

Uncensored Feeds and Social Advantages of Ilokano Alters on X

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ABSTRACT

The use of social networking sites such as X continues to evolve, with some individuals adopting secondary identities known as Alters. This study explores the digital space of Ilokano Alters to examine their motivations for creating alternative personas and the actions associated with them. Four Ilokano male Alters participated in nine months of observation and textual interviews, which documented their activities and achievements. The study identified six sub-themes describing their activities: teasing with nude images, posting sexual invitations, sharing other thirst-trap images, posting life updates, re-sharing adult content, and sharing motivational quotes. Collectively, these activities represent the overarching theme of uncensored feeds on X. In terms of achievements, four sub-themes emerged: self-expression, popularity, relationship building, and income generation, which together form the grand theme of social advantages. The findings suggest that social media platforms such as X can function as safe spaces for individuals who choose to perform anonymously, enabling them to construct identities, develop mental resilience, and foster social belonging--ultimately providing social advantages. These insights may be further explored across other socio-cultural demographics to deepen understanding of the emerging Alter phenomenon.

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Introduction

If there is one technological product that has revolutionized communication, it is social media. It connected people across location, time, and other boundaries. In addition, social media provides people with a platform to communicate differently. One of these is a social networking site, X. Nemes (2021) stated that this social media allows users to post and interact with messages with limited characters, known as tweets. It also shares the same features as other social media for image and video posting. Today, it is still considered one of the most popular social media

platforms Filipinos use for their communicative activities in the digital space. According to Kemp (2022), there were 10.50 million X users in the Philippines in 2022.

However, X usage has evolved. Presently, it is used by people who have adopted a second or other identity known as Alter. Castro et al. (2021) said that Alter is a community of anonymous users increasingly attracting an online audience in the Philippines. The practice of anonymity is the central concept of why an individual becomes an Alter. Moreover, Piamonte et al. (2020) discussed

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becoming an Alter using accounts distinct from those known to friends, colleagues, and relatives. These users can exhibit behaviors and thoughts considered deviant by those who know them outside of the internet. The Jakarta Post (2021) wrote in an article that the communicative act of Alters offers an escape from a society that is more judgmental of their sexual preferences, orientations, kinks, and all other things that remain taboo, even as topics of discussion. Meanwhile, Sumayao (n.d.) expounded that it might also be a form of affirmation. In addition, having an Alter account provides unabashed freedom between one's eyes and LED screens.

Generally, there are various reasons for the increasing number of Alter users on X. This may range from expressing and meeting anonymously, which earlier studies have started to explore (Aristyawati et al., 2023; Piamonte et al., 2020). However, despite the growing popularity of Alters on X, more research is needed on the specific experiences and motivations of Ilokano Alter users, a significant ethnolinguistic group in the Philippines. Ilokanos are commonly residing in the northern region of the country. Thus, this study aims to fill this gap by exploring the communicative activities and achievements of Ilokano Alters through digital ethnography. This is particularly suitable for this study as it will allow the researchers to study the Ilokano Alters in their digital space and understand their Alter culture through their activities.

Boughton (n.d.) described digital ethnography as immersion, the study of people in a real-world environment, such as the Alters in their real-world environment in their digital space on X. In addition, digital ethnography allowed the researchers to explore the perspectives of an Alter and the achievement of becoming one through an interview that would substantiate the immersion in the Alter's digital space. This paper describes the Alter phenomenon as it is practiced by the Ilokano Alters who participated in this study.

Generally, this study aimed to explore the communicative activity of becoming an Alter on X. Specifically, it answered the following questions: 1) How do Ilokano Alters act on X; and 2) What is achieved in becoming an Alter on X?

Review of Related Literature

Popularization of Alter

The easy connectivity that social media such as X provides mediates people across locations, with various reasons for such connections. It also allows people to control their identity by presenting a different person hidden behind a self-created username and discretely

presented profile photo. As described by Castillo (2021), Alter is a cyberqueer technopractice in Philippine internet culture. Adding to that, it is typically a secondary account in which the anonymous owner presents and performs an explicitly sexual(ized) gay self, as evinced in the use of nude selfies (with the subject's face always concealed) or dick pictures (or dick pics) as a profile picture and tweets charged with sexually explicit content--from provocative tweets to graphic images and videos of sexual activities. In essence, for an Alter, social media such as X provided easy access to and practice of pornography. This corroborates Paasonen (2011), who states that online networks have dramatically increased the general visibility, accessibility, and diversity of pornography. For Cao (2021), more than pornography, Alter Community is a site where Filipinos perform and validate their masculinity.

The concept of Alter on social media is usually associated with anonymity, interactions, freedom, and sex (Aristyawati et al., 2023; Attwood et al., 2017; Bukhori, 2023; Castillo, 2021; Piamonte et al., 2020). Because anonymity is central to being an Alter, according to Aristyawati et al. (2023), people can quickly build new identities on social media and express themselves within them. In their study, Piemonte et al. (2020) discussed that being an Alter on X is a tool Filipinos use not just to express and search for sexual gratification but also to make meaningful interactions. The Alter community affords these individuals a venue to express themselves without worrying about the consequences of their social lives should these accounts become known to people who know them outside of the Internet. Further, in the study of Delda et al. (2023), it was revealed that X Alter serves as a platform that enables individuals to express, explore, and reconstruct their sexual identity freely. Meanwhile, Bukhori (2023) found out that alter ego accounts on Twitter are carried out because people want to find satisfaction both sexually and emotionally.

In a nutshell, the uncensored activities of Alters on X provide various benefits to the growing community, satisfying emotional and sexual desires. This very nature of Alter culture explains the growing number of individuals becoming Alter on various social networking sites.

X (Twitter) as an Uncensored Platform

Twitter, now rebranded as X, has increasingly gained attention as a platform that balances on a fine line between promoting free speech and permitting harmful or explicit content. Research shows that Twitter's architecture inherently supports the rapid diffusion of unfiltered and often controversial discourse, contributing to

its characterization as a semi-uncensored space (Bruns & Burgess, 2015). When Elon Musk acquired Twitter, a significant reduction in moderation protocols was observed, which led to a measurable increase in hate speech, misinformation, and NSFW content (Gorwa et al., 2020). These shifts were interpreted by some as a pivot toward “free-speech absolutism,” although empirical analyses question whether the platform equally protects all forms of expression (Crawford & Gillespie, 2016).

Moreover, the decentralized approach to moderation, such as the introduction of Community Notes, reflects a crowdsourced resistance to top-down censorship, though its practical reliability remains contested (Freelon et al., 2020). Comparative studies examining censorship patterns across regions show that X still selectively moderates content depending on political or cultural pressures, especially in countries with strict regulatory frameworks (Roberts, 2019). In this context, Twitter’s ambiguous policies offer users—especially those maintaining alter identities—a digital space to circumvent traditional gatekeeping while also risking algorithmic invisibility (Klein, 2020). Some studies highlight that soft moderation strategies, like visibility reduction instead of outright deletion, contribute to an illusion of uncensored engagement (Caplan, 2018). Thus, Twitter’s hybrid model of speech governance becomes both enabling and limiting—inviting critical engagement from communities such as Ilokano alters who rely on digital opacity for cultural survival.

Benefits of Being an Alter

Alter accounts—or secondary anonymous digital identities—serve as significant avenues for psychosocial expression and cultural negotiation, especially among marginalized and regional communities. Literature on online identity performances suggests that pseudonymous spaces enable users to articulate desires, beliefs, and traumas that may otherwise be suppressed in real-life environments (Chen, 2017). In the Philippines context, alters have emerged not only as sexualized personae but also as platforms for peer support, political discourse, and creative expression (Soriano, 2022).

For Ilokano alters, the space that X provides can serve as a sanctuary for resisting conservative cultural expectations. Studies demonstrate that alter identities offer protective barriers against surveillance while enabling self-exploration, particularly for queer and nonconforming youth (Abidin, 2018). These digital spaces foster intimacy, emotional validation, and solidarity by allowing users to

curate their audiences and control exposure (Marwick & boyd, 2011). The psychological benefits of anonymity have also been linked to reduced social anxiety and improved self-concept clarity, especially among those navigating conflicting roles offline (DeAndrea, 2012). Notably, multiple studies reveal that digital alters often function as counterpublics—creating distinct online cultures that challenge mainstream norms while facilitating community building (Gray, 2009).

Research also indicates that the performative nature of these accounts can result in empowerment rather than fragmentation, enhancing users’ perceived control over their narratives (Zhao et al., 2008). Overall, alter accounts on X serve not only as anonymous havens but also as culturally embedded tools for identity formation, mental resilience, and social belonging for Ilokano users negotiating both digital and physical marginalities.

Methodology

Research Design

The study is qualitative research framed as digital ethnography. Proctor (2023) discussed how digital ethnography studies the cultural and social domains of human interaction through the internet technologies they use. This can mean studying “online” fandoms, gamer communities, and virtual worlds. Since the study aimed to explore the activities and achievements of Alter in their “real world,” digital ethnography is suitable as it will allow the researchers to make sense of how the participants present themselves in their digital space. As Kaur-Gill and Dutta (2017) mentioned, digital ethnography poses questions about the communicative phenomena taking place in a technologically mediated world. These spaces are where identities are negotiated, cultural practices are enacted, and social phenomena of various kinds are manifested, making them a worthy area for interpretation for ethnographers interested in the tradition of storytelling to understand the social world. More importantly, since the central theme of Alter is anonymity, Gleeson (2022) explained that when conducting digital ethnography, there is no one else in the room. This removes any inhibitions on the part of the participant and, once trust is established, enables the researchers to capture intimate insights that would never be possible using other research methods.

Participants of the Study

The study considered 4 (four) participants. The participants were selected based on the inclusion and exclusion criteria set by the

researchers. The inclusion criteria are as follows: (a) an Alter using X; (b) an Ilokano male Alter who is residing in Ilokano-speaking provinces; (c) Alter for at least a year; (d) 18 years of age; and (e) willing to participate in the study. The study excluded a target participant who did not meet the set inclusion criteria. Prior to finalizing the number of participants by employing the inclusion and exclusion criteria, the researchers browsed X using the hashtag #IlokanoAlter. Using the inclusion criteria, nine (9) potential participants were considered. The researchers then reached out to the potential participants through direct messaging. The potential participants were asked to confirm their residence and age; they were also requested to show proof of their claim, such as previous posts that contain such information. Six potential participants provided details on their age and residence to the researchers, while the other three

failed to confirm, resulting in their removal from the pool of potential participants. Meanwhile, the other two participants were excluded from the final number of participants due to their unresponsiveness and failure to provide consent for observation and participation in the textual interview. After strictly applying the criteria, four participants were finalized to be part of the study.

Sargeant (2021) emphasized that participant selection in qualitative research is purposeful; participants are selected who can best inform the research questions and enhance their understanding of the phenomenon under study. Furthermore, Lindlof and Taylor (2019) stated that a researchers recruit a particular person because they have had experiences vital to the research question, possess specific knowledge, or have stories to tell. The profile of the participants is shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Profile of the Participants

Participant	Address	Occupation
ALT1	Ilocos Norte	Teacher
ALT2	Ilocos Norte	Market Supervisor
ALT3	Ilocos Norte	Masseur
ALT4	Ilocos Norte	Student

Data Gathering Procedure

All the procedures used in the study were reviewed and approved by the research ethics board of a state university in the Northern Philippines. The study conducted two (2) important data-gathering procedures: observation and interview.

First, the researchers observed the participants as an Alter on X from April to December 2023. After securing the ethical clearance, the researchers, using a newly created alter account on X, searched for potential participants using the hashtag #IlokanoAlter. Using the inclusion criteria, several X Ilokano Alter users were considered part of the study. Initial communication was sent to the potential participants through X's direct messaging. The Alters who agreed to participate were then observed by the researchers twice a week by browsing the participants' X accounts. The researchers recorded all the participants' activities in a journal arranged by dates during the nine-month observation period.

During the entire data-gathering procedure, the researchers also maintain anonymity. The observation also included taking screenshots of the participants' activities on X that the researchers think are needed in describing the activities and the achievement of an Ilokano alter. This was conducted with the consent of the participants.

Ardévol and Gómez-Cruz (2014) stated that the process of observation itself involves dealing with textual and visual information displayed on the screen, such as the use of emoticons, pictures, colors, page layout, and graphic designs, as key elements of the digital interaction, as well as the interactive capabilities of the technological scripts. Meanwhile, Gleeson (2022) described digital ethnography as observing real behaviors at the moment and in multiple contexts. The participant is relaxed and safe, knowing they are in a familiar environment.

Lastly, a textual interview was conducted to know how the participants described their activities and achievements in practicing, such as becoming an Alter. It was conducted virtually through X messaging, maintaining the anonymity of the participants. Ardévol and Gómez-Cruz (2014) explained that textual interviews (especially those based on anonymity) are useful for approaching sensitive or elusive topics since they allow people to express themselves more freely. Although this will pose problems with authenticity and spontaneity, textual interviewing allows participants to put more thought into their responses. The anonymity factor may also balance the power relationship between interviewer and interviewee because the latter may feel freer to challenge researchers online than in a face--to-face

interview. Generally, according to Lindlof and Taylor (2019), interviews are well suited to understanding the social actor's experience, knowledge, and worldviews. They also enable researchers to gather information about things or processes that other means cannot effectively observe. With the consent of the participants, their answers to the textual interviews were extracted from X messaging after the interview and presented in the research text.

Data Analysis Procedure

The notes of the researchers during the observation and other research materials, such as screenshots, were analyzed. The researchers classified and refined the listed activities of the participants during the nine-month observation, finding a pattern to describe their communicative activities. As a research instrument, the researchers used what was gathered from the observation to describe and explain the activities of an Ilokano Alter. By doing so, the study was able to describe an Ilokano Alter in their real-world environment, which is the goal of digital ethnography. According to Ardévol and Gómez-Cruz (2014), during the data analysis, the role of ethnographers is to meaningfully explain the studied universe, considering the vernacular categories of their research subjects (emic) and developing theoretical frameworks that help to organize them (etic), so that they can bring some light to their research questions. It means to displace the researchers from their vernacular categories, even when these may be largely shared with their correspondents in the field.

Meanwhile, the transcript of the textual interview was subjected to thematic analysis to search for themes to explain the reasons for their actions further, as well as their achievements in practicing them. Braun and Clarke (2006) discussed thematic analysis as a strategy for distinguishing, dissecting, and announcing designs (subjects) within information. The research text also presented actual quotes from the participants to describe the themes that emerged as answers to the research questions. The participants gave consent to the use of their answers in the interview.

Plausibility of Findings

To ensure plausibility, the initial results were presented to the participants to check their agreement or disagreement with the researchers' realistically presented practices. Only after that did the participants approve the research text, and then the final research text was prepared.

Results and Discussions

Ilokano Alter activities on X

Following the concept of digital ethnography, the researchers were immersed in the real world of Alters in X space. The observation lasted for nine (9) months. From the observation, it was revealed that the participants consistently engaged in the following activities: (1) teasing with naked images; (2) posting sexual invitations; (3) posting other thirst trap images; (4) posting life updates; (5) re-sharing of adult content; and (6) sharing motivational quotes.

Teasing with Naked Images. The observation revealed that the participants were consistently posting their naked pictures. This is the most common material that the participants are posting to their X space. Commonly, naked images posted by the participants show it all, but with their ways of hiding parts of their bodies, their identity is hidden. In some of the images uploaded, a participant shows his fully erected penis. Still, his face is covered with an emoji, while another participant hid his face by doing a mirror selfie with his phone covering his face, but his penis is completely shown. In addition to their naked image, participants usually include an enticing caption.

The Alter World allows the participants to publish anything, such as their naked images. This implies that the participants trust their digital world on X as a safe space for them to show everything, as they are hiding their identity. They, as an Alter, show courage and confidence to act without limitation or judgment by the public. Alters might act in such a way for various reasons. It can be an act for them to feel "likable" to satisfy their desire to gain more followers. More followers will give them more chances of achieving their goal of being an Alter, be it to be known or earn. It can also be a way to be "marketable" to the participants who are monetizing by engaging in sex-related works, as Alter on X.

This is comparable to the study of Wang and Ding (2022) on the sexual use of Twitter in China, describing X as one of the mainstream platforms that provide underrepresented groups with unique opportunities in the erotic economy. In fact, studies on X emphasizes that its semi-uncensored policies, particularly the reliance on soft moderation tools such as content warnings instead of outright deletion, create conditions where nudity and NSFW content can circulate widely without immediate sanction (Bruns & Burgess, 2015; Caplan, 2018). This uncensored environment helps explain why Ilokano Alters feel emboldened to post such images as part of their digital presence. Hence, Alter enjoys doing their activities on X, as they have a less strict policy on

posting naked images. Robertson (2022) explained that the X feature that lets users obscure individual photos and videos behind warnings for nudity, violence, and sensitive content rather than adding a blanket warning to all multimedia tweets can be the reason why posting and accessing naked images is popularized.

The leniency of social media platforms regarding erotic content signifies a need for a strict review and implementation of platform policies and governance on these platforms. Posting naked images among Alters can be culture itself in their community, regardless of where they are or to what ethnolinguistic group, such as Ilokano, they belong. While it might not be unique from one Alter group to another, it is a constant activity that Alter does to satisfy their reasons for becoming one. In sum, since X is a platform for expressing feelings, this social media allows users to post anything if it does not violate the rules.

Posting Sexual Invitations. The observation also revealed that the participants are consistently posting sexual invitations. This includes posting exact locations and looking for possible partner or partners for “side fun.” Another participant, also posted invitation asking followers send direct messages (DM) for “booking.”

This implies that to some Alters, their presence in the X space is an opportunity to advertise their feelings and likings with the hope that others in the Alter world can fulfill their gratification. This is comparable to the findings of Piamonte et al. (2020), who stated that in terms of sexual functions, Twitter’s accessibility is beneficial for the efficient satiation of Alter’s sexual desires, be it by oneself, in partnership with a partner, or more. Consistent with this, research shows that X enables the rapid diffusion of unfiltered invitations and solicitations due to its weak enforcement of sexual content restrictions, allowing these practices to thrive despite nominal platform rules (Gorwa et al., 2020). Furthermore, the anonymity afforded by alter accounts reduces social anxiety and emboldens users to pursue sexual connections that might otherwise be repressed in their conservative offline environments (Chen, 2017; DeAndrea, 2012).

As observed by the activities of the participants, they are maximizing the platform for a variety of purposes, such as meeting people and expanding networks. Posting sexual invitations, according to some of the participants, is one important activity to realize their goal of possibly meeting someone who can not only fulfill their sexual desire but can also share a face-to-face relationship. In a situation of modality switching where dating moves from online to offline, Twitter can also act as a conduit for these people to take their ongoing interactions offline, particularly for

those who are looking for relationships (Hallam et al., 2019).

Posting Other Thirst Trap Pictures. The conduct of digital ethnography also revealed that aside from nude images, the participants are also regularly posting thirst trap pictures to entice their followers. Fabello (2020) described the thirst trap as a clear communication of desire but still coy enough to feel light and fun. Noonan (2021) added that it is any provocative post that intends to entice an array of compliments, praise, or obsessions. Some of the images posted by the participants, shows a part of their body in various poses and are commonly taken while an Alter is either in a public or personal space.

Participant ALT3 explained that he is uploading thirst trap pictures for various reasons, including earning profit. According to him, the thirst trap attracts attention; he added: “Upon seeing my nude photos, my followers would then be interested and ask me about the services that I offer. It’s a win-win situation. So, the more that I post nude pictures, the higher the engagement, therefore the more possibilities of people booking me for a service.” This is comparable to the statement of Theodorou, as reported by Isador (2017): thirst trapping on social media is like selling oneself as a brand that will draw attention, followers, and likes.

Meanwhile, for some participants, posting thirst traps is a way to showcase themselves as a means for their account engagement. Users often analyze these engagement metrics to gauge the success and impact of their posts. High engagement can indicate that they are resonating well with the audience, while low engagement may prompt a reassessment of the content strategy. Strategies to increase engagement often involve creating compelling and relevant content, participating in conversations, and understanding the interests of the target audience. In this way, according to some of the participants, they can maintain their relevance as active Alter accounts in the X space. As Noonan (2021) expressed, thirst traps are an inevitable byproduct of social media—they came about because of the innate need for validation as humans. From a broader perspective, thirst traps also exemplify how alters perform digital identities as a form of empowerment and branding. Studies argue that alter accounts act as performative counter publics, where practices like thirst trapping serve not only to seek validation but also to resist mainstream norms and build community (Gray, 2009; Zhao et al., 2008).

Posting Life Updates. The conduct of digital ethnography revealed that aside from sexy content and posts, the participants are also using their X space to share their life updates. This may include their relationship status and even slightly

sharing their professional experiences. This implies that even as Alters, the participants cannot easily detach their personalities from the digital space. They store their true personalities as content in their alternative world. This also implies that while Alter accounts are known for sex-related content, they can still be a platform where Alter can engage differently with their followers. This proves that nonsexual activities can also be strategically used by Alters in digital space to motivate and inspire. Additionally, the participants, who are all men, tend to use their Alter accounts to share their tales. Relating to men, Sifferlin (2014) stated that social media is creating a haven for some men to express themselves online in ways they do not do in person.

It is observed ethnographically that the X space of the participants is seen to be their space for anything that they want to share with the world. The participants are confident because of their anonymity. However, a participant shared that when posting anything, especially for life updates, he is cautious, as some might find a hint to relate this to him. Hence, while the participants are actively sharing life updates, they are conscious of the fact that there might be followers who can identify them based on their posts about their life updates. This is supported by Carver (2023), who stated that it is possible to share personal stories on social media while protecting intimate details of a relationship or situation. This activity aligns with findings that alter accounts are not solely about sexual expression but also about identity negotiation and intimacy-building. Research suggests that anonymity provides psychological safety for users to explore multiple facets of themselves, balancing hidden and authentic identities (DeAndrea, 2012; Marwick & Boyd, 2011).

Retweeting of Adult Content. The conduct of digital ethnography revealed that the Ilokano Alters are regularly retweeting adult content. According to some participants, they are retweeting adult content to show support to fellow Alters who are producing the content. This is supported by Mendoza (2023), who found out that Alters who repost are showing compliments to the creators. However, an Alter Ilokano is retweeting if he likes the video so that his followers will also be able to watch. Such an act, according to him, is hard to do personally, Alter or not. As Marsili (2021) discussed, it is hard to deny that social media platforms also allow users to perform communicative actions that they would not be able to perform in ordinary offline communication: for instance, to like or react to a post, to share it, or to retweet it.

Meanwhile, participant ALT1 added: "Retweeting can benefit your followers and help

build a relationship with the original poster. People who post and repost effectively can build a following of millions of people." Retweeting causes a ripple effect; when Alter retweets, it can make a post visible around the Alter world in a very short amount of time, resulting in increased engagement. Retweeting, as described by TweetEraser (2023), is one of the most basic activities one can perform on a social media platform. Sexual content on Twitter can be retweeted for a variety of reasons, and people may have distinct motives for doing so. When sharing content, they deem instructive or educational, some users may retweet sexual content out of genuine curiosity or interest in the subject. Retweeting sexual content is a useful tactic for those in the adult business, such as performers and content providers, to promote their own or other people's work. Users have also been known to retweet explicit content that they value aesthetically or artistically. They might value the artistic or visual elements of such material. Reynolds (2022) stated that adult content is one of the fastest-growing subgenres of content for users of Twitter, according to internal documents obtained by Reuters. The documents estimate that 13% of all Twitter posts are now not safe for work content media, such as nude videos, pornography, and explicit photos.

The retweeting of adult content is already a staple of content that Alter posts in their X space. X is one of the social networking sites with a less-strict, more liberal policy of posting adult content, contributing to the rise of online pornography (Cao, 2021; Paasonen, 2011; Wang & Ding, 2022). Additionally, this aligns with broader scholarship emphasizing that X's semi-uncensored architecture amplifies NSFW materials by design, making retweeting a key practice in sustaining alter networks and erotic economies (Roberts, 2019; Reynolds, 2022). For the participants, "retweeting" of adult contents is a manifestation that they participate in making online pornography accessible to their uncensored feed.

Sharing Motivational Quotes. The observation revealed that the participants are consistently sharing motivational quotes. They usually share in between the other types of materials they are sharing in their online space. Commonly, this motivational quote also talks about God. The participants utilized inspirational quotes as part of their branding, such as from public figures, influencers, and companies. This can be a unique characteristic of Ilokano Alters of not only focusing on sexual content but maintaining their personal beliefs even when acting anonymously. It aids in their positioning as inspirational and upbeat figures. It may be a way for them to express themselves in a way that speaks

to their own experiences and convictions and sheds light on their morals and personalities. Furthermore, positive sayings frequently get a lot of likes, shares, and comments. Engaging with others can boost one's visibility and following, which makes it a useful tactic for expanding Alter's profile.

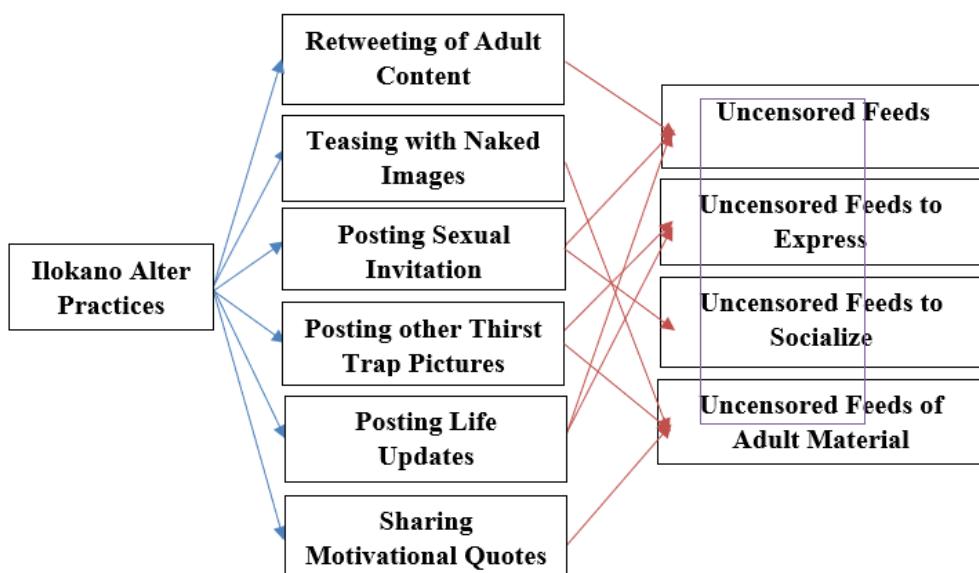
Participant ALT3 explained that he is posting because social media sites such as X have emerged as important forums for the exchange of ideas, knowledge, and inspiration. Motivational quotes have grown in popularity to encourage people to be positive and motivated. Such a statement from the participant explained that activities on Alter accounts are not only confined to sexually related activities. Alters have their way of giving inspiration through posting motivational quotes. According to Selzer (2003) and Tumasang (2022), motivational quotes, when well-crafted, can have a significant and lasting impact on how people think, which can help to recognize the importance of sometimes underappreciated things. While this activity makes Alter inconsistent with their sexual branding, their sharing of motivational quotes only proves that they have dual identities

and that their digital space is somewhat representing or sharing a glimpse of their hidden identities. In relation to this, studies on alters highlight that these accounts function as counter publics where users engage not just in sexual expression but also in identity-building, emotional validation, and cultural resilience (Gray, 2009; Soriano, 2022). Thus, the posting of motivational content illustrates how Ilokano Alters use their anonymous platforms to balance vulnerability with empowerment.

Uncensored Feeds on X

The observation of the participants' digital world revealed five (5) activities that they are regularly performing as Alters, including: (1) retweeting of adult content; (2) teasing with naked images; (3) posting sexual invitations; (4) posting other thirst trap images; (5) posting life updates; and (6) sharing motivational quotes. By connecting these activities, the ethnographer concluded to present a grand theme that describes the entirety of the activities of Ilokano Alters on X as Uncensored Feed. The conceptual connection is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Conceptual Connections of Ilokano Alter Activities



As shown in the figure, all the activities by Ilokano Alters on their feed on X can be described as uncensored. As Alters, the participants maintain their anonymity while using their Alter accounts. Thus, they have confidence in showing and doing anything as Alter. They act uncensored in their feed by posting personal tales through motivational quotes and life updates. As Alters, they are not afraid to share a piece of their personality with their feed on X. The way they express themselves is uncensored, as any content can be shared by them without thinking of being judged by society or non-

adherence to laws and regulations, such as posting nude images, thirst traps, and retweeting adult content.

This aligns with research noting that X operates under a semi-uncensored architecture where sexual and NSFW content is permitted with minimal moderation, relying mostly on content warnings instead of outright bans (Bruns & Burgess, 2015; Caplan, 2018). Such platform affordances create a space where Alters can cultivate expressive freedom without the fear of immediate censorship. The way they socialize on

their feed is also uncensored, as the content of the invitation is sexually enticing. The participants' uncensored acts on their feed can be multi-factor, but the concept of anonymity in the Alter phenomenon is the constant reason that cannot be detached. The participants' anonymity allows them to perform different communicative activities without control or limitation.

Thus, uncensored feeds can be associated with participants having freedom. As participant ALT3 shared: "*Walang limitation sa pwedeng gawin at i-post, walang control kaya may freedom ako sa account ko na ito.*" [There is no limitation on what to do and what to post. There is no control because there is freedom from this account.] He added: "*Nagagawa ko ang lahat ng gusto ko na hindi iniisip ang sasabihin ng iba. Para kanyak daytoy ket maysa a lugar a maubrak ken maipakitak ti amin a pakaragsakak.*" [I can do everything without thinking about what other people would say. This is a place where I can do and show everything that will make me happy.] From another perspective, the uncensored feed is not merely a function of anonymity but also reflects the benefits of being an Alter. Studies emphasize that alter accounts provide psychological release, a sense of belonging, and opportunities for economic and social capital (Soriano, 2022; Wang & Ding, 2022). By being "uncensored," Alters can manage dual identities, explore suppressed aspects of selfhood, and gain validation from peers who share similar practices. This suggests that the uncensored feed is not only about sexual expression but also about empowerment and resilience in navigating restrictive offline cultures.

In sum, the uncensored feed of the participants can be considered one significant reason why Alter is continuously practiced on various social media platforms. In a world that is easily judged, an alternative world such as X can serve many people in various ways. Ethnographically, uncensored feed is the very culture that the practice of the Alter phenomenon is all about. A digital culture that can be freely practiced fulfilling personal satisfaction in various ways. While it is not perfect and is disadvantageous in numerous aspects, for the participants, it is a territory that can let them practice freedom. Thus, the notion of "uncensored feeds" encapsulates both the structural affordances of X as a platform and the individual benefits Alters derive from participating in such spaces.

Achievements of Ilokano Alters on X

The ethnographic data obtained from the textual interview was analyzed using the Lindlof and Taylor (2019) method of coding, categorizing, and interpreting. The conduct of thematic analysis revealed various themes that explain what the participants achieve in becoming an Alter. As

deduced from the data, the participants identified the following as their achievements: (1) expression; (2) popularity; (3) establishing relationships; and (4) income generation. Furthermore, the reasons for the participants' achievements are also discussed in this section.

Expression. As a result of thematic analysis, expression emerged as one of the achievements of the Ilokano Alters. Having an Alter account provides them with a platform to freely express themselves without thinking of social judgments. Alter accounts are used to hide identities. It uncovers how the participants utilize alter egos and incognito identities to participate in social and political concerns and permits them to freely express who they are. The online disinhibition effect (Suler 2004), which postulates that people behave differently online than they would offline in part due to less inhibition and improved anonymity, can be used to explain how Alter is being perpetuated. Discussions on subjects that are typically seen as potentially abnormal, such as those related to sexual activity, are more welcome in online communities, such as Alter. Alter serves as a free space where an Alter can investigate his hobbies and identities without giving up on the everyday limitations of existence.

This is further explained by participant ALT3: "At first, I was anxious because I didn't know how the followers would react. I got bashed and attacked in so many ways, so it made my morale go rock bottom, but when I had learned to play the game in the Alter world, I only focused my attention on the things that helped me financially and emotionally." Meanwhile, participant ALT2 added: "*Happy, kasi dun mo pinapakita yung dimo kayang ipakita sa mga taong kilala ka. Exciting kasi may mga taong gusto kang mameet at marami kang nakakausap na iba't ibang tao na same lang din kayo ng mga gusto.*" [I am happy being an Alter because I show my other side that I cannot show to those who know me. It is also exciting because it allows me to meet and engage in conversation with different people.] It is therefore evident that through the answers of the participants, X served as a platform for the participants to freely share and express their feelings, thoughts, and inner selves.

In their work cited by Orehek and Human (2017), Inglehart and Oyserman noted that self-expression values have significantly increased among younger generations over the past four decades. It is noteworthy that while these values are on the rise, the means through which they are expressed are evolving, particularly with the surge in the usage of social media platforms. This raises crucial inquiries regarding individuals' ability to effectively convey themselves in such settings. Twitter, for instance, may serve as an optimal platform for shaping positive perceptions, as it

grants individuals substantial control over how they present themselves, a factor known to cultivate more favorable impressions. Furthermore, as highlighted by Wilcox (2018), millions of teenagers engage in daily sharing, thereby establishing a platform for self-expression and the exchange of intriguing information. Despite its initial purpose of fostering enjoyment and facilitating connections, social media offers a space for self-expression and interpersonal interaction.

In conclusion, as expressed by the participants, becoming an Alter means having the ability to express without limitations. This is one significant achievement that the participants mentioned. As an Alter, the participants value their platform to act and engage freely without having to think about social judgments. As Nemes III (2021) shared, the Twitterverse used by Alters has become a venue for others to do the things that they want outside the four walls of their house and school.

Popularity. The conduct of the thematic analysis allowed popularity to emerge as one of the achievements of becoming an Alter. As shared by the participants, they like the idea to be noticed and become well-known. An achievement that, according to them, might be hard to achieve in the real world. This is supported by Lagumbay and Solaba (2023), who express that the personas that the community members (Alter community) establish here are often bolder than their real-life selves. For ALT1 and ALT2, becoming popular is their primary motivation for becoming an Alter. Popularity is easily achieved, especially when the contents are sexual, as shared by the participants.

While many users post different kinds of content to get followers, some users publish explicit stuff to draw attention. Because sexual content is naturally appealing and can lead to interaction, posting it is one way to accomplish this goal. Posting explicit material can be a useful tactic to grab attention and generate buzz. As Piamonte et al. (2020) stated, posting anything that is sexual on Twitter can attract followers, which, in turn, increases an account holder's popularity. This is gauged through the number of retweets that one's tweets receive and, more importantly, the number of followers that one's Alter account accumulates.

To conclude, popularity as an achievement, according to the participants, is a motivational factor for becoming an Alter. The participants believed that maintaining their anonymity in the digital space would allow them to act freely, including actions that could make them popular. Achieving popularity as shared by one participant even in the digital space is something he can be proud of, noting that such is hardly achieved in a society that values social class and looks like a common basis for giving attention.

Citing Porras, Nemes III (2021) stated that society is to blame as to why some people are forced into creating a second or an Alter account on social media platforms, such as Twitter.

Establishing Relationships. It was also revealed that the participants consider establishing relationships as their achievement in becoming Alters. The participants shared that they interact with and create relationships with some of their followers on Twitter. Commonly, according to the participants, online interaction is the start of establishing relationships, such as those offline through meetups, hookups, and casual meetings, among others. This implies that Ilokano Alters, even acting anonymously on X, has the guts to establish relationships outside X. As participant Strawberry stated, some Alters are brave in meetups as they already have mutual understanding that can be associated with the unwritten rules of Alters to protect the identity of one another. As The Jakarta Post (2021) reported, Twitter Alters can take advantage of the anonymity of the internet to become an alternative version of themselves without caring about societal mores, thus creating a safe space for adults who want to meet others and look at each other's intimate pictures, which many believe will lead to more.

Such a scenario is shared by participant ALT2, who states that through being an Alter, he was able to find friends and, at some point, a partner. But for participant ALT3, while being an Alter is a good platform for establishing relationships with others, the challenge is giving trust. Note that it can be hard to trust someone who knows that you are acting anonymously. Lagumbay and Solaba (2023) pointed out that the literature on Alter Twitter explains that communicating with another person as Alter is a painstaking process because of the distrust inherent in anonymity. To resolve this issue, the first step to creating relationships in the Alter world is by slowly building up trust and mutual understanding between communicating users. Once rapport is established, they then exchange personal information such as phone numbers or Facebook Messenger names. According to some participants, this is usually what is happening. However, not all established relationships on Twitter can last for a long time, as shared by some participants.

A participant also shared that a professional relationship was established with someone he met on Twitter. Another participant shared that he found comfort in someone he met on Twitter.

In sum, participants have offered a variety of reasons, both sexual and nonsexual, for their activities as Alters. But what is clear, according to the participants, is that they were able to establish relationships regardless of initially being

anonymous to one another. As Cohn (n.d.) stated, Twitter can be used effectively and produce a great deal of positive results, such as establishing relationships.

Income Generation. Thematic analysis also revealed that one achievement of becoming an Alter is income generation. The ethnographic data from the participants explained that Alters are using their accounts to earn income through various means. The participant, ALT3, is active in his account to advertise the service he is offering to earn income. He shared: "Many things are achieved by being an Alter. It provides a platform for desperate people like me to have a source of income by promoting the massage service that I am offering."

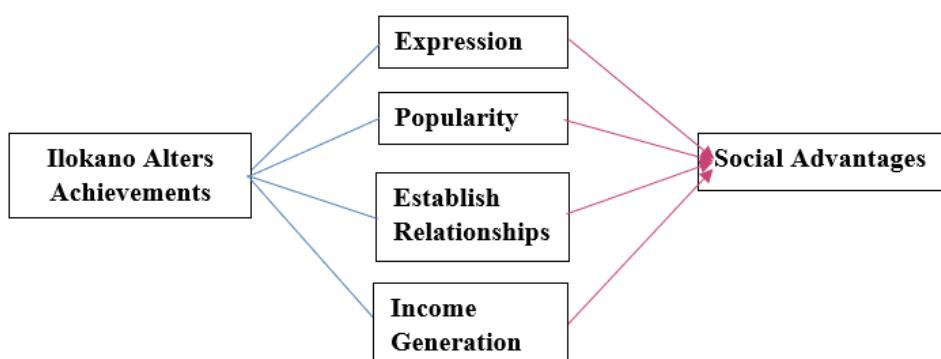
Participant ALT4 is using his Alter account to advertise and find possible customers as he is offering various sex-related services. Such an Alter is categorized by Piamonte et al. (2021) as For Pay Alter. Accordingly, they can be characterized by their engagement in monetary transactions. The commodity being exchanged for money varies. It may range from pictures in various stages of undress, self-gratification videos, and personal sex videos where such contents are offered via different means, such as Onlyfans.com or Google Drive. Others also offer massages, either purely massages or massages with sexual activity involved. The phrases "For hire" or "Not for free"

indicate that the person exchanges sex services for money. For Lagumbay and Solaba (2023), income generation is a reality for some Alters. Adding to that, the duality of being an Alter and a normal person emerges out of necessity--a product of repression. Whether it is poverty or gender discrimination, the members of the Alter community are victims of suffocating inequalities and bigotry in the real world. No space, whether it is in the online or offline world, allows them to be a whole being. Thus, they settle for dividing themselves into varying personas in equally stigmatizing spaces. For some participants, it is another way to earn income for survival. However, to one participant, being an Alter is not sex work; it is simply a platform to be free.

Social Advantages as an Achievement of Alters

The conduct of the thematic analysis revealed four (4) activities that the participants consider their achievements in becoming Alters; these include: (1) freedom to express; (2) popularity; (3) establishing relationships; and (4) income generation. By connecting the identified achievements, the ethnographer concluded to present a grand theme that explains what is achieved in becoming an Alter as a Social Advantage. The conceptual connection is shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Conceptual Connections of Achievements of Becoming Alters



The figure shows that the four (4) identified achievements of the participants all lead to the construct of Social Advantage. This means that the participants enjoy a social advantage by having the freedom to express anything on their platform, it is a social advantage as other social media users who are not anonymous cannot do the same. It is an advantage on the part of the participants that they have the freedom to show anything using their alternative personas. This resonates with research on X as a semi-uncensored platform, where soft moderation strategies and

tolerance of explicit content provide Alters with unique opportunities to bypass conventional restrictions on self-expression (Bruns & Burgess, 2015; Caplan, 2018). Gaining popularity is another social advantage, according to the participants. Being popular means having the advantage on social media platforms of having many followers and engagements, which can make an Alter achieve more compared to other regular Twitter users. It is also a social advantage for the Alters to easily establish relationships that can fulfill both their personal and social gratifications.

As Alters, the participants mentioned that it is easier for them to socialize with others if they are acting as Alters. Hence, they achieved social advantage through socializing despite acting anonymously. As participant ALT3 expressed, having an Alter account is advantageous to him as it is a confirmation of his existence. Finally, having an Alter account, according to some participants, is a social advantage because they can earn income to support their needs. Acting anonymously on Twitter allows them to engage in activities to earn income. As participant ALT3 shared, such cannot be done in the real world: "I don't get them easily and every day from the real world, so for me, it's becoming an important part of my life. It is advantageous to me as it pushes me to keep going amidst all the negativity and chaotic world that we live in." These experiences are consistent with studies highlighting the benefits of being an Alter, which include gaining emotional validation, exploring suppressed identities, and leveraging digital presence for economic or social capital (Chen, 2017; Soriano, 2022; Abidin, 2018). Such benefits demonstrate that the participants' sense of achievement extends beyond mere online performance, becoming tied to broader psychosocial resilience and self-affirmation.

It is evident from the ethnographic data that the achievement of participants in becoming Alters is having a social advantage to fulfill their personal and social gratification. They consider being an Alter an advantage, as they are free from judgment regardless of what they are doing in their alternative worlds. Hence, they are expanding what they can do in the digital space that is commonly confined to socialization. In this sense, the achievements described by the participants mirror what scholars identify as the empowering functions of alter identities: facilitating community-building, managing multiple selves, and resisting offline cultural constraints (Gray, 2009; Zhao et al., 2008).

To be an Alter, based on the participants, goes beyond socialization. It provides them with various opportunities, such as earning income and achieving popularity, allowing them to be a better person. Social advantage as the participants' achievement in becoming Alters is a remarkable start in embracing their real persona. While having social advantage is an achievement for an Alter, this cannot guarantee the same if they use their true identities. Also, the same social advantage cannot also be enjoyed by some non-anonymous users on social media who are discrete and reserved with their social media activities. In essence, having a social advantage is a significant achievement for Alters because they benefit regardless of whether they hide or act out their identities. Thus, the participants' accounts illustrate how the

uncensored affordances of X intersect with the psychosocial benefits of alter identities, producing concrete social advantages that sustain the Alter phenomenon.

Conclusion

The digital ethnography conducted in this study has revealed intriguing insights into the phenomenon of Ilokano Alters within the Xverse digital space. Participants collectively exhibited authenticity in their Alter personas, leading to an uncensored digital feed where they felt free from societal judgment. This anonymity afforded by Alter identities enabled participants to engage in a wide range of activities, both sexual and non-sexual, without fear of repercussion, ultimately providing them with a sense of social advantage and fulfillment.

The grand theme of achievement among the participants underscores the significant opportunities that being an Alter offers for personal and social gratification. However, despite their anonymity, their achievements remain noteworthy and indicative of the potential inherent in Alter identities.

This study highlights the unexplored potential of Ilokano Alters as a rich area for further exploration within communication studies. As the research unfolded, several avenues for future studies emerged. Firstly, future research should delve deeper into the dynamics of Alter activities to gain a more comprehensive understanding of this phenomenon. While this study provided valuable insights, a more extensive exploration could reveal additional layers of complexity. Secondly, there is a need to expand the scope of inquiry regarding the achievements resulting from Alter activities. While this study touched upon notable achievements, further research could provide a more nuanced understanding of the impact and implications of these achievements on the participants and their communities. Given the time constraints that limited the inclusion of only four male participants in this study, future research should aim to include a more diverse sample, encompassing participants of different demographics, including female Alters. Exploring the perspectives of female Alters could offer unique insights and expand understanding of the Alter phenomenon.

As mentioned earlier, the study only considered four participants, limiting the generalizability of the findings. However, the result can serve as a lens for understanding the Alter phenomenon, which is subjective to the participants. The interpretation is also limited to the researchers' understanding and interpretation

of the participants' digital space. Hence, it is also recommended that future research include more mechanisms to mitigate biases that may occur along the way.

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