to May 2020)*

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Subtheme(s), if applicable</b>	<b>Example quote (s)</b>
“Resentment towards Asians”	“Send them back”	2FB422: “If you don’t like it here you can go back to your own country nobody asked you to come here. Why do you come here and expect us to respect your lifestyle above our own.”
“The Government is to blame” *	-	2FB312: “We’re going to end up like the rest of Europe, where everyone will know someone who died from this virus and the govt is doing absolutely fuck all. Whats lockdown gonna do except make us all have a sheep mentality? Bunch of fuckin idiots all of you who voted to keep taxinda and her band of clowns running what was a beautiful country”
“I have every right say what I want” *	-	2FB2: “I’m ‘European’ and I’ve never been to Europe. Sure we may have played a part in the colonialism problem, but Asians should be owning up for spreading the virus everywhere. Call me someone whos part of the cancel culture or whatever but that’s my two cents.”

*Note.* Theme(s) that have an asterisk (\*) next to them have been identified to have been present in other time frames. This is expanded upon in the results chapter.

*Time frame three (July 2020 to October 2020)*

**Table 8:** *Themes, subthemes and quotes that surfaced from articles selected in time frame three (July 2020 to October 2020)*

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Subtheme(s), if applicable</b>	<b>Example quote(s)</b>
“People in power are the ones to blame and should be held accountable”*	‘China should also be held accountable’	3FB20: “The World Health Orgainsation clearly fucked up. Now they fully expect us to listen to this government and expect everything they say about this stupid covid thing is actually going to help us? Fuck right off”
“Lockdown is the real problem”	-	3FB400: “Covid isn’t the real problem here at this point. The real problem is the struggles of having to stay the hell at home and go up struggle street alone”  3FB401: “Can’t agree with you more there 3FB400. We better hope there will be proper help once we get tf out of this mess cause farrrrk.”
“Any solution to COVID-19 should not come from China”	“Mistrust in Chinese products”	3FB103: “If the solution is coming from China, I don’t want it. For all I fking know they could be injecting nanobots or 5G emitting microchips

into my body. I'm boycotting that until the US, hell even the UK or Aussie have a solution. I'm also getting rid of all the stuff that's made in that shithole of a country too"

3FB115: "Well too bad 3FB103, if you're going to be 'boycotting' all the things made in China I hope you're prepared to chuck out most if not all your furniture, clothes, electronics and maybe even your condoms. Which would be a shame cause we don't need more of you idiots populating the earth."

"Pasifika people are to blame"

"South Auckland again?"

3FB497: "First the Asians bring COVID-19 into the community, and now the coconuts wanna steal the show? They have big families so them spreading the rona round doesn't bloody surprise me."

3FB510: "Always South Auckland that gets the bad fuking press. If the airport was in West, East or on the shore I bet the response would be 100% different because all the Pakeha lives that way."

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*Note.* Theme(s) that have an asterisk (\*) next to them have been identified to have been present in other time frames. This is expanded further in the results chapter.

*Thematic analysis results tables using data collected from Twitter*

*Time frame two (March 2020)*

**Table 9:** *Themes, subthemes and recurring hashtags that were recorded from the comments, from time frame two (March 2020)*

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Subtheme(s), if applicable</b>	<b>Recurring hashtag(s), if applicable</b>	<b>Example quote(s)</b>
“Extermination of the Chinese”	“Killing of all Asians”	#fuckchina, #chinaliedpeopledied, #wuhanvirus, #chinavirus	2T2: “Fuck the ching chongs. The god damn chinks should fucking rot in hell. #chinaliedpeopledied #fuckasia #fuckchina #chinesevirus #wuhanvirus #burninhellchina #bombchina”
“WHO and China are to blame” *	-	#wholied, #chinaliedpeopledied	2T180: “#China assured the #WorldHealthOrganisation that #COVID19 could not be transmitted human-to-human. The WHO transmitted the Chinese assurance to the world. #ChinaLiedPeopleDied.”
“Just desserts”	-	#asianvirus, #wuhanvirus, #chinavirus, #bombchina	2T440: “What did the #chingchongs expect? Flowers and thanks for spreading the #ChinaVirus to

the rest of the world? They're finally fucking getting what they deserve. The extermination and the end to them #fuckchina #chinksgotwhatscoming"

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*Note.* Theme(s) that have an asterisk (\*) next to them have been identified to have been present in other time frames. This is expanded upon in the results chapter.

*Time frame three (September 2020)*

**Table 10:** Themes, subthemes, replies and recurring hashtags that were recorded from the comments, from time frame three (September 2020)

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Subtheme (s), if applicable</b>	<b>Recurring hashtag(s), if applicable</b>	<b>Example quote(s)</b>
"We stand in solidarity"	-	#AAPI	"My grandparents came here [to America] to give my mum and their future grandchildren the chance to have a better life. I can't change the colour of my skin or my heritage, but I know for one thing. I didn't cause #COVID. My ethnic group didn't cause COVID. Minority groups didn't cause COVID. This bullshit needs to stop

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			#StopTheHate
			#WashTheHate”
“A homemade remedy will cure COVID-19”	Misinformation about what may alleviate COVID symptoms	-	3T224: “Just putting it out there that tin foil hats, bat soup and burning oranges are some of the best ways to fix the shit the rona side effects have.  Maybe the  #chinkswereonto  something #curecovid  #chingchongremedy”
“People in power have failed us” *	-	#wholied	3T416: “Of course Donald Trump is going to pass the fucking blame to everyone else but himself. We voted in this fuckwit the least he could have done is ensure us Americans don’t struggle with all the #covid restrictions that are in place. Whats our local governments gonna do? Twiddle their thumbs as per usual? #covid #WereFucked

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*Note.* Theme(s) that have an asterisk (\*) next to them have been identified to have been present in other time frames. This is expanded upon in the results chapter.