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

Day 6

What have you seen from the group today?

- [add screenshot]
- Did not see anything

Did you interact? If so, what did you do?

-

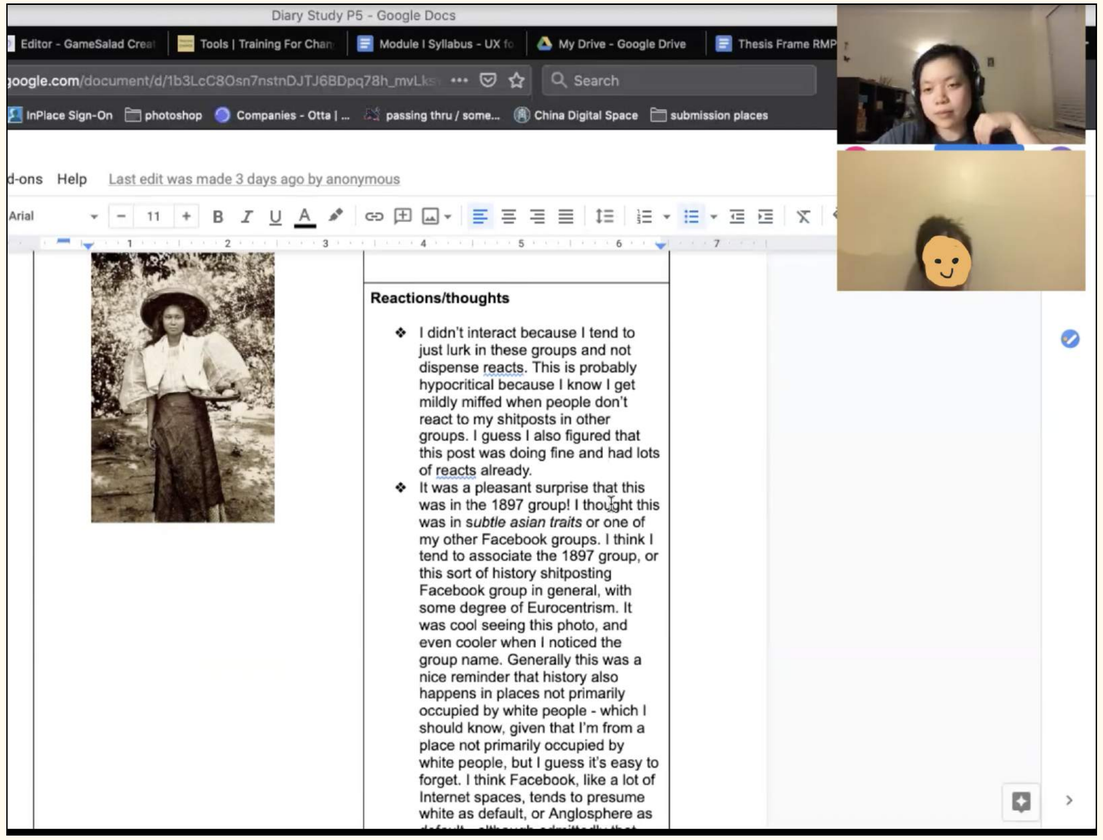
Reactions/thoughts

-

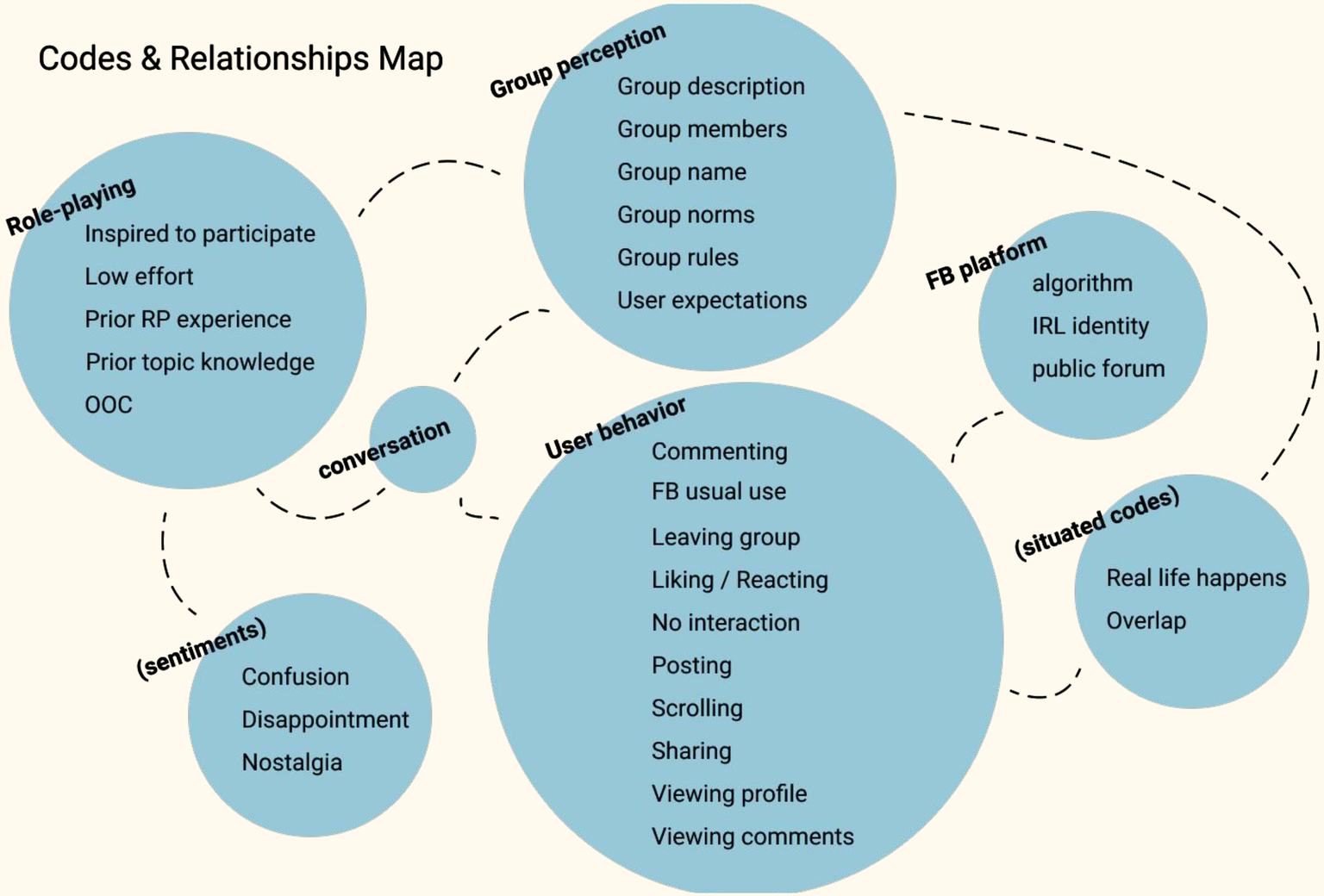
Anything else:

-

REMOTE INTERVIEW (USING ZOOM)



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**