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> ICOR



EMPOWERING CHANGEMAKERS FOR A BETTER SOCIETY

## **“I’M NOT RACIST, THEY’RE JUST FACEBOOK JOKES: HOW ORGANIZATIONS DEAL WITH VIRAL RACIST INCIDENTS.”**

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### **ABSTRACT**

An organizational dilemma for a modern era: racism and social network sites (SNSs). In this international qualitative study of ten cases, we map the stages of how organizations and the public react to incidents of racism gone viral. Despite organizations having little control over what their staff do online, online audiences associate organizations with staff behavior on online platforms. Our analyses show that when individuals’ racism is tied to their workplace, organizations are called to hold their offending staff members accountable. Regardless of whether the offenses occur in a professional context, organizations go into a damage control stage, but these responses are generally considered weak. In the absence of platform-based consequences, the public negotiates group reactions to offending statements. Our study contributes to studies on negative online social evaluations by showing how organizations distance themselves from perpetrators, in a process we label context reconstruction. We also contribute by challenging the assumption that staff on SNSs can accurately anticipate the reactions of online audiences, and that reducing organizational responses does not prevent continued attention to viral incidents of racist behavior.