

Pretending on Facebook

JUST THE DEETS
BY JOYCE HUANG

Context

TIMELINE

Part time, 6 months

TEAM

Me

There are Facebook Groups where people “pretend” to be ants, middle schoolers, farmers/cows, or from 1897, with 10,000 - 1.9 million members.

I set out to **qualitatively** understand the member experience of these groups and how platform design affects their experience.

RESEARCH GOALS

- Do members change how they use Facebook when engaging in these groups? (How *do* they engage?)
- Does platform design impact how users participate?
- What leads to a satisfying pretend group experience?

Process

LITERATURE REVIEW

Platform design
Diary studies
Social networking sites
Virtual Spaces
Facebook
Role-playing games
etc...

RESEARCH

13 participants (across 4
Facebook Groups)

13 week-long diary studies
+ 13 semi-structured
interviews on their
experience and perception
of the group

DATA ANALYSIS


Transcribed interviews

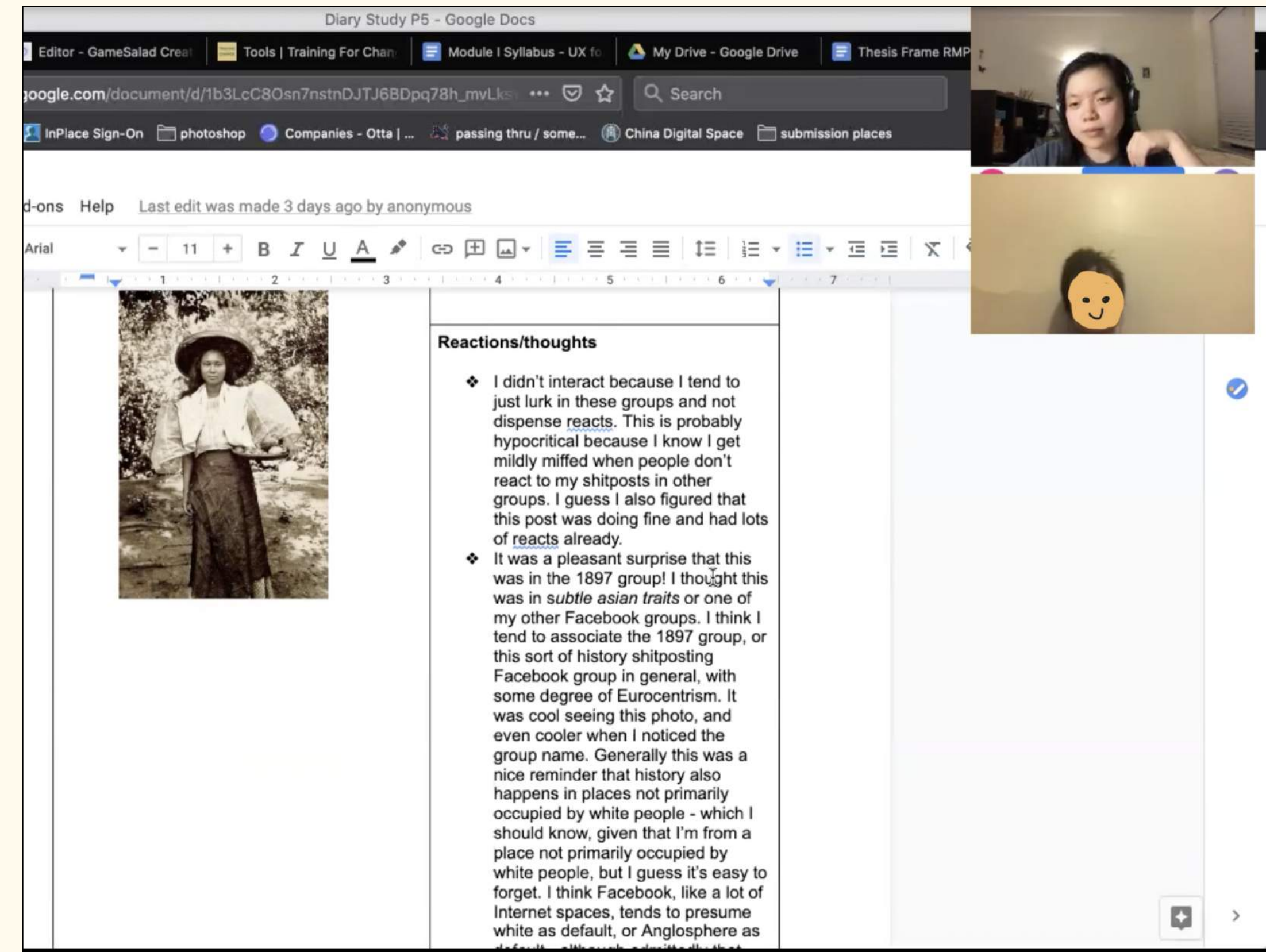
Coded data inductively 2x
to reveal patterns

Thematic analysis, inspired
by Grounded Theory

DIARY STUDY SAMPLE PAGE

REMOTE INTERVIEW (USING ZOOM)

<h2>Day 6</h2>	
<p>What have you seen from the group today?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">❖ [add screenshot]❖ Did not see anything 	<p>Did you interact? If so, what did you do?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">❖
	<p>Reactions/thoughts</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">❖
<p>Anything else:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">❖	



Diary Study P5 - Google Docs


Editor - GameSalad Creat... Tools | Training For Chan... Module | Syllabus - UX fo... My Drive - Google Drive... Thesis Frame RMP...

google.com/document/d/1b3LcC8Osn7nstnDJTJ68Dpq78h_mvLks... Search

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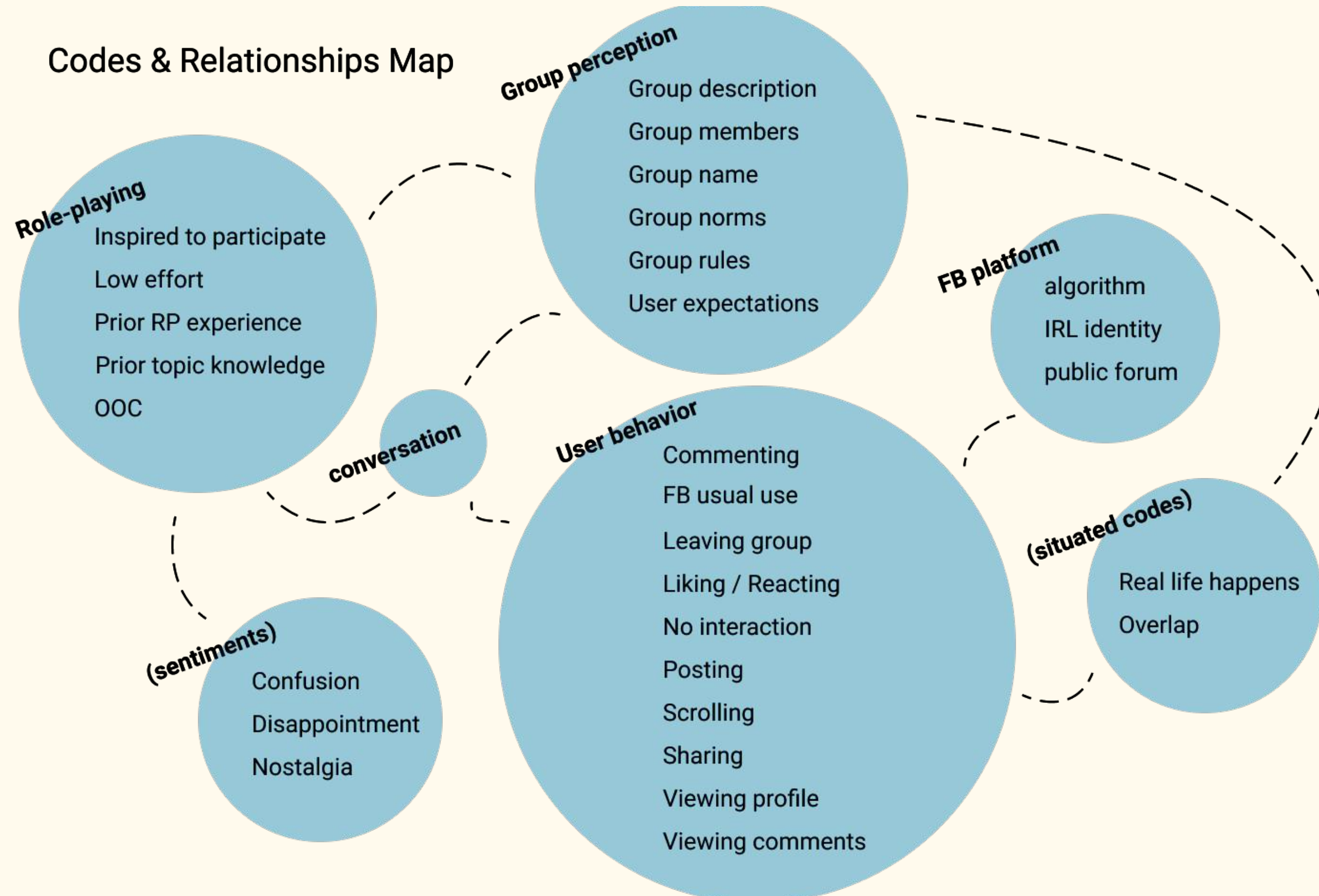
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Reactions/thoughts

- ❖ I didn't interact because I tend to just lurk in these groups and not dispense reacts. This is probably hypocritical because I know I get mildly miffed when people don't react to my shitposts in other groups. I guess I also figured that this post was doing fine and had lots of reacts already.
- ❖ It was a pleasant surprise that this was in the 1897 group! I thought this was in *subtle asian traits* or one of my other Facebook groups. I think I tend to associate the 1897 group, or this sort of history shitposting Facebook group in general, with some degree of Eurocentrism. It was cool seeing this photo, and even cooler when I noticed the group name. Generally this was a nice reminder that history also happens in places not primarily occupied by white people - which I should know, given that I'm from a place not primarily occupied by white people, but I guess it's easy to forget. I think Facebook, like a lot of Internet spaces, tends to presume white as default, or Anglosphere as

HIGH-LEVEL MAPPING OF ALL TOPICS MENTIONED/OBSERVED



Findings Highlights

- The core of the role-playing experience (and the social networking experience) is **conversation**.
- Platform design affects how the **group norms** are perceived, through explicit and community moderation, and through how Facebook's algorithm serves content.
- Members reinterpreted conversational content to suit the group purpose, but **largely perceived platform affordances as usual if they did not relate to producing conversation**.

Outcome: Principles for Satisfying “Pretend” Groups

Based on the findings, here's what makes up a satisfying group experience:

1. Promote **in-character conversation**
2. Define a **clear group purpose**
3. Encourage **distinctive norms**
4. Foster a **collective understanding of group history**

Got more questions? Talk to me! joyce.q.huang@gmail.com