

“Retweet for More”

The Serialization of Porn on the Twitter Alter Community

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Abstract

This article examines the notion of seriality in the context of the Filipino alter community, a network of Twitter users producing, distributing, and consuming pornographic images. The alter community is prominent among Filipino gay men who satisfy their need for sexual arousal, collective identity, and validation of their sexuality. Seriality is influenced by technological features and affordances of a media platform. In the case of Twitter, the platform’s short form media formats and real-time content generation fosters a particular kind of seriality. This essay analyzes data from online observations, content analysis of tweets and profiles, and interviews and is informed by theories on seriality, gay sexuality, and Internet studies. In situating seriality within the context of gay amateur porn economy, this article argues that serial pornography is instrumental in satisfying both present and long-standing affective, sexual, and social needs of gay men. These needs, this essay claims, stem from long history of minoritization of homosexuality. As Twitter renders older tweets ephemeral and quantifies social engagement, seriality enables gay men to satisfy the aforementioned needs longer. Furthermore, this essay proposes that serial porn on Twitter brings new insights to how seriality is conceived. Serial porn images are strategically and carefully constructed narratives of sexual encounters aimed at garnering higher social engagement and validation. Thus, serial narratives can resolve present and urgent affective tensions and needs that unravel within an ongoing life narrative rather than working toward supporting a plausible ending, as seen in other serial forms. This article

contributes to an understanding of how pornographic images and serial narratives fit into consumerist culture and how platforms exploit long-standing affective needs of sexual minorities to ensure extended production and consumption of contents.

Keywords: Seriality, Serial porn, Gay pornography, Twitter, Alter community

Introduction

In late 2020, a Filipino gay pornographer named Anton (not his actual name) tweeted, “You want to see me getting fucked by this hot and muscular athlete? Follow me and retweet for more.”¹ After a few days, the tweet did not go past his target of two hundred retweets, and he claimed he did not garner enough followers. In a tell-all thread, Anton narrated how he is tired of feeling embarrassed because he was “begging” his followers to like and retweet his porn videos. In his last tweet, he thanked his followers and bid goodbye to the alter community. I tried returning to his profile after three days to get screenshots of this and to see how his farewell fared with his followers. Unfortunately, it seems that he deactivated (if not outright deleted) his account. Meanwhile, other pornographers in the alter community do not ask for retweets and more followers. Instead, they simply release portions of their recorded sex videos in a series of tweets and wait until they get more followers. In the words of Gabriel (not his real name), who has more than ninety thousand followers, he lets his porn videos do the work of increasing his followers.² Gabriel’s Twitter feed is an assemblage of porn videos, narratives of everyday life, stories of sexual encounters, and musings about his romantic desires.

1. Translated from Tagalog. Tweet retrieved on July 20, 2021.

2. Personal communication with the author, October 29, 2019.

In both ways, pornographers weave written narratives about sexual pleasure and their sexuality on Twitter, writing details about themselves and their sex partners in each porn video as if they are characters in serial newspaper columns or television shows. Unlike amateur pornographic videos that generally do not have fully detailed characters and narrative or recognizable settings, amateur porn in the alter community has developed characters, narratives, and settings that unfold over time.³ Once attacked by cultural critics as being shallow and offensive to women, porn has developed, serving different functions and assuming different forms thanks to advances in digital and online technologies.⁴ Sex, if used in storytelling or as a storytelling device, stirs emotions and fantasies, and this enriches our understanding of sexuality and its relationship with digital media.⁵ However, despite the emancipatory potentials of the Internet, networked publics and digital media can also subject sexual minorities to conditions that reinforce their minoritization.⁶ The Internet is a vital site where sexual minorities seek validation, approval, or a sense of belonging, and how these things are metrified and quantified by social media platforms may have significant impacts on why and how sexual minorities conduct their online activities.⁷ Twitter, for example, shows the number of hearts and retweets and how

3. John Mercer, *Gay Pornography: Representations of Sexuality and Masculinity* (London and New York: I. B. Tauris, 2017), 183–85. Ruepert Jiel Dionisio Cao, “Amateur porn in Filipino Twitter Alter Community: Affordances, commodification, ghettoization, and gay masculinity,” *Media International Australia* 179, no. 1 (2021): 57–60; Ruepert Jiel Dionisio Cao, “Primitive Aesthetics in Twitter Porn in Filipino Alter Community,” *Synoptique: An Online Journal of Film and Moving Image* 9, no. 2 (2021): 130.

4. Feona Attwood, “Introduction: Porn Studies: From Social Problem to Cultural Practice,” in *Porn.com: Making Sense of Online Pornography*, ed. Feona Attwood (New York: Peter Lang, 2010), 1.

5. Lindsay Coleman, “Introduction,” in *Sex and Storytelling in Modern Cinema: Explicit Sex, Performance and Cinematic Technique*, ed. Lindsay Coleman (London and New York: I. B. Tauris, 2016), 3.

6. Mike Grimshaw, “Digital Society and Capitalism,” *Palgrave Communications* 3, no. 1 (November 2017): 1.

7. Carolin Gerlitz and Anne Helmond, “The Like Economy: Social Buttons and the Data-Intensive Web,” *New Media & Society* 15, no. 8 (December 2013): 1358.

many followers one has. To achieve higher numbers that represent social ties, attention, or validation, one has to work or perform labor, and online platforms encourage frequent production and consumption of contents through their design and algorithms.

Even pornography, which has recently been more ubiquitous in different social media sites such as Twitter, has assumed various forms. Apart from the usual porn videos that last around twenty to thirty minutes, there are also livestream pornographic shows, GIF porn, and short porn clips on Twitter.⁸ These porn formats are shaped by the affordances of the platform that hosts them, and these formats may give rise to other functions of pornography. On Twitter, for example, amateur pornography can be serialized to resemble a full-length porn video that covers foreplay until ejaculation. This paper follows this notion and investigates the serialization of porn on the Twitter alter community, a collective of Filipino gay pornographers involved in the production, distribution, and consumption of amateur porn on the platform. It examines how Twitter’s platform design and the motivations of alter community members give rise to the serialization of porn on Twitter. In this article, I view serialization both as a strategy that maximizes social capital and affective experiences of making pornography and as an inevitable outcome of Twitter’s design that exacerbates gay men’s need for validation, a sense of belonging, and collective identity. Instead of considering serialization as a way to circumvent Twitter’s technical limitations within a video’s duration, this essay argues that serialization feeds into gay men’s needs for validation and a sense of belonging to a community. It further proposes that serialization, as an outcome of Twitter’s algorithms and affordances, is labor intensive, requiring various kinds of resources from the pornographers and viewers. Such settings, this article suggests, maintains an illusion of sexual liberation while turning gay

8. Katrien Jacobs, “Smouldering Pornographies on the Chinese Internet,” *Porn Studies* 7, no. 3 (2020): 337–45; Helen Hester, Bethan Jones, and Sarah Taylor-Harman, “Giffing a Fuck: Non-Narrative Pleasures in Participatory Porn Cultures and Female Fandom,” *Porn Studies* 2, no. 4 (2015): 356–66; Cao, “Amateur Porn in Filipino Twitter,” 52–65.

men into enterprising agents responsible for their own social networks and emotional fulfillment. This also expands current insights on the nature of serial narratives. This essay suggests that instead of supporting a predetermined ending, serial pornography addresses present and enduring social issues gay men face.

The serialization of pornography in the alter community brings to light one important question: Does pornography have a narrative? Scholars and cultural critics have repeatedly attacked porn, not only because they objectify femininity but also because they have flimsy narratives.⁹ Feminist porn makers try to make porn women friendly by investing them with more detailed characterization and plot elements with slower sexual intercourse.¹⁰ Whatever the case, many scholars do not emphasize how sexual intercourse is a narrative that has a long-standing history of beginning with foreplay and ending with male ejaculation.

Some remark that some porn (specifically short ones) can have complete absence of narrative because of their length.¹¹ The shortening attention span of viewers and the advancement of digital technologies to cater to this gave birth to short forms of porn that are devoid of any narrative.¹² These forms of porn show only very short clips of sexual intercourse with no known character, setting, or place. These are vogue in amateur porn circuits, which are borne out of online participatory culture and whose aesthetics center on anonymity.¹³ But such conclusion is potentially problematic when applied to Twitter and other porn platforms because the Internet also provides spaces where porn can gain new functions and meanings.

9. Alexandra Hambleton, for example, cites the various settings female porn actors needed to endure in porn videos, including having sex with octopus tentacles. See Hambleton, "When Women Watch: The Subversive Potential of Female-Friendly Pornography in Japan," *Porn Studies* 3, no. 4 (December 2015): 431.

10. Hambleton, "When Women Watch," 431–32.

11. Peter Lehman, *Pornography: Film and Culture* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2006), 95.

12. Hester, Jones, and Taylor-Harman, "Giffing a Fuck," 356.

13. Hester, Jones, and Taylor-Harman.

This study employs participant observations and content analysis of tweets and profiles since September 2019. These are considered more frank but also limited in scope and depth than interview data.¹⁴ Participant observations and analysis of tweets and profiles focus on how pornographers weave narratives of sexual desires and feelings using pornography and how these narratives are serialized. I started my personal engagement with it in 2016 when I encountered alter community profiles on Grindr.¹⁵ I follow 150 alter community profiles using an account to lurk, meaning I simply watch videos and retweet porn videos I find interesting.

These porn videos may contain sexual intercourse I find titillating, pornographers that I find attractive, or narratives I find touching. Many of these are archived in my personal alter community handle, which I also use to interview some alter community members. To enrich the analysis, this essay also includes interviews with seven alter community members conducted since September 2019.

This study contributes to the study of serial narratives, digital media, gay sexuality, and pornography. It suggests new ways of thinking about serial narratives when appropriated in different technological and textual contexts. This essay offers an explication of serial narrative as a strategy that addresses both present personal needs and lasting social issues. This study also offers explanations on how platform affordances and features reshape the articulations of sexuality and the economics that govern them. Situating serialization in the context of gay porn production allows us to view the complexities of the affective and emotive dimensions of pornography. As such, this essay contributes to a better understanding of serialization of narratives and its relationship with platform features and affordances and with user motivation.

14. Christine Hine, *Ethnography for the Internet: Embedded, Embodied and Everyday* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 159–63.

15. Grindr is a gay socialization app geared toward anonymous sexual encounters. When constructing profiles on the app, users can link their social media handles. A widespread practice is to link one's alter community Twitter account in order to preserve the users' anonymity.

Pornography in the Philippines

The literature on pornography in the Philippines is scarce, and most articles paint or regurgitate the negative attitude society has on pornography and discourses of sexuality. In a historical account of the development of Philippine cinema, eminent film historian Clodualdo del Mundo Jr. shows how cultural critics in the 1970s considered the proliferation of soft-core porn films to be the lowest point in Philippine cinema history.¹⁶ Likewise, Jose Florante Leyson writes that because of the powerful influence of the Catholic Church in the Philippines, nonnormative sexual practices became unacceptable and sex media considered illegal in the country.¹⁷ Most of the recent takes on pornography view it as a harmful medium that endangers conservative moral values.¹⁸ These perspectives propose that the rise of pornography represents the changing values and standpoint on sexuality, but they also suggest that these developments are disastrous because they disrupt established social relations. Bernarte and colleagues, for example, explain that pornography hurts the unity of the nuclear family because it encourages sexual experimentation and, therefore, infidelity. According to them, the rise of pornography and the emergence of more liberal sexual attitudes among youth can be changed by educating youth about the moral implications of pornography. But such education, according to Cordero, must be based on Christian moral teachings on sexuality, which emphasizes abstinence and rejects premarital sex.

16. Clodualdo del Mundo Jr., "Philippine Movies in 2001: The Film Industry Is Dead! Long Live Philippine Cinema!" *Asian Cinema* 14, no. 1 (March 2003): 167.

17. Jose Florante Leyson, "The International Encyclopedia of Sexuality: Philippines," web.archive.org, 2004, <https://web.archive.org/web/20130508201931/http://www2.hu-berlin.de/sexology/IES/philippines.html>.

18. Dalmacito Cordero, "Understanding the Broader Horizon of Sexual Encounter: A Case Study on Sexual Engagement among Filipino Teens," *Asia-Pacific Social Science Review* 18, no. 1 (2018): 46; Racidon Bernarte et al., "Internet Pornography Consumption and Relationship Commitment of Filipino Married Individuals," *Asia Pacific Journal of Multidisciplinary Research* 4, no. 3 (2016): 40.

Interestingly, despite all the negative connotations on pornography and the restrictions on its production and distribution in the Philippines, the country has a significant record of consuming pornography. Leyson writes that since the 1950s, porn consumption in the Philippines has been geared toward adding excitement to married couples' sex lives by educating themselves about sex techniques. He further adds that with the availability of electronic and optical media, porn consumption in the Philippines grew. Del Mundo's work also discusses *bomba* films, or soft-core pornographic films, that were vogue in the 1970s.¹⁹ Del Mundo describes the proliferation of pornographic films to be the lowest point in Philippine cinema. He suggests that the proliferation of pornographic films was because of the dismal financial situation enveloping the Philippine film industry. He reminds us that to film studios, porn films are the surest way to quickly gain money.

In the Philippines, amateur porn on the Internet has been around since blogs became ubiquitous in the 2000s. Some of these sex blogs are still active today as moderators upload stories on a weekly basis. Apart from blogs and amateur porn videos on porn sites such as XVideos, online communities and networks on social media, such as the alter community, are popular online venues for amateur porn production, distribution, and consumption. The alter community refers to the network of anonymous Twitter users who are involved in the production, distribution, reappropriation, and consumption of amateur pornography.²⁰ Like other videos and tweets on the platform, porn videos and sex stories in the alter community are restricted by Twitter's features and technical limitations.

The alter community is not exclusive to gay men, but it is a popular venue for Filipino gay men. Some profiles belonging to gay men command over one hundred thousand followers and their videos viewed, retweeted, and hearted several thousand times. In an earlier article, I proposed that the popularity of

19. Del Mundo, "Philippines Movies in 2001," 167.

20. For a fuller description of the alter community, see Cao, "Amateur porn in Filipino Twitter," 52–65; Cao, "Primitive Aesthetics," 52–65.

the alter community among gay men can be attributed to the lack of cultural space that caters to the needs of gay men.²¹ Despite Twitter's problematic sensitive media policies that restrict all expressions produced by porn producers (including their tweets that do not talk about sex), the alter community remains a popular site for gay men to socialize, explore their sexuality, and discuss the problems that gay men experience. Just like amateur porn on different porn sites, amateur porn in the alter community features anonymous actors shot using mobile phones and has no professional editing, lighting, or sound quality.²² But unlike porn videos on porn sites, alter community porn embodies the range of affective potentials of pornography. As Susanna Paasonen argues, pornography can cultivate various feelings and emotions in the audiences, including feelings of disgust, arousal, shock, shame, and fear, among others.²³ Similarly, the posts and videos shared by alter community members cultivate different feelings and emotions among its members, including feelings of gratification arising from experiencing validation of their sexuality.

In this paper, I pay closer attention to one of the defining characteristics of alter community pornography, which is the serial format of porn. By this, I refer to the episodic format of porn videos that begin with foreplay and end with male ejaculation. I examine the parallels of the serialization of pornography with serials found in other media. This essay intends to sketch the defining characteristics of serial pornography on Twitter, taking into account the pertinent features of the platform. It also aims to investigate how serial porn compares with and differs from the nature and characteristics of other forms of serials. Lastly, this research investigates how the serialization of pornography on Twitter feeds into the sexual needs of gay men and the social issues surrounding their minoritization. Thus, this article adds to the understanding of the nature of serial narratives and how media platforms shape serial narratives.

21. Shawn Suyong Yi Jones, "Jemok Eopseum: The Repurposing of Tumblr for Gay South Korean DIY pornography," *Porn Studies* 7, no. 3 (2020): 303–14.

22. Mercer, *Gay Pornography*, 183–85.

23. Susanna Paasonen, *Carnal Resonance: Affect and Online Pornography* (Cambridge, MA; London: MIT Press, 2011), 217–25.

It also contributes to the understanding of how serials operate when situated in a distinct sociopolitical, sociocultural, and technological setting.

As various scholars explain, porn is the only way to see the unseeable (i.e., sexual intercourse) and learn about sex techniques.²⁴ This is even more interesting because with amateur pornography, porn imbibed a sense of “realness” or authenticity. As Niels van Doorn explains, amateur porn’s use of ordinary people (as opposed to porn actors) having sex in nondescript locations and recorded without the use of professional video production techniques contribute to amateur porn’s “claim to ‘realness.’”²⁵ By this, van Doorn means that amateur porn projects itself as real sexual encounters, the culmination of porn’s quest to maintain an illusion of realness of the sexual fantasies it stages. But despite the “free” cost of amateur porn to the pornographers and their audiences, amateur porn’s ubiquity conceals the influence and operation of neoliberal logics and the labor required to produce, distribute, and consume amateur porn.²⁶ This article considers the serialization of porn in the alter community as an outcome of Twitter’s features, affordances, and algorithm, but it is also a form that responds to gay men’s needs, desires, and social standing.

Seriality: From Old to New Media

Serialization refers to narrative structure where the plot progresses episodically, often within a predetermined span of time. Serialized narratives were

24. Marcel Barriault, “Bucking Heteronormativity: Buck Angel as Porn Performer, Producer and Pedagogue,” *Porn Studies* 3, no. 2 (April 2016): 139–40; Linda Williams, *Hard Core: Power, Pleasure, and the “Frenzy of the Visible”* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 332.

25. Niels Van Doorn, “Keeping It Real: User-Generated Pornography, Gender Reification, and Visual Pleasure,” *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies* 16, no. 4 (November 2010): 414–15.

26. Bonnie Ruberg, “Doing It for Free: Digital Labour and the Fantasy of Amateur Online Pornography,” *Porn Studies* 3, no. 2 (April 2016): 150–51, <https://doi.org/10.1080/23268743.2016.1184477>.

first popular in literature but have since expanded in television, cinema, comic books, manga and anime, and even social media posts.²⁷ In contrast to series programs that have self-contained episodes, serials have episodes or installments that are part of ongoing narratives that stretches across a span of time (e.g., one season). Serials are often described as complex because they possess and emphasize “cinematic style, novelistic scope, critical potential, complex character development, self-reflexivity, and epic or poetic form.”²⁸ Babette Tischleder argues that complexity relates to the “quantity” of “parallel storylines that develop in different directions and intersect in multiple ways.”²⁹ The narrative structure of serials often feature a main story line that intersects with various subplots of varying importance and use storytelling techniques that experiment with diegetic space and time.³⁰ For example, each episode of a television show or an online serial (e.g., *The Crown*) has smaller plots unfolding per episode but contribute to the advancement of the larger story and long-term character development. The story may have multiple principal characters (i.e., multiple protagonists, antagonists, and everything in between) usually played by an ensemble cast.

In works of fiction, serials are demanding to both produce and watch. On the production side, serial narratives are plotted to hold the audience’s interest for one or more season and each episode, installment, and/or season may end in cliff-hangers.³¹ Hagedorn notes that in serial narratives,

27. Serial narratives were first associated with Victorian novels, which were serialized in periodicals and were later bound in volumes. Literary classics such as *The Count of Monte Cristo*, *The Three Musketeers* (both by Alexandre Dumas), and *Oliver Twist* (by Charles Dickens) were first serialized in periodicals and were reprinted as novels. See Tore Rye Andersen and Sara Tanderup Linkis, “As We Speak: Concurrent Narration and Participation in the Serial Narratives ‘@ I_Bombadil’ and ‘Skam,’” *Narrative* 27, no. 1 (2019): 84–85; Federico Pagello, “The ‘Origin Story’ Is the Only Story: Seriality and Temporality in Superhero Fiction from Comics to Post-Television,” *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 34, no. 8 (July 2017): 726.

28. Babette Tischleder, “Thickening Seriality: A Chronotopic View of World Building in Contemporary Television Narrative,” *Velvet Light Trap* 79 (2017): 122.

29. Tischleder, *Thickening Seriality*, 122.

30. Tischleder, 120–22.

31. Dennis Broe, *Birth of the Binge: Serial TV and the End of Leisure* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2019), 3.

“installment ends at a point of unresolved narrative tension, precisely to leave the readers in suspense.”³² This makes serial narratives riskier investments for TV networks and production houses compared to series with self-contained episodes. Serial TV shows, regardless of methods of distribution, highly depend on strong viewership (i.e., ratings and/or number of views). Writing on the consumption of serials, Lorenz Engell argues that serials can be demanding to watch because the progression of the story needs to be understood by watching it from start to finish.³³ This is a challenging feat to maintain because serials need to be plotted and paced to keep the viewers’ interest strong. Unlike series programs, which can be viewed in any order, serials are not friendly to newcomers who jump into the program halfway. Despite these difficulties, successful serials have a strong following among a dedicated fan base. These fans perform invaluable labor by watching the shows, creating fan products, and popularizing the shows through word of mouth, sharing or posting on social media, or buying merchandise.

The recent scholarly attention given to serials in digital media largely stems from works of fiction and traditional media.³⁴ New media platforms have lasting impacts on the economics and politics of serial narratives. Scholars working on fictional serials on social media note how the Internet merges the processes of production, distribution, and consumption into one platform.³⁵ The affordances and features of online platforms fundamentally alter

32. Roger Hagedorn, “Doubtless to Be Continued: A Brief History of Serial Narratives,” in *To Be Continued . . . Soap Operas around the World*, ed. Robert Allen (New York and London: Routledge, 1995), 31.

33. Lorenz Engell, *Thinking through Television* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2019), 142.

34. Ruth Page, “Seriality and Storytelling in Social Media,” *Storyworlds: A Journal of Narrative Studies* 5 (2013): 31; Dominik Maeder and Daniela Wentz, “Digital Seriality as Structure and Process,” *Eludamos: Journal for Computer Game Culture* 8, no. 1 (2014): 144.

35. Tore Rye Andersen, “Staggered Transmissions: Twitter and the Return of Serialized Literature,” *Convergence* 23, no. 1 (2017): 36; Elke D’Hoker, “Segmentivity, Narrativity and the Short Form: The Twitter Stories of Moody, Egan and Mitchell,” *Short Fiction in Theory & Practice* 8, nos. 1–2 (2018): 7–20. Andersen and Linkis, “As We Speak,” 83–84.

the aesthetics, formats, and affective potentials of serial narratives. Scholars working on Twitter serial fictions, for instance, note how the shorter character limits pushes the aesthetic and affective boundaries of serials.³⁶ Tore Rye Andersen analyzed how authors use Twitter to write works specifically for the platform. Andersen argues that compared to episodes on older media, each tweet must contribute to the development of the narrative and must lead the viewers to the ending (if not buying a new book teased by Twitter serial fictions). Scholars also argue that digital media changed the temporality of serial narratives. Whereas episodes in older forms of serials are released on a regular basis, episodes of online serial fictions may not follow such a rigid schedule. Thus, the spacing and silence between posts carries affective and semiotic potentials, allowing them to stir the audience's emotions or become part of the narrative structure of the serial.³⁷

But perhaps the greatest change digital media brought to the theory and practice of serial narratives is the serialization of nonfiction narratives written by different kinds of social media users. Ruth Page tells us that nonfiction serials in the form of wikis and social media posts do not have narratives. While the sequencing of episodes is important in serial narratives, Page writes, "Simply producing a text in segments over time does not a narrative make: the content of that text must demonstrate narrativity."³⁸ Page argues that nonfiction serials fundamentally changed the nature and structure of serial narratives when appropriated in nonfiction narratives. The most important is what Page calls "non-teleological" narratives.³⁹ These narratives do not have to serve a particular resolution that marks the end of a narrative, nor do they have to achieve resolution after a predetermined time span. Because serials on online platforms serve different purposes, such as relaying constantly updating information (e.g., Wikipedia) or an online avatar (e.g., Facebook), they do not have to necessarily bring the readers closer to the

36. Andersen and Linkis, 87.

37. D'Hoker, "Segmentivity, Narrativity," 7–8.

38. Page, "Seriality and Storytelling," 33.

39. Page, 49.

ending. Page argues further that the purposes serials serve now depend on the context where they are used.

Serialization and seriality bring some questions to the discourse and practice of pornography in the alter community. First, what functions do serialization and seriality have in the production, distribution, and consumption of pornography? Second, how does the serialization of porn on Twitter differ from serial narratives on television and other forms of media? Third, how does seriality contribute to capital accumulation and the institution of labor in the alter community?

The Serialization of Porn in the Alter Community

One prominent characteristic of the alter community's porn videos is the serialization of pornography. The serialization of pornography can be described as a direct outcome of Twitter's own affordances and architecture, but it changed the way pornography and serials are made. Particularly, the serialization of porn has emotional and affective dimensions that feed into gay men's status as sexual minorities.

Most porn videos in the alter community are serialized in four to six tweets. Each part contains a specific portion of sexual intercourse, with the first episode depicting foreplay (i.e., kissing, touching, or stimulation of nipples) followed by oral sex, anal sex, and, finally, ejaculation. In gay pornography, porn videos are plotted to show anal sex and ejaculation as the climax of intercourse, presenting the “proof” of male sexual pleasure. In the alter community, most videos follow the same narrative trajectory, but each part is spliced into two-minute (or less) clips, following Twitter's limitations, and then released in a series of tweets. Each tweet serves as an episode and tends to be open-ended and edited to show the most titillating or intense part of the sexual intercourse. The captions end in phrases such as “retweet for more” to signify that more videos or images can be released. As the videos



Figure 1: A video of a serialized porn on Twitter. Note that the owner of the tweet marks the video as “Part 1,” which opens the possibility of a sequel. The narrative being told in the tweet provides a detailed account of what the actor feels during the sexual encounter. *Source:* Screenshot by the author.

show passionate thrusting and the loudest moaning from the participants, the captions stress the feelings and thoughts of the uploader or author (see figure 1). The captions become a storytelling device that contains the progression of sexual encounters and the feelings the author feels during these moments. In figure 1, for example, the video shows the “passionate sex” and how it progressed. The video may not show the progression of this encounter, from gentle penetration to rough, but the author details all of it in the tweet. The same happens throughout the entire serial—the pornographer would use the captions to embellish the videos with emotive textual expressions that deepen the affective potentials of porn.



Figure 2: One example of serial porn on Twitter. The porn video is divided into four parts that show the progression of sexual intercourse between two participants. *Source:* Screenshot by the author.

In figure 2, the uploader spreads his anal sex over four tweets. In each tweet, the pornographer writes about his sexual abilities and how this sexual encounter was special to him. In a succession of tweets, he writes about his bottom’s manly qualities (e.g., the tan complexion and huge penis) and how he dominated his bottom with his superior sexual performance. This superior performance pertains to the relentless penetration of the anus until the bottom becomes submissive. The tweets descend into a fiercer performance of sex and a more pronounced use of violence to express sexual prowess. The penetration here symbolizes the total domination of the bottom who eventually asked the top to be gentler. While the series did not end in ejaculation, it did provide a sense of closure with the emasculation of the bottom.

Like Twitter fiction, spaces and breaks between episodes in porn serials have semiotic and affective functions. Spaces and breaks between tweets carry meanings that push the narrative forward. To some pornographers, putting a break between tweets allows them to interact with their followers who demand that the next tweets be released. In the page of Danny, a famous pornographer who identifies as a daddy, porn video threads are filled with requests for collaborations or for next episodes. At one point, Danny felt so touched by the overwhelming support that he wrote a tweet thanking his followers. To some pornographers like Anton, the breaks represent

an attempt to garner more likes and retweets. In a recent interview with Thomas (not his real name), retweets and hearts are important metrics that signify attention.⁴⁰ Thomas notes that if people react to their porn videos, it means that the pornographers are doing something attractive or titillating. Thomas says that posting nude photos or porn videos allows them to seek attention and admiration from other men and empowers them to quickly find followers who can be their sex partners, friends, dates, or romantic partners. By serializing pornography or nude images, Thomas says that they can continue releasing sexually explicit images to sustain positive feelings and interactions from their followers. I will return to this point at a later section in this essay.

Just like the serials in other media platforms, each episode brings us closer to a sense of an ending of each sexual encounter. Each tweet brings us closer to orgasm, which marks the end of a serial. The end of a porn serial marks the beginning of a next porn project with another on-screen sex partner and an attempt to expand their social circle and extend the positive feelings they get from the alter community. But pornography in the alter community is also nonteleological in the sense that there is no definite end in sight and pornographic images are not released to support a particular ending. Nor do pornographers aim for a particular statistical figure in terms of their social engagement. As Thomas told me, accessing the alter community and distributing porn images is always an “on-going endeavor, dependent on your need to satisfy your [sexual] urge or to find people who will tell you that you’re good.”⁴¹ To many pornographers, the alter community is also a personal space where they express both important and mundane details of their lives. I suggest that the alter community posts be viewed as an ongoing account of one’s life that is accessed and updated based on one’s emotional and social disposition and not because of a need to find a logical ending to a narrative. The tweets of alter community

40. Private communication with the author, June 21, 2021.

41. Translated from Tagalog and English.

members comprise the serial narratives of their own lives, complete with subplots of their personal relationships, anonymous hookups, encounters with regular sex partners, musings about their sexuality and desires, and at times their daily activities. One HIV-positive pornographer tweeted that if his followers want to know his motivations for making pornography, all they have to do is to scroll down his (extremely long) profile feed. Indeed, while he never posted porn videos spliced into parts, his entire alter community profile is one ongoing narrative replete with people and events that resemble various characters and subplots. His porn videos are equally emotive, usually expressing his various feelings when having sexual encounters. He narrates that as a person living with HIV, he feels glad that people find him sexually desirable. He intertwines his sexual encounters with tweets about his advocacy as an HIV counselor and various happenings in his personal life. Even the pornographer in figure 2 sometimes admits his personal hardships in his tweets. Sometimes he apologizes to his followers for not being able to make new porn videos because, according to him, he needs some time alone. As such, alter community profiles serve as ongoing and constantly evolving narratives of gay men's sexual and personal lives.

In the alter community, porn has a strong emotive side that expresses various feelings and emotions the pornographers feel. These feelings and emotions unfold during the serialization of porn. While some express a variety of emotions and feelings of intimacy and sexual fulfillment, others take the chance to express and prove their masculinity. Whatever the case is, gay men use the alter community to find emotional gratification because they have no other outlet to express their sexuality. As these pornographers tweet, being able to serialize their porn means they can engage with more users and gain more followers. Serialization functions to prolong these experiences of emotional gratification, allowing gay men to enlarge their social capital by publishing porn videos and revealing parts of their lives. But serialization is also brought about by Twitter's design and algorithms.

Twitter's Design, the Serialization of Porn, and Labor

As I mentioned above, the serialization of porn in the alter community stems from Twitter's design. Twitter's features are conducive to the rise of an attention economy where users are pitted against each other for the limited attention from their followers and exposure. Two features of Twitter are related to this. First is Twitter's newsfeed, which displays contents in reverse chronological order that constantly updates with new contents. Instead of rendering content present and permanent, such design renders older content ephemeral.⁴² While older content remains on Twitter and can be retrieved in the future, users can only scroll so much that older content may simply be inaccessible. Depending on the number of profiles one follows and the activity of these users, one's news feed can update extremely fast. This means that older tweets can be near impossible to find because new tweets come in. Twitter's own news feed design gives content (and users) its few minutes (or seconds, perhaps) of fame before it gets buried under a deluge of new tweets. Even when one is scrolling one's newsfeed, Twitter actively asks the user to reload the newsfeed so they can view new tweets. Ephemerality is also exacerbated by the (in)frequency of access. Like cruising spaces,⁴³ the alter community is only accessed for immediate sexual needs. This means that long breaks separate access to the platform. As Thomas and Gabriel admitted, they only visit the alter community for short glimpses during the day or when they are socializing, watching porn, or just mindlessly scrolling. Thus, every time they visit the platform, they see new tweets and they may not be able to find older contents. I argued elsewhere that serialization of pornography can be understood as a way to circumvent

42. Dhiraj Murthy, "Twitter: Microphone for the Masses?" *Media, Culture & Society* 33, no. 5 (2011): 786.

43. Jose Antonio Langarita Adiego, "On Sex in Fieldwork: Notes on the Methodology Involved in the Ethnographic Study of Anonymous Sex," *Sexualities* 22, nos. 7–8 (2019): 1262.

Twitter’s technical limitations and the ephemerality of content there.⁴⁴ Furthermore, being “present” in another’s newsfeed at a given moment does not guarantee that one can garner enough attention from one’s followers.

Attention on Twitter is metrified and can be expressed, counted, and seen through hearts, retweets, number of views, and number of followers.⁴⁵ Twitter readily visualizes and quantifies the influence and reach one has, and these numbers buttress the feelings of emotional relief alter community members experience. To many gay men, the alter community is their space where they can claim cultural legitimacy, forge a collective identity, and seek emotional and social connection with one another. Thomas states that by releasing nudes, gay men hope to gain more followers, reactions, and retweets—in short, attention. On Twitter and other social media sites, it is not enough to attract gazes and glimpses. Attention is expressed through clickable buttons, and to the alter community members, garnering high numbers translates to positive emotions. To some pornographers, high numbers make them feel validated. Without adequate representation from the mainstream media, legally guaranteed rights and protection from discrimination, and with a moral framework that considers homosexuality deviant, these numbers embody validation of gay men’s sexuality and desires. These numbers are also a resource, allowing gay men to garner higher hearts and retweets, garner more followers, and stay longer in other users’ newsfeeds. Higher engagement gives them the potential to expand their social circle and to find like-minded individuals who they can establish different kinds of relationships with.

Because the Internet enables instantaneous mass communication, it is easy to imagine that platforms prioritize fresh and currently unfolding events. This real-time communication makes it appear that tweets are fresh and genuine.⁴⁶ In the case of serial porn, tweets happen after the fact and are released based on the motivations of the users. Serial porn is a strategic and

44. Cao, “Amateur Porn in Filipino Twitter,” 58.

45. Gerlitz and Helmond, “The Like Economy,” 1361.

46. D’Hoker, “Segmentivity, Narrativity,” 58.

planned exercise, a product of emotional, sexual, and social labor aimed at expanding users' positive emotions and social network. It is a format shaped by Twitter's technical limitations and tendencies to render contents ephemeral. In order to circumvent Twitter's features, gay men serialize their porn to allow them to garner higher social engagements and connections. These are, however, accompanied by laborious processes. Pornographers are expected to use their own technical and social networking skills in an attempt to secure higher social engagements.⁴⁷ Serial porn is not an on-the-fly, as-it-happens transmission or recording of a sexual encounter. Pornographers spend time and skills to produce and record their sexual encounters, edit these into two-minute clips that show their best physical and sexual qualities, and release these videos while interacting with their followers and sometimes teasing for next updates. As Thomas said and other participants posted, while pornographic materials reflect actual sexual encounters, the way these images are captured, edited, and released take skills to process. Thomas notes that what images are shown and how these are shown impact how much engagement these posts can generate. He said that, for example, begging too much for retweets looks like a hard sell while posting lethargic sexual performance would attract negative publicity. Indeed, some alter community pornographers criticize or poke fun at some amateur porn videos where the participants do not moan or show no physical gesture of satisfaction. Some fill the thread with negative comments when the video is too dark. Even the setting of the sexual encounter does not escape the attention of the viewers. In one case, a pornographer released a video of anal sex with the television playing a children's show in the background. One commenter wrote, "Okay *na sana eh, kaso nakakalambot ng titi 'yung kanta [na pambata]* (laughing emoji)" (it should have been okay, but the [kids'] song makes my dick limp).⁴⁸

47. Katrien Jacobs, *Netporn: DIY Web Culture and Sexual Politics* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007): 56; Ruberg, "Doing It for Free," 156.

48. Tweet retrieved on February 2, 2020.

Amateur pornographers position their cameras to capture the motion of the penis while maintaining the anonymity of the participants. The pornographers then select clips that follow the plot established in professional pornography—foreplay, oral sex, anal sex, and ejaculation. The pornographer also creates captions, weaving narratives or details that go into each episode. Some pornographers simply describe what is going on in the video while others pen emotional or reflexive tweets. Others describe the participants on the video. Still, others ask others to retweet their videos or to follow them with a promise of more content. Once the videos are tweeted, the pornographers are expected to interact with the commenters and release more videos.

The serialization of porn is a labor-intensive process that requires skills and commitment from the pornographers. The structure, architecture, features, and affordances of Twitter are instrumental in the emergence of a virtual environment that requires different kinds of labor from the participants. In order to garner and sustain the affective and emotional gains they get from the alter community, the pornographers are expected to frequently produce contents that capture the attention of their viewers. This has implications on how we understand social media channels as platforms for authentic and spontaneous communication. As this section shows, serialized pornographies are neither spontaneous nor are they posted to simply project repressed sexuality. They are also strategic and processed to fit into consumerist cultures. While serial porn shows actual sexual encounters, they are articulated and used to achieve a specific goal. In the alter community, actual sexual experiences are captured, processed, and transformed into a commodity that is set for consumption. The serialization of pornography can be interpreted as a process of continuous consumption and production of pornography as gay men attempt to negotiate their sexuality and seek affective satisfaction for it. The metrification of consumption and validation on Twitter creates an environment where attention and validation can be measured and increased seemingly without end. As Gabriella Lukacs argues, platform architecture is usually designed to compel users to perform

emotional labor.⁴⁹ She proposes that fans of idols are embroiled in economies of emotion as they produce and consume contents that give them emotional gratification while the idols that they support gain monetary compensation. Thus, to Lukacs, digital platforms reproduce capitalist logics and its exploitative tendencies, which conceal the labor audiences exert in the process of accumulation of capital.

The impetus for the production of serial porn is complex. On the one hand, the pornographers need validation, space for socialization, cultural legitimacy, and collective identity that they try to forge in the alter community. Twitter readily facilitates the provision of these needs, leading to emotional and affective satisfaction for its members and the pornographers. On the other hand, the articulations and expressions of sexuality on Twitter are also shaped by what the audiences want to see so they can give likes, retweets, or follow a specific pornographer. The serialization of pornography, then, feeds into these two. It is a strategy that aims to prolong a pornographer's presence on their follower's newsfeed while attempting to garner attention from their followers. Thus, the negotiation between the need for attention and the need to attract positive feedback and higher social engagement in a prolonged span of time form the basis of serial porn on Twitter.

Discussion and Concluding Thoughts

This essay has examined the serialization of pornography in the case of the Filipino alter community. It presents some key arguments that enrich our understanding of pornography, gay sexuality, and serial narrative/serial formats. This study proposes that the alter community is an important virtual space for gays to seek cultural legitimacy and sexual satisfaction and to forge

49. Gabriella Lukacs, "The Labor of Cute: Net Idols, Cute Culture, and the Digital Economy in Contemporary Japan," *Positions: Asia Critique* 23, no. 3 (August 2015): 494, <https://doi.org/10.1215/10679847-3125863>.

a collective identity. Without institutions or representations that affirm their sexuality, gay men take it on themselves to forge an organic network that they can collectively claim as their own. In the alter community, pornography plays an important role in forging and expressing gay identities. It also suggests that the serialization of pornography on Twitter borrows from older serial forms (e.g., TV serials), and the affordances and properties of Twitter imbue it with distinct characteristics. Taken together, the tweets written and posted by a pornographer can be understood as an ongoing life story, a non-teleological serial without a guaranteed ending. Instead, as this essay argues, the aim of serial porn is to satisfy present and enduring affective, sexual, and social needs. The urgency of sexual and emotional needs of pornographers and the lasting need for validation are the goals of the production of pornography on Twitter. Serial pornography is strategic, meaning it is geared toward amassing attention and validation, which are metrified and simplified by Twitter. Thus, amateur pornography can be understood as representations of authentic or actual sexual experiences shaped to fit into consumerist culture. Twitter facilitates the commodification and metrification of attention and validation. By rendering tweets ephemeral and by quantifying attention and validation, serial pornography becomes a way to ensure the extended production and consumption of gay porn.

This essay advances arguments that the way serial pornography fits into consumerist culture and neoliberal logics places the responsibility of seeking validation on the shoulders of the individual gay pornographers. Twitter facilitates an environment where sexual minorities are compelled to commodify their sexuality and their bodies in order to seek validation from others. In the alter community, individuals use their skills, resources, and energy to continuously experience affective and emotional satisfaction brought on by the validation of their sexuality. In the same venue, they compete with other individuals who have the same aim and use the same strategies to garner attention. Twitter facilitates the metrification and circulation of affect, but at the same time, it limits this metrification and circulation as it invites people to pay attention to newer content. Thus, the need for validation, which

is constant, fuels the production of content on Twitter that the platform eventually renders ephemeral. As far as serial porn satisfies any affective or emotional need, this research sees that such satisfaction is only momentary. Once the life span of the tweet is spent, pornographers are compelled to release a new set of tweets that will allow them to reach higher retweets, hearts, or followers. In the end, this pattern becomes a cycle that eventually exhausts many pornographers.

In seeking validation for their sexuality, gay pornographers are performing labor that feeds into an attention economy. As such, pornographic media in the alter community are commodities whose production and consumption carry affective and emotional value for its producers and consumers. Yet, it also shows us at what lengths gay men are compelled to go in search of intimacy, sexual contact, and collective identity. In the alter community, the pornographers have become enterprising individuals who are responsible for their own experiences of happiness and validation.⁵⁰ Garnering likes has become a responsibility for many pornographers who would only release pornography in exchange for hearts, retweets, and following.

Here, we can also consider that the alter community and serial porn provide opportunities for meaning-making. By weaving narratives and selecting appropriate images to represent their feelings, the alter community members seek to make sense of themselves in relation to other people's perspectives of sexuality. In situating pornography within an ongoing narrative of one's life and evolving sexuality, the alter community merges narratives and affect to evoke what gay men feel about themselves and others. It embodies a place where gay men can feel good about themselves while attempting to seek and make meaning out of their interactions with other people. Through the buttons, the simple buttons, and character limits Twitter has, the alter community becomes a site where gay men understand and express their sexuality. By making narratives and presenting images of their sexual

50. Roger Foster, "The Therapeutic Spirit of Neoliberalism," *Political Theory* 44, no. 1 (2016), 10.

exploits and their everyday life, the alter community members interpret the quantification of social engagements as signs of validation and approval from their peers.

Ultimately, the emergence of the alter community and the forms of pornography it encourages reflects the real-life situations gay men face. We must also ask to what extent the alter community contributed to the resolution or improvement of the situations of gay men. Surely, as a new space for the expression of sexuality and as a space that enables the circulation of affect, Twitter encourages experimentation and creativity. This gives rise to new forms of pornography that is distinct to Twitter. Yet, it also invites an examination and rethinking of its role in gay sexual politics. The alter community's promise of sexual freedom is, to an extent, illusory. In providing a space for sexual expressions, the operation and dynamics of the alter community hides the mechanisms that shape the logic and impetus behind the formats of pornography emerging from it. Under the guise of sexual liberation, sexualized expressions in the alter community have become commodities that partially answer to market demand like serials in other media forms. But unlike fictional serials that have an end in sight, serial amateur porn will remain a strategy for prolonged visibility so long as the social issues surrounding gay sexuality remain unsolved.

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