TIKTOK CYBERBULLY RESPONSES: COMMUNICATING THE NARRATIVE

by

Wendy Sommer Zito

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy in Communication

School of Communication and the Arts

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APPROVED BY:

Dr. Shannon Leinen, Committee Chair

Dr. Carol Hepburn, Committee Member

Dr. Sheri Parmelee, Committee Member

Dr. Robert Mott, Committee Member

Abstract

This study analyzed TikTok cyberbullying response videos to understand how content creators use verbal and nonverbal communication within their performance, creating audience engagement and awareness for cyberbullying and social advocacy issues. This study was conducted with 200 TikTok creator accounts analyzing communication, performance, engagement, and analytics narrative content analysis. Codes were separated into themes that represented the creator's emotional responses. These responses were analyzed to learn how the audience presented the content. The combination of narrative content analysis and analytics data was used to determine the effectiveness of the creators' ability to engage with their audience and create cyberbullying and social advocacy awareness.

The study found a connection between a TikTok content creator's performance and audience engagement. The content creators with successful performances convinced their audience to engage with comments supporting anti-cyberbullying and promoting social causes. The combination of scholarly research and new media technology allows this topic to be examined through a Communications lens analyzing verbal and nonverbal communication. The research project can be helpful for academics, social advocacy groups, and those interested in TikTok content engagement.

Keywords: TikTok, Cyberbullying, Social Media Engagement, Digital Communication

Dedication

This study is dedicated to my husband and son for helping me to see all that I am capable of even when I could not see it in myself. Thank you so much for tolerating my late nights and constant writing. I love and appreciate you both more than you will ever know. It has been a struggle to get our degrees at the same time.
I look forward to the day we can introduce ourselves as Dr. Zito and Dr. Zito

To my parents, who have always encouraged me and told me that I could accomplish anything in life I set out to do.

To my grandmother, Marvelle, who was my best friend in the entire world. I hope you know how much I miss you and wish you could be here to walk this journey with me. You were the most incredible person and amazing nurse I have ever known. I've spent more years on earth without you that I did with you. But not a day goes by that I don't you were here.

To my family and friends who have been highly encouraging and understanding of the missed functions and missed holidays.

To my dissertation chair, Dr. Shannon Leinen, for helping me battle through when I wasn't sure that I could make it to the finish line.

And lastly this paper is dedicated to God Almighty without whom I would have never been able to complete this undertaking. Thank you for the guidance and faith to be able to complete this monumental task.

Acknowledgment

I would like to acknowledge the new and future Communication Ph.D. candidates for Liberty University. It has been an honor and a privilege to work with such an incredible group of people who have worked diligently and pushed each other to do their best work possible. The high standards set by the first graduates of this program will set a high benchmark for future graduates of Liberty University's Communication Ph.D. program. I would also like to acknowledge the head of our program, Dr. Robert Mott, for leading this program in a unique new direction. His leadership has laid the groundwork for an incredible program that will establish Liberty University as a leading institution for Communication research. Finally, it has been a true honor to be one of the first dissertations to emerge from this program.

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List of Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Explanation
GIF	Graphics Interchange Format
LGTBQ	Lesbian Gay Transgender Bisexual Queer
BLM	Black Lives Matter
ADHD	Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
OCD	Obsessive Compulsive Disorder

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Overview

This narrative content analysis research aimed to examine TikTok content creators' response videos to cyberbullying by studying their verbal and nonverbal communication, performance, and account engagement. Determinations can be made from this data to recognize if content creators' bullying response videos are an effective method for creating anti-cyberbullying messages and social advocacy awareness. Thomas et al. (2015) defined cyberbullying as "an aggressive, intentional act, carried out by a group or individual, using electronic forms of contact, repeatedly and overtime against a victim who cannot easily defend themselves" (p. 141). The newness of this social media app created the need for a Communication-based study that examined the relationship between performance and account engagement.

Social media content can be analyzed for verbal and nonverbal communication elements to recognize the creator's emotions due to cyberbullying (Lowry et al., 2016). The emotional responses are essential to understanding how content creators use communication to aid their performance in recorded videos. Cyberbullying affects how victims communicate and express themselves on social media (Barlett & Chamberlin, 2017). Because content creators are individuals, their emotional video responses can vary. Thomas et al. (2015) noted that cyberbullying victims could feel intimidated about defending themselves. It may not be easy to express their emotions. Some may express anger, depression, or humor. Other creators may choose to explain why the bully is wrong. These emotions can influence verbal and nonverbal communication performance, leading to account engagement and social advocacy awareness.

Shaping Public Opinion Study

Boatman et al. (2021) created a TikTok study to gauge the effectiveness of changing public opinion about the HPV vaccine. Their research examined over 175 TikTok videos with narrative content analysis. In addition, it analyzed the available TikTok analytics on each clip for engagement levels. The study recognized that TikTok videos created a "high number of interactions," which helped counter misinformation about the HPV vaccine (p. 5). In addition, interactions and dialogue were recognized to help shape public opinion. Boatman et al. (2021) stated, "Learning more about how users react to specific TikTok content would be an essential next step to providing a complete understanding of interactions" (p. 3). Boatman et al.'s (2021) call for more TikTok research was noted in this cyberbullying response video study.

Expanding upon Boatman et al.'s (2021) research, this TikTok cyberbullying performance and engagement study worked to understand shaping public opinion about cyberbullying and social causes. The narrative content analysis method allowed the TikTok video clip's content to be analyzed. In addition, a Communication lens provided the framework to study verbal and nonverbal actions within the performance. The analytics data provided insight if the creator inspired the audience to engage with *likes*, *shares,* and comments. The comments created a dialogue between the audience, creator, and other viewers. This dialogue was crucial to understanding the effectiveness of anti-cyberbullying messages and social advocacy awareness.

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Personal Experience Statement

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TikTok is a social media app founded in 2018 that uses short-form video content allowing creators to share narratives over the internet globally with others (Kiss, 2020). Inspired by Fisher's (1989) concept that people are natural storytellers, I started an experimental TikTok

account creating videos ranging from personal stories to self-produced comedy skits helping

understand the app and its content. As a content creator, I experienced cyberbullying incidents

that served as the starting point for this research study.

Social media has evolved into a growing outlet for individuals to share personal

narratives and bond virtually with others. Aichner et al. (2021) described social media as

"internet-based applications" allowing users to exchange content. For example, people share their

stories, display artistic talents, or other aspects of their life on social media platforms. Belonging

to a group will provide meaning to individuals' reality and shape their worldview (Berger and

Luckmann, 1966).

Celebrities, consumer brands, social media influencers, and a global audience create

content and watch recorded videos on TikTok. Content creators build an audience to watch

videos with similar values, experiences, and interests.TikTok's parent company, ByteDance,

supports the social media code on their platform that will surpass 1.5 billion active users in 2022

(Greig, 2021). Kirkness (2019) described a platform as a stack of software that runs applications,

commonly known as an app. ByteDance's app, TikTok, has swiftly moved from a trendy, teen

lip-sync app to a solid social media powerhouse worth billions of dollars (Greig, 2021).

The TikTok algorithm adjusted the app from viewing habits and original video content

postings. The algorithm tailors the main feed to the user's interest utilizing various criteria

(Anderson, 2020). In addition, the app will populate videos for each user based on preferences

within the algorithm. For example, the like button, known as *likes*, will trigger the algorithm to

send viewers similar videos to those liked. Also, videos that users save, watch, comment on, and

skip can trigger the algorithm to change a viewer's habits (Anderson, 2020). As a result, there

were new trends in the audience and changes within the algorithm.

Content creators ranged from individuals sharing their narratives to businesses with marketing messages and social groups promoting social causes on the app. Additionally, content creators ranged in age, geographic location, class, gender, race, and sexuality. As a result, the app offered a variety of storytellers and content. Then, the algorithm began shaping the videos to view. As the number of account *followers* increased, so did the engagements. Many users were extraordinarily positive and interacted in a very positive manner.

However, I noticed that not all comments were positive, and many negative comments were frustrating. Multiple negative comments switched to personal attacks unrelated to the video content. Viewers criticized criteria such as appearance, age, and narratives. Bartlett (2015) recognized that bullies use the content creator's personal experiences to attack and criticize. Viewers commented with intense negativity that caused feelings of being personally attacked and harassed.

The harassing comments and personal attacks became frequent. Pabian (2019) stated that it is up to the victim to respond to the bully. *Blocking* and reporting were ineffective responses to stop the negative comments and users. Having personal narratives attacked made the app no longer enjoyable. In addition, there were comments left by other content creators that also had experienced similar negativity. These creators left comments on the videos and were concerned about the bully's negative comments.

Many content creators had cyberbullying response videos on their account pages that addressed their bully's comments. The audience came to their defense on their video's comments scroll. The audience left anti-cyberbullying statements and posted positive thoughts to build the creator's self-esteem. Seeing this, I recorded a cyberbully response video and discovered it was a powerful method to combat negativity. The *likes*, *shares*, and *comments* on the bully response

video increased. In addition, the audience engaged with back-and-forth dialogue in the comments about anti-cyberbullying, the negative comments, and body positivity. There was a noticeable trend between the video's engagements and other content creators with anti-cyberbullying videos.

I noticed an observable path was present that led from the original video, getting bullied, creating a bully response video, and then finding increased engagement with the audience. I also recognized trends that were also noticed in the audience's comments on anti-cyberbullying statements and support for social causes relating to the bullying incident. These experiences led me to the research topic. Li et al. (2021) recognized that it is essential to study TikTok because of its significant popularity when connecting with a global audience. Therefore, there is a need to understand TikTok creators' experiences with cyberbully response videos that lead to audience engagement and activism for anti-cyberbullying and social causes.

How TikTok Works for the Basic User

TikTok's app is available for free download on the Apple, Amazon, and Android app stores (Anderson, 2020). A smartphone or tablet user can download TikTok from the app store that matches their device. For example, an Apple user would download from the Apple Store, and an Android user would download from the Android store. Amazon users can also download the operating system (Anderson, 2020). Desktop users can download a version of the app from www.TikTok.com that will work with Windows. They can also choose to use a browser-supported version with the browser of their choice, such as Google, Firefox, or Safari. All versions have support pages that link to www.TikTok.com to help new users learn to set up accounts. Community guidelines with content rules are also on this page that speaks out against bullying, hate speech, and other offenses that can lead to TikTok acting against the account

(Anderson, 2020). Public settings allow a content creator's videos to be viewed by a global audience. Private settings allow select viewers approved by the content creator to see their videos. Private settings are a standard method that content creators use to prevent the general public from viewing their account videos (Anderson, 2020). A TikTok account is not required for app users to watch videos.

TikTok differs from other apps because there are no pictures or text-only postings. Videos can be created within the app's video editor or produced outside the app and then uploaded. Either method allows a content creator to upload a unique video on their account profile page. The app's video editor allows the content creator to use prerecorded audio clips available within their database. These clips can be matched with an original video recorded by the creator. TikTok's original format began as a lip-syncing video app that later added extensive video editing tools (Anderson, 2020). The in-app video program also includes a text editor that can superimpose words into the video. There are also special effects that can be added from within the editing program. These videos can be digitally edited with multiple professional elements to communicate narratives.

The creator can customize their profile page with a unique picture, screen name, and description. The profile page will also show the number of *followers*, the number of profiles they *follow*, and the total number of *likes*. *Followers* are a community built by the content creator that enjoys their content. Content creators can not only build their *followers* but can become *followers* of other accounts on the app (Anderson, 2020).

Following is when users pick a favorite account. New content from that creator consistently appears in the user's feed scroll. The scroll feed is the *For You* page that displays recorded videos from content creators. This page allows the users to watch the videos and have

the option to interact. Swiping up will enable users to see a video. Videos do not have to be watched all the way through. A user can choose to swipe up to end the current video and view the next video in the feed. The algorithm will determine the following video based on the user's past viewing history and engagements. When users find a video they want to watch, they can choose engagements (Anderson, 2020). Engagements include clicking the *emojis* for various commands. *Emojis* are computer animation symbols that express emotions (Danesi, 2016). For example, the TikTok e*moji* for *likes* is a heart. The audience can click *like* on a video they enjoy showing the content creator approval.

TikTok videos also have a comments section that allows viewers to write opinions on a dedicated message scroll attached to the videos. The newest comments left by the audience are shown on the top. It is possible to scroll through all comments. The content creators can click the text bubble e*moji comment* button to view the comments left by the audience. The content creators can also choose to make comments back to the audience's responses. The audience and content creators engage through *comments*, *likes*, and *shares* (Anderson, 2020).

A content creator video's audience can express various opinions, including negative comments. When negative comments attack a content creator personally, this is known as cyberbullying (Allison & Bussey, 2017). Cyberbullying behavior can affect content creators negatively and impact their self-esteem. In extreme cases, cyberbullying can lead to suicide (Ansary, 2020). Therefore, content creators can turn off comments made by others, *blocking* the audience's comments. Some users try this method to prevent or deter cyberbullying. For example, a creator may decide to block an audience member from further engagements with their account due to negative comments. Countermeasures such as *blocking* and reporting negative

comments to the admin page are standard social media tools dependent on users' actions (Wright, 2013). *Blocking* stops a user's ability to comment on an account.

A creator initiates *blocking* to stop engagements with another user. On TikTok, *blocking* does not allow blocked users to view or comment further on the creator's account. Reporting is when a creator sends the TikTok help desk information about another user's behavior on the app. TikTok has several features that allow for custom settings such as turning off comments, limiting the creator's audience to only *followers*, and turning off direct messaging abilities. However, these tools only control what the creator can see and do; turning these options off limits the creator's content; they do not limit the bully (*Bullying Prevention*, 2021).

It is up to a content creator to block or report harassing behavior to the TikTok help desk. Hayes et al. (2020) stated that TikTok creators could report and block users with damaging behavior. Hayes et al. (2020) also noted that creators could restrict comments "by blocking certain accounts from commenting on their videos" and setting content controls to filter specific words and language. (p.3861). Unfortunately, the app does not have an automatic process to eliminate negative comments. Therefore, it is up to creators to self-police the app and report behavior.

Storytelling

TikTok creators can tell stories and bond with other users with similar interests. Fisher (1989) stated, "If the Narrative Paradigm celebrates anything, it celebrates human beings, and it does this by reaffirming their nature as storytellers" (p. 56). TikTok relies heavily on the content creators' story-based videos to generate content and attract new users. Content creators share their lives and narratives, hoping the audience will share similar experiences.

As members join TikTok and create content, the more likely individuals with similar interests can connect. Bates et al. (2020) noted that social media platforms allow individuals to explore identity elements and look for individuals with similar experiences. For example, TikTok has become a place for those exploring their gender identity to share their journeys and discuss their struggles with family and acceptance.

Community Building

Members with similar interests and content share commonalities with their experiences—an online culture forms based on these shared experiences that influence how content creators use the app. These commonalities also affect their storytelling and relating to individuals within their social groups. Fisher (1989) stated that people tell stories to define experiences, which helps understand their belonging to the group. TikTok allows content creators to share personal narratives and bond with others forming social groups. These groups can range from small social groups to large social causes.

TikTok creators have bonded and launched many campaigns to create awareness of social causes, such as the LGBTQ community, Black Lives Matter, Healthcare, Women's Rights, Poverty, and Environmental issue. Social media has allowed content creators to express their gender identity in a safe environment and seek others to form supportive communities (Selkie et al., 2020). Mental health is an important topic discussed on TikTok. Conditions such as ADHD, OCD, Bipolar Depression, Body Positivity, Special Needs, Deaf Community, Blind Community, dissociative identity disorder (formerly known as split or multiple personalities disorder), and others have strong communities and support. Hiebert and Kortes-Miller (2021) stated, "TikTok users can find themselves rapidly immersed in virtual communities of users that share similar interests and characteristics" (p. 4). Many communities on TikTok go beyond mental health or

social causes. For example, communities based on a shared interest in movies, books, or pets draw people together and help them find like-minded individuals.

<div align="center">**Background**</div>

TikTok History

TikTok began in 2018 and quickly gained popularity due to its unique features such as frequently updated filters, editing tools, and the ability to use the audio of any video on the creator's content. Kiss (2020) stated, "TikTok is a smartphone app that invites users to watch and share short video clips. Most are dance moves, practical jokes, stunts, and mawkish singing" (p. 35). However, many apps fade quickly in popularity as fads and norms change. TikTok was primarily a lip-syncing app that allowed users to make short clips using music samples.

The app evolved with various short-form video content as it has gained users. Weimann and Masri (2020) discussed, "What helps TikTok stand out among the competition is that practically anyone can become a content provider because of the simplicity of using the app" (p.4). TikTok works to maintain simplicity even as it adds new features to make it easier for creators to record, edit, and upload their content for a global audience. TikTok makes changes to its app periodically to increase its capabilities.

Cyberbullying History

Historically, cyberbullying began with email harassment and posting unsolicited or photoshopped pictures. Ansary (2020) noted, "Similar to the lack of agreement about a cyberbullying definition, there is no consensus about a comprehensive theoretical model that explains cyberbullying" (p. 2). In the present day, cyberbullying can span many social media platforms. The virtual environment creates new opportunities for cyberbullies. Cyberbullying on

social media has expanded over time as social media platforms have grown and changed (Barlett et al., 2019). In this digital age, the possibilities are endless in how a victim can be targeted. Social media can be a vulnerable place for many individuals as they share so much of their personal lives (Stoller, 2013). Videos and pictures can be edited and posted anonymously to many social media sites. This anonymous nature can target the victim across many social media apps, websites, and any means of internet communication.

Many social media apps allow users to comment on each other's profiles without a previous social connection (Ho et al., 2020). TikTok does not require users to know each other outside of the virtual environment. Cyberbullies' negative comments are made in the context of the TikTok post. The bully does not have to consider the victim's non-virtual life. It allows for impulsive comments in a virtual environment that can still create emotional damage. It does not require any real-world contact between a bully and a victim.

Cyberbullying's anonymous nature makes it difficult to punish those responsible (Arntfield, 2015). For example, TikTok does not require users to share their real names or disclose identities. Instead, TikTok bullies will make comments and deactivate or delete the account. They can then start a new one with a false identity, phone number, and email account. In addition, anonymity makes it easier for bullies because it is difficult to prove their identity for legal prosecution or retribution.

The lack of consequences and repercussions can repeatedly embolden cyberbullies to bully their victims (Barlett, 2015). Bullies can perceive inaction on the part of victims as a form of acceptance and continue to bully. If a cyberbully is allowed to continue bullying their victim, the behavior may escalate and worsen. A lack of repercussions enables the bullies to continue the

behavior. TikTok's existing safety policies to block and report users do not prevent cyberbullies from creating a new account. With a new account, they can continue to harass and bully others.

Cyberbullying Dilemma: Leaving the App

Some people may say, "Well, just leave the app!" as if the solution was that simple. However, leaving TikTok because of cyberbullying is not practical for understanding or preventing the issue. It places the consequences on the victim (Gini, 2008). It also punishes and blames the victim. Moriarty (2008) discussed the topic of bullying victim-blaming. "If they were not different, they would not be victimized. Victims are then warned that they must change to become like the non-victim group to avoid victimization, and if they fail to avoid victimization, they are to blame" (p. 31). Individuals must have the freedom to tell their narratives and build relationships in a virtual environment. Cyberbullying is an important issue as it hinders victims' ability to express themselves freely for fear of being bullied and ridiculed by cyberbullying perpetrators (Barlett, 2015). Changing the creator's videos and behavior does not stop cyberbullying. It can also prevent the creator's storytelling ability to connect with others.

If a content creator leaves TikTok after being bullied, it appeases the bully's behavior. However, this appeasement would not stop cyberbullying or eliminate bullying from the internet (Chapin, 2016). Cyberbullying must be researched, addressed, and discussed to understand awareness and prevention. Social media communication studies are the key to understanding new apps such as TikTok and finding proper solutions to the cyberbullying issue.

Social media is a common means of communication in modern society and is an element of many social interactions (Jiang et al., 2016). People use TikTok to stay in contact with personal and professional relationships. Leaving TikTok could cost individuals emotionally and financially depending on how they use the app. Social media can be their chosen method of daily

communication for both personal and business (Cebollero-Salinas et al., 2022). Content creators spend hours building their social identities. They promote their narratives and stories to connect with others. Growing a social media *following* can take months and even years (Church et al., 2021). Leaving the platform would diminish their ability to increase business and personal relationships.

With in-person non-virtual bullying, the torment ends when the bully and victim are no longer together. Cyberbullying is different from in-person bullying. Langos (2012) defined, "Cyberbullying is bullying transposed on a technological platform" (p. 285). It is not easy in a virtual environment to separate from a cyberbully. Walking away from an app does not create digital separation. Though cyberbullying may start on a specific platform, it can carry to other social media platforms and communication such as email or texting. Nothing stops the bullies from finding the victims on other forms of social media. A victim can repeatedly experience the trauma of cyberbullying as the damaging content can be recycled to target further the victim (Muhonen et al., 2017). The bully can repost comments or pictures from one platform to another. Leaving one form of social media does not guarantee that a cyberbully cannot find their victims on another platform.

Cyberbullying Examples

Unfortunately, many TikTok content creators have encountered significant amounts of cyberbullying and have responded to bullying in various ways with their video narratives. These five examples of TikTok cyberbullying will provide a brief description of the response videos to add context to the study.

Example 1: @lex.ginger

This TikTok user is a mother of twins who shares her birth experience and life with her children. She has been bullied for sharing her pregnancy and birth experience. She has also been criticized for parenting decisions concerning her young children. Statements from her videos have been taken out of context. She has also been ridiculed for elements of her birth story. Her twins were born extremely premature, and she has been criticized for not handling their birth correctly. Her response to bullies has been calm and collected, and she has shown no anger. She has directly addressed several of the comments and explained why they are wrong or have taken her words out of context.

Example 2: @blazewing2010

This TikTok content creator is a transgender female who advocates for the rights of others and creates awareness of issues transgender individuals face in society. Her style of confrontation when dealing with bullying comments on her content is straightforward. She consistently backs up her rebuttals with research and statistics. In videos, she has told bullies that she will seek them outside of the platform if they persist. It is unknown at this time if she has ever pursued these actions.

Example 3: @theasystem/ @systemspouse

These accounts belong to husband and wife. They have separate accounts but use them in connection with one another. The husband has dissociative identity disorder, formerly known as split personalities disorder. He is a system of 28 different alters formerly known as personalities. This system uses its account to create awareness of the condition and struggles with mental health. The wife uses her account to explain how the couple copes with the diagnosis and explains situations for her husband and his alters when they have trouble communicating. This couple has suffered repeated cyberbullying on TikTok, making several videos addressing the

bullies. The husband has been accused of being a fraud and called insulting names. The wife has been targeted by bullies claiming that she enables her husband. The couple takes a calm approach, making periodic videos letting their viewers know that the bullies will be blocked, and all bullying comments will be deleted.

Example 4: @jasminejones654

This content creator is an obese body positivity promoter. Though she is significantly overweight, she creates videos that promote a positive body image, often filming in a bikini or other revealing clothes. This content creator has received numerous bullying comments. This creator chooses to call out her bullies in the comment responses and responds with positive but firm messages. She is never insulting and does not swear but clearly states that the bullies will not win. She has gained a significant *following* that supports her and the message she shares.

Example 5: @shoelover99

This content creator is a southern woman with a very distinctive accent. She shares a positive Christian message with her *followers*. She was a teen mom and has tried to share support with others struggling in their lives. On TikTok, she is heavily criticized for how she speaks and the videos she makes supporting people. Her manner of confronting bullies is very down-to-earth, and she expresses feelings of pity towards the bullies. However, she does not apologize for who she is and stands firm in her faith.

Cyberbullying Response Video Research.

Cyberbullying is a persistent problem, and victims are not trained nor given support to combat bullies on social media. Victimized individuals react to cyberbullying differently, such as anger, sadness, and depression (Balakrishnan, 2018). It is crucial to understand this phenomenon because of its impact on how creators cope with bullying. Cyberbullying research has previously

focused on adolescent victims and what parents should do to prevent cyberbullying; little focus

has been placed on adult victims (Ansary, 2020; Arntfield, 2015; Barlett & Kowalewski, 2019).

Research for cyberbullying adult responses via TikTok is limited. Though cyberbullying

receives media attention as a problem for adolescents and teens, it is not the only demographic

impacted (Barlett & Chamberlin, 2017). Further research is needed on how adult TikTok users

create cyberbullying response videos to express their emotions through narrative discourse

creating account engagement and social activism awareness.

<div align="center">**Theoretical Framework**</div>

In communication research, theories are used to help describe and explain phenomena.

For this research study, the Communication theories of Primary Framework, Narrative Paradigm,

Symbolic Interactionism, and Parasocial Interaction will be used to help understand how

cyberbullying impacts the performance of content creators

Primary Framework

Goffman (1986) argued that a framework creates an organized structure for persuasive

communication. It creates consistency and flows within a designed work. In addition, the

framework can evoke emotions based on shared experiences. These shared experiences can help

persuade using the audience's existing knowledge and understanding of situations. Goffman

(1986) noted that society's rules and orders provide boundaries that keep people within a frame

of reference and understanding for social situations. Arguments that stray from these boundaries

can be complicated for an audience to understand.

TikTok creators can respond to a bully's comments and use social frameworks to produce

videos. Their cyberbullying response videos can display emotions evoking a predictable response

from the audience. Goffman's (1986) framework can provide a persuasive structure the content

creator can use to ensure the audience has certain feelings towards the bully's comments. The content creator can frame a video to make the audience feel sad, happy, angry, or any intended emotion. Staying within certain social boundaries and guidelines allows the message to be understood. Videos that have arguments outside these boundaries risk the audience misunderstanding their meaning. The audience can choose to engage with the clip based on their feelings about the video. Using emotions, the content creator can lead the audience towards an intended action, such as clicking the *like* button. The content creator influences the audience with an emotional framework to create the desired result.

Narrative Paradigm

Walter Fisher's (1989) Narrative Paradigm emphasizes that human beings are storytellers, and understanding the world is based on narratives. On social media, specifically TikTok, content creators share stories with viewers to entertain. TikTok is a story-driven social media platform. Creators share real stories and fiction they have created. Sometimes these stories are accurate and are experiences they have lived. However, some creators choose to tell stories through made-up characters to entertain their viewers. Sharing stories makes TikTok a unique world constructed of stories by real people. Therefore, the Narrative Paradigm is appropriate for TikTok as each video is a story, regardless of its content. Sometimes the stories are brief anecdotes of a person's day or a sizeable multi-video series sharing a person's story with viewers.

 Symbolic Interactionism/ Social Construction

Symbolic Interactionism explains that people behave differently based on preexisting social meanings. These meanings are gathered from social interactions and modified through interpretation (Blumer, 1986). Through studying Mead's works, Blumer developed the theory of Symbolic Interactionism. For example, the actions of cyberbullying and the words they use to

hurt their victims have meaning because it is understood that those words and actions are insulting and damaging. Likewise, the victim of cyberbullying interprets the bully's actions as threatening because it is understood from preexisting, meaning what derogatory terms and death threats mean. Though there is no immediate physical threat to the victim, the words and actions of the bully are still interpreted as harmful.

Berger and Luckmann (1966) stated, "There has been general agreement to the effect that the sociology of knowledge is concerned with the relationship between human thought and the social context within which it arises" (p. 4). The world's reality is constructed of the shared meanings of those within the world. The context of the constructed reality gives meaning to those individuals within. Social media platforms such as TikTok can be viewed as a world unto itself. The shared meaning constructed by content creators through trends, slang, and hashtags defines the reality of TikTok. However, the actions of bullies on TikTok also define the reality for other users. When victims are bullied, the reality of the platform changes from a welcoming, fun place to one of cruelty and trauma.

Parasocial Interaction

Parasocial Interaction develops when a viewer develops a relationship with a performer though the relationship is not reciprocated (Horton & Wohl, 1956). This relationship with the performer makes it seem that the viewer knows the performer when there is no real relationship. TikTok as a platform is highly visual. It is typical for a content creator to speak directly to the camera. Speaking to the camera gives the impression that they speak directly to the viewer. This video style can feed a feeling of interaction for the viewer, strengthening intimacy and the Parasocial Relationship. However, this level of familiarity in content can also give bullies a sense that they know the content creator and feel entitled to cyberbully.

Biel and Gatica-Perez (2010) also recognized that virtual communication would mimic face-to-face communication with both verbal and nonverbal communication. Nonverbal communication can include facial expressions, eye movements, and hand movements. These expressions can be used to communicate emotions and feelings between individuals. Virtual communication on TikTok allows for verbal and nonverbal communication to be deciphered from recorded video. The videos can be interpreted by the audience when they watch the video.

Because the video is recorded, the content creator's verbal and nonverbal reactions are not occurring in real-time. These actions can be planned and rehearsed by the content creator to elicit an emotional response from the audience. The content can leverage the Parasocial Relationship (Horton & Wohl, 1956) between themselves and the audience. The creator's video can have verbal and nonverbal performance elements portraying emotions to reach their desired intent. The creator's desired intent can strengthen the Parasocial Relationship and bond with the audience. This bond can give the creator the ability to persuade and nudge the audience in a specific direction. These directions can be a direct path that meets the creator's goals.

Deciphering verbal and nonverbal communication will depend on the commonalities between the audience and the content creator. Blumer (1966) guided that people share symbolism which defines meaning. Meaning is socially created. The audience must decipher the nonverbal actions exhibited by the content creators. If the audience shares the symbolism, then the nonverbal communication will present the correct meaning and effect on the audience.

Problem Statement

TikTok content creators' cyberbullying response videos must be studied to understand how verbal and nonverbal performance can persuade the audience to engage with the video. By analyzing the data, the researcher hoped to determine if the content creators' bullying response

videos were an effective method for understanding patterns on TikTok, inspiring the audience to engage with anti-cyberbullying and social advocacy awareness comments. Examining videos on TikTok allows for analyzing content creator responses and audience engagement. The effectiveness of the content creator's verbal and nonverbal emotional appeal within the performance will affect the audience's engagement. The engagements were through *comments*, *likes*, and *shares*. The *comments* provided data if the creators successfully created awareness for anti-cyberbullying messages and social advocacy awareness.

TikTok research has primarily centered on the COVID-19 pandemic and disseminating health-related information (Forsyth, 2021; Li et al., 2021; Zheng et al., 2021;). As a result, there is not enough focus on communication and the social environment on TikTok. Instead, the emphasis has been placed on the TikTok algorithm and how it determines the content viewers are shown (Anderson, 2020). Therefore, this TikTok cyberbullying response video study was conducted through a Communication lens. The focus was to study verbal and nonverbal communication performance aspects within personal narrative cyberbullying response videos to discuss audience engagement and measure its effectiveness in creating anti-cyberbullying messages and social activism awareness using narrative content analysis.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study aimed to analyze TikTok cyberbullying response videos through narrative content analysis to understand how creators use verbal and nonverbal communication within their performance to create audience engagement. Additionally, narrative coding separated data into themes that described each video, the cyberbullying incident, the content creator's response, and their emotions were also coded into themes. This data determined the effectiveness of the content creators' ability to create anti-cyberbullying awareness and

promotion of social causes. A pathway flowchart emerged from the research that described a creator's pathway from the initial cyberbully act, the video response, account engagement, and creating anti-cyberbullying messages with social activism awareness.

Multiple Communication theories guided this study. First, Goffman's (1986) Primary Framework described how the structure could aid persuasive arguments. Next, the Narrative Paradigm (Fisher, 1985a) explained the socially constructed meanings of storytelling of cyberbullying and how it negatively impacts TikTok creators. Third, Symbolic Interactionism (Blumer, 1986) recognized how creators interpret cyberbullying comments and actions as hurtful and damaging. Finally, the Social Construct of Reality (Berger & Luckmann, 1966) explained how social media platforms exist in a virtual environment, bonding like-minded individuals together in groups.

Significance of the Study

It is essential to understand how cyberbullying affects TikTok content creators to influence their audience. In addition, it is necessary to know how TikTok's emotional performances affect the audience and help understand the framework of cyberbullying response videos. Gaffney et al. (2019) recognized that more research is needed for cyberbullying intervention and prevention. This study can aid communication scholars in understanding how creators use emotional appeals on TikTok to influence an audience and gauge its effectiveness in raising awareness for anti-cyberbullying and promoting social activism causes on TikTok.

Research Questions

The study seeks to find the answer to the following research questions:

RQ1: How does TikTok cyberbullying influence a content creator's verbal and nonverbal communication performance on a response video?

RQ2: How does a TikTok content creator's performance influence account engagement?

RQ3: How does a TikTok content creator's bullying response video build awareness for anti-cyberbullying and social advocacy causes?

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Definitions

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The following terms are defined to help the reader understand each word's context in this study.

Cyberbullying: There is no clear consensus on the exact definition of cyberbullying, as each research project fits its research definition. Watts et al. (2017) define, "Cyberbullying is defined as the intent to consistently harass another individual to cause harm via any electronic method, including social media, and includes defamation, public disclosure of private facts, and intentional emotional distress" (p. 269).

Cyberbystander: In any situation, there are active participants and bystanders. The term *cyberbystander* indicates that the bystanders witness an online situation (Dillon & Bushman, 2015.)

Shaming: In an online setting, shaming is a common form of bullying. Shaming is a type of bullying in which the victim feels guilty for their behavior, personality, and online content (Ahmed & Braithwaite, 2005).

Trolling/Hater: Trolling is a form of cyberbullying. This form of bullying is typically repetitive by the same perpetrator and often used recreationally by the bully (Mkono, 2018).

For You Page: On the TikTok platform, the main feed is divided into two sections. One is the '*For You* Page.' This section is where the videos generated by the algorithm populate. The more a viewer interacts through *likes*, comments, and shares, the algorithm repeatedly works to pull content that will interest the viewer (Kennedy, 2020).

Following Page: The 'Following' page is the other half of the main feed. The 'Following' page is video content from creators that the viewer chooses to follow; all other content is eliminated (Haenlein et al., 2020).

Content Creator: On the TikTok platform, an individual that creates content is called a 'content creator' (Xu et al., 2021). This term is often used for individuals who have not achieved an influencer's status.

Influencer: On social media platforms, content creators with a large *Following* are also known as 'Influencers.' There is no precise number of *Followers* to qualify as an influencer. It is typically a large number, and for sponsorship by companies, the typical threshold is ten thousand. Influencers share their opinion with viewers and often influence their buying habits and popular trends *(*Berne-Manero & Marzo-Navarro, 2020).

Friend (mutuals): On the TikTok platform, this term's meaning is slightly different from other platforms such as Facebook. On TikTok, the terms' friend' and 'mutuals' are used interchangeably to mean that both content creators follow each other (Omar & Dequan, 2020). Both individuals must follow each other for a friend or mutual connection to be made. In addition, on TikTok, individuals must be mutual to message each other privately.

Followers: On social media platforms, the term follower defines the individuals who keep up with a creator or influencer (Gilani et al., 2019). On TikTok, each video has the profile picture of the content creator, and clicking on the image will follow the creator.

Views- The number of times a video has been watched.

Comments- The number of comments made on a video. Screenshots were collected of comments to determine how bystanders react to the content creator being cyberbullied.

Likes- The number of times a viewer has clicked like on a video. The more times a video

is liked, it will show up on the *For You* page of more viewers.

Shares- The number of times the video was shared outside the TikTok platform. This number includes sharing other social media platforms, downloads, and adding to a Favorite list.

Hashtags- The hashtags are posted in the caption section of a video.

Cosplay- Cosplay refers to costumes and role play (Rahman et al., 2012). It is favored on TikTok to make content dressed as a character from television, books, and movies.

The definitions above give clarity to terms that are unique to TikTok. Without an explanation of the terms, it is not easy to understand the inner working of the application. Without this context, it is also difficult to understand how content creators speak about their experiences on the platform. Many of these definitions are common to social media in general. Still, they are not words commonly defined in a scholarly manner. The explanations here clarify their context within the research.

Summary

Chapter One explored TikTok's background and use. It also included a discussion about the history of cyberbullying and its issues. This scholarly study outlined the effect cyberbullying has on TikTok content creators' verbal and nonverbal performance techniques and analyzed if the audience was motivated by the creator's persuasion.

This study will be arranged into five chapters. Chapter Two is a literature review examining existing Communication theories about social interactions that apply to virtual environments and introducing cyberbullying scholarship. In Chapter Three, the method for the study will be presented, including the narrative content analysis research design and how the

narrative research was conducted. The research results are provided in Chapter Four, followed by

Chapter Five, discussing the results, implications, and ideas for further study.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

TikTok has become a social media mainstay, much like Facebook and Instagram. The app's popularity has diversified its use beyond social interactions (Anderson, 2020). Current academic TikTok research focuses on algorithm and marketing applications (Zhang et al., 2019; Xu et al., 2019). Additionally, other TikTok research has focused on the COVID-19 pandemic and the dissemination of medical information (Boatman et al., 2021; Zhu et al., 2019). This study will focus on verbal and nonverbal communication of the content creator's performance. Studying cyberbullying reaction videos will help researchers understand how emotional appeals can affect user engagement leading to social activism and anti-cyberbullying awareness. Chapter Two will discuss Communication tradition, model, and theories that apply to the research study. There will also be a discussion of social media history, cyberbullying, and data tying the subjects together.

Communication Theories

Communication theories are tools for scholars to understand the world and human interactions. Theories give context and framework to human behavior. Craig (1999) explained that there are many ways to view the world. Many theories could be used to understand what is being observed or experienced. Craig (1999) developed a map for communication theory to help researchers and scholars understand how theory could be used in various contexts. His map includes seven categories or traditions. Craig (1999) outlined the seven traditions to organize communication theories into target areas that allow for a more focused approach to the study of human communication. Craig (1999) stated, "The various traditions of communication theory

each offer distinct ways of conceptualizing and discussing communication problems and practice" (p. 120).

These traditions allow scholars to focus on the most relevant theories to the area they intend to study. The appropriate theories can lead to a deeper understanding of the human experience with a focused approach to communication studies. In addition, through the theory-based communication approach, the traditions can shed light on how people relate to one another. Craig defined the seven traditions: Socio-psychological, Socio-cultural, Cybernetic, Rhetorical, Semiotic, Critical, and Phenomenological (Maguire, 2006). Each tradition has its place in communication theory and gives a targeted framework for various communication study areas. This research will be based on the Socio-psychological and Phenomenological traditions because they are appropriate to the study of social media and how it impacts people's worldviews.

Phenomenological Tradition

The Phenomenological Tradition focuses on how people interpret the world through their experiences. The Phenomenological Tradition is theorized as dialogue (Maguire, 2006). This tradition focuses on interpreting the meaning and how these interpretations impact human existence. The experiences themselves give meaning rather than assigning meaning and defining the experiences. For example, the experience of unusual, unexplained weather events is often used as an example of a phenomenon. The experience rather than the explanation is the focus of this tradition.

TikTok user experiences with cyberbullying fall under this tradition because it focuses on the content creator's experiences of being bullied. The content creator's experiences will provide information on how they choose to communicate about bullies on the app. It is critical to

determine the performance methods TikTok content creators use with their verbal and nonverbal communication to make emotional appeals to their audience. Creator's cyberbullying response videos can impact how the audience views TikTok bullying, prompting them to engage with the content creator's video.

Socio-psychological Tradition

The Socio-psychological tradition focuses on the individual and the social elements of the human experience. Maguire (2006) discussed the Socio-psychological tradition, "Communication is theorized as expression, interaction, and influence. Cause-and-effect relationships can be discovered through careful, systematic observation" (p. 89). A significant focus of theories in this tradition is how humans process information. Jan et al. (2017) noted, "The focus of the theories is individual social behavior and cognition" (p. 18). Through this tradition, the human experience can be interpreted through cause-and-effect relationships. This tradition is appropriate for this study area due to the exchange when a creator is cyberbullied. Craig (1999) explained, "Sociopsychological trait theories of communication, for example, seem plausible because they appeal to the commonplace notion that people's communication styles reflect their personalities" (p. 129).

The audience's experiences allow the research to be viewed through the Socio-psychological Tradition. The tradition will impact how they view the cyberbullying experienced by content creators. The content creator's response video will use persuasive verbal and nonverbal communication through an emotional appeal that will give the audience a decision to interact or not. Interactions include *shares*, *likes*, and *comments*. Additionally, many viewers may choose not to interact or get involved in the cyberbullying situations of others. The personal

cyberbullying experiences of creators may also impact how they feel about cyberbullying on TikTok. The feelings and emotions are experienced by both the content creators and the audience. For example, suppose the content creators can successfully communicate their emotional appeal in response videos. In that case, it will prompt the audience to react through interaction. This prompt can lead to engagement and creating awareness for cyberbullying and social causes.

Communication Model

Daylight (2017) discusses Jakobson's Communication Model Methodology "for considering such complexities as the sender's intentions, the social and cultural context of transmission, the metalinguistic codes that the message relies on, the effect of the transmission medium, and the sender and receiver's relations to the referent" (p. 175). In Jakobson's model, six elements of communication are necessary. The six elements are context, sender, receiver, contact, shared code, and the message. The sender, message, and receiver are standard compared to other Communication models. The contact, Lemon (2018) stated in the "visual channel," represents the way the sender and receiver can communicate with each other. The shared code is the socially accepted meaning accepted between users (Lemon, 2018). Finally, the context is the boundaries of understanding. Messages out of context can exist outside the boundaries of social understanding. According to Jakobson (Daylight, 2017), communication is established through these elements.

Jakobson's Communication model puts the message in the middle between sender and receiver. Since the message is in the middle of the model with sender and receiver on opposing sides, the context, contact, and code can all affect the message (Lemon, 2018). In this instance,

the content creator and viewer, the interpretation of messages between the sender and receiver, is subject to interpretation and context. Serban (2012) stated, "Roman Jakobson's linguistic model of communication distinguishes among the functions of language the conative one, focused on the addressee and defined in terms of the effects of the message on the behavior of the addressee" (p. 838). Without these elements, the messages are not communicated clearly.

Jakobson's model is appropriate for this social media study. Linask (2018) acknowledged, "Jakobson based his communication model on verbal language, but also acknowledged its wider applicability to all communication systems" (p. 518). TikTok is the method of communication, which Jakobson refers to as contact. However, the message still resides between the sender and receiver. The sender is the content creator, and the receiver is the audience. TikTok is the contact, representing the medium.

The medium transports the message but does not define its meaning as Meyrowitz (1993) noted that technology is a mere "conduit" that transmits messages. TikTok allows the message to be delivered virtually in a recorded, asynchronous format. The message is not synchronous simultaneously, such as an in-person conversation between sender and receiver. There is a delay between sender and receiver, both choosing when to respond at their convenience (Ijsselsteijn et al. 2003). Moreover, the sender may not know who the receiver is. The TikTok algorithm offers unlimited opportunities for who may see the content creator's video and when they may see the video. The algorithm creates limitless possibilities for video viewing (Anderson, 2020).

There is no direct connection for the receiver to access the sender's message. Once the receiver has the message, communication between the sender and receiver is not in a traditional two-way back and forth, real-time interaction. Immediacy cannot be guaranteed because the

audience will receive, encode, and interact with the receiver's message when the video is presented to their feed. The asynchronous format presents challenges for context and code.

Content creators send messages through the video content they produce. The viewers are the receivers. The context represents the boundaries within the social order. Messages out of context and outside the social boundary of understanding can be misunderstood. The context of the video content can come from many places, such as the creator or TikTok trends. When the audience misunderstands the content creator's context, the message may be outside the accepted boundaries. If the sender and receiver do not share commonalities for boundaries, then the sender may not understand the limitations. Jakobson's context is essential to understanding TikTok interactions because videos that are understood by the audience are more likely to share commonalities with the content creator.

Jakobson's code is the shared commonalities; verbal and nonverbal language that TikTok users understand is necessary to communicate. TikTok is a social body that represents a code. TikTok users share commonalities that exist within their social circle on the app. The slang and jargon used on TikTok have become unique to the users. However, those unfamiliar with the app may not understand the content. For example, Instagram and Facebook may not relate to the norms of TikTok users. These two apps focus on photos and texts, while TikTok is short-form video content. The changes in norms can reflect the changes in the medium. The different mediums will have different social groups with their norms. The social groups attached to various social media platforms will have different codes depending on their platform of choice. The context and codes work together for shared understanding between sender and receiver. If

codes and context are misunderstood, the content creator's message will likely not be relatable to the audience. A TikTok audience is likely to understand that social group's norms and codes.

Jakobson's model (Daylight, 2017) does not concern when or how the receiver decodes the message. Instead, it is concerned with the "common code," which is the point when the sender and receiver agree on a shared meaning (Daylight, 2017). The shared meaning between a TikTok content creator and their audience allows for a social connection and meaning to be interpreted similarly. For example, suppose the content creator and audience agree on meaning. In that case, they likely share a similar bond and viewpoint to the content creator's message. Engagements such as likes, shares, saves, or comments can follow if the audience understands the content creator's message. The content creator's ability to properly frame a performance that shares meaning and understanding with the audience is paramount for engagements.

Blythe (2009) argued that noise could affect the message. Noise could be any distraction caused by the environment, technological issues, or miscommunication between the sender and receiver. The environment can create issues between sender and receiver (Moise et al., 2020). Any additional sounds or distractions can affect hearing preventing proper understanding. Technology failure, such as weak Wi-Fi, can prevent complete messages from arriving at the receiver leading to improper decoding. Miscommunication between the sender and receiver can be caused by unique slang or norms not shared between users. Users must share values for understanding (Blumer, 1986).

Theoretical Frameworks

Communication theories give context to human behavior and give researchers the tools to study lived experiences. Social media platforms have become a mainstay of communication. As

such, communication theory can be applied to understand the human experiences of creators on these platforms. Walther (2011) recognized that existing theories could be applied to new technology (p. 471). Therefore, modern scholars should test if existing theories can "stretch" past their original limits and apply to new technology. Communication theories such as Primary Framework, Narrative Paradigm, Symbolic Interactionism, and Parasocial Interaction are theories commonly associated with traditional media. These theories will be used to understand better the TikTok social media communication process between content creators and their audience through bullying response videos.

Primary Framework

Goffman (1986) noted that framing involves "motive and intent" with a clear goal (p. 22). The framework provides boundaries to communicate within specific themes and styles. These boundaries can include emotions that will guide performance in a particular direction to display that emotion. When organized and structured, rhetoric can persuade an audience with specific outcomes based on the framework's goal. Framing will use existing schemas and norms as boundaries to present ideas.

Goffman (1986) described Primary Framework as exact rules that people will follow for understood situations (p. 24). Goffman (1986) used examples of checkers or street traffic rules to apply the idea that people will stay within certain boundaries of understanding based on their previous experiences. The Primary Framework provides a structure that stays within specific guidelines that people already understand. Anything outside that framework can affect the message content by adding unfamiliar concepts. The framework keeps communication in line with social understanding through shared meanings and experiences.

TikTok bullying response videos that follow Goffman's (1986) framework would keep their emotional appeals within the audience's experiences. Drifting outside of the audience's shared experiences and expectations would break the framework. Breaking the framework can lead to misunderstandings within meanings. Any meanings that are not shared between sender and receiver can lead to miscommunications. When framing their nonverbal and verbal communication, content creators that use the Primary Framework and Goffman's (1986) concepts will keep their messages within shared boundaries between the creator and audience.

Narrative Paradigm

Walter Fisher originated the theory of the Narrative Paradigm. This theory proposes people as storytellers and how this defines human communication. Fisher (1985b) noted, "The Narrative Paradigm sees people as storytellers-authors and co-authors who creatively read and evaluate the texts of life and literature" (p. 76). Fisher defined the terms *narrative* and *paradigm*, giving a more robust understanding of the theory's function. Fisher (1984) recognized, "By 'narration,' I refer to a theory of symbolic actions- words and/or deeds- that have sequence and meaning for those who live, create, or interpret" (p. 2). The human experience fuels the stories within the Narrative Paradigm. The story's context and plot are not of consequence, and neither is the story's truthfulness. Fisher (1984) stated, "By paradigm, I refer to a representation designed to formalize the structure of a component of the experience and to direct understanding and inquiry into the nature and functions of that experience- in this instance, the experience of human communication" (p. 2). Much of the human experiences are impacted by the stories they tell. Humans want to share their stories, and essential human experience elements can be learned from these narratives.

Fisher (1989) stated, "If the Narrative Paradigm celebrates anything, it celebrates human beings, and it does this by reaffirming their nature as a storyteller" (p. 56). Humans tell stories to entertain one another, often compromising the story's validity. People will post a story about getting a speeding ticket, a horrible restaurant experience, or something their child said to embarrass them. An entertaining, funny, and incredible TikTok post may not always be a true story. However, a well-crafted false TikTok video can still be impactful and influence the paradigm.

Fisher (1985a) discussed, "While the Narrative Paradigm as a worldview of human communication does not provide a specific method of analysis, it does propose a precise perspective for critically reading text" (p. 357). Social media is filled with individuals sharing their tales. For example, on TikTok, it is common for creators to post videos describing their life experiences to viewers. Describing can be through showing their daily life, telling stories, and reenacting things that have happened to others. These narratives are meant to entertain and find like-minded individuals. One trend on TikTok uses audio clips that ask an individual to put a finger down for each thing they have in common with the video creator. These details of shared experiences help to foster a sense of community on the platform. However, there is no verification system to know if the creator is telling the truth. According to Narrative Paradigm, the story's truthfulness is not as important as the story's impact.

Social media affects how narratives are understood and constructed. People widely use it to share their lives and everyday moments with *followers*. For example, the Narrative Paradigm is evident on TikTok when creators relay information to their audiences. Li et al. (2019) explained, "It promotes the belief that human beings are storytellers and listeners and are more persuaded by a good story than by a good argument" (p. 117).

Coherence

Coherence is the element of the Narrative Paradigm that makes the story plausible. When creating a narrative, it does not have to be valid to be effective though it does need to be feasible for it to be effective. Fireman and McVay (2002) discussed," Sometimes the models that are available to us do not allow us a means to integrate life and narrative, and the story breaks down; the extra narrative intrudes and disrupts our sense of control, continuity, and stability" (p. 167). Fairytales or other over-the-top stories can be compelling stories. False stories can be persuasive. However, the audience must feel that the events could have happened to be truly impactful. Coherence is often harder to establish on social media. If the audience cannot relate the drama to their own lived experience, the story will be less effective (Fireman & McVay, 2002).

Coherence (Fireman & McVay, 2002) works with Goffman's (1986) Primary Framework. Plausibility stays within the guidelines of the audience's accepted boundaries. Anything outside these boundaries can be difficult to communicate from sender to receiver. Staying within the boundaries in a linear method creates a message that works with existing audience experiences' and comfort zone. Anything outside of existing experiences and shared meanings can create miscommunication due to a lack of connection to the sender's intent. Not understanding the sender's experiences and intent can create miscommunication. The sender needs to understand Coherence (Fireman & McVay, 2002) and Goffman (1986).

Fidelity

Narrative fidelity determines if the storylines up with what is already known to be true (Li et al., 2019). The narrative element of fidelity allows the audience to fit the story into already existing schemas and make sense of it in the context of their personal lived experience. The

story's details enable the listener to reconcile the story with their personal experiences. Fidelity is an element that can cause difficulty for content creators on platforms such as TikTok. Many creators share elaborate, over-the-top stories in the hope of gaining *followers*. Though these stories may be funny or extraordinary, they are often so outlandish that they do not fit the context of the audience's lived experience. The story's extreme nature can cause the viewer to doubt the story's authenticity and cause the creator to be shamed or accused of lying. These doubts and accusations can be difficult for a content creator as there may be no proof to verify the story.

Symbolic Interactionism/ Social Construction

Symbolic Interactionism and Social Construction theories pair well to explain how meanings are applied and interpreted. Symbolic Interactionism explains how meaning is derived from preexisting schemas from the surrounding world (Blumer, 1986). People gather meanings from social interactions and give value to other things within their reality. The events in an individual's life will shape how they interpret events and other elements of their world.

As cyberbullying is not a physical act and is interpreted through communication, the meaning of a bully's comments is gathered from social interactions. It is socially understood what the words of the bullies mean. It has been agreed that bullies' hurtful insults and threats are painful to the victims. While the phrases used may not seem like insults out of context, it is cruel and traumatic to the creator within the realm of social media and the context of the interaction. A typical example of Social Interactionism is the relationship between *emojis* and their meanings. *Emojis* are symbols used in texts and social media that have meanings beyond the pictures' symbols (Danesi, 2016). For example, an eggplant and peach *emoji* are now interpreted to have an explicit and sexual meaning. Cyberbullies' insults have a negative connotation because,

socially, the intention is agreed upon with derogatory words. Because there is a schema and negative meaning of the bullies' insults, there is the potential to hurt the victims.

TikTok is a social world that exists on the internet and where people interact every day. Creators build communities of individuals who understand their social norms and habits. For example, many communities are based on shared interests such as various book series, cosplay, or sexual orientation. Though TikTok is a global platform, the smaller communities offer support to those looking for individuals like themselves. Berger and Luckmann (1966) stated, "The world of everyday life is as real to others as it is to myself. Indeed, I cannot exist in everyday life without continually interacting and communicating with others" (p. 23). Interactions with other content creators create shared meanings of slang words and hashtags. As content is shared, the meanings are spread among the online community.

TikTok users often discover creators from different genres that are unfamiliar. They may disagree or find fault with their activities, disrupting the norms and expectations for TikTok. Some users choose to express their negative opinions rather than swiping past or not clicking like on the clip. There is a different context between a negative comment and bullying. Negative comments become bullying when they become personal and insulting. For example, insulting a person's religious beliefs, the death of a child, or suggesting that they kill themselves crosses the line from negative opinion to bullying. These harmful words and actions can severely traumatize content creators, creating emotions such as anger or sadness. An altered emotional state may impact how they communicate verbally and nonverbally their feelings about being bullied on TikTok.

Parasocial Interaction

Parasocial Relationships form when viewers feel they are building a relationship with the performer. Horton and Wohl (1956) explained, "We propose to call this seeming face-to-face relationship between spectator and performer a Parasocial Relationship" (p. 215). This relationship can be with the performer or with the performer's character. In addition, Parasocial Relationships can develop on social media platforms such as TikTok between viewers and content creators. By repeatedly viewing the creators they follow, spectators can build a Parasocial Relationship and look for updates from their favorite creators. On TikTok, there is an option of viewing content from only the creators a user follows. This repeated viewing of the same creator can establish a Parasocial Relationship through increased content saturation.

Parasocial Relationships: Three Levels

Giles and Maltby (2006) recognized three levels of Parasocial Relationships: Entertainment-social, Intense-personal, and Borderline-pathological. In addition, Giles and Maltby (2006) discussed criteria relating to celebrities for parasocial relationships. These levels help note the intensity levels for Parasocial Relationships. As individuals feel more connected to a celebrity and their content, their intensity level of attraction increases. If they increase content saturation, the likelihood of moving to the subsequent phases can also increase.

Entertainment-social

Entertainment-social is the level where people interact with others and discuss celebrities in the context of their favorite movies, appearances, and shows. The connection is mild and based on conversations with others as familiarity with a celebrity and their work. Entertainment-social is the least intense level for Parasocial. Viewing the celebrity's content would be at a moderate saturation level, and the attachment is social.

Intense-personal

The second level increases intensity for both attachment and content saturation. This attachment level increases for the individual, and they may feel connected personally to the celebrity. This intensity level can confuse the individual. They may be deluded into believing they have a relationship with a celebrity. After researching other media content, such as personal television interviews and magazine articles, individuals may feel they know and understand the celebrity. This stage can still be a harmless fascination built upon a strong interest in the celebrity.

Borderline-pathological

The third level increases to the most passionate attachment and intensity. Audience members who reach this level can feel strong emotional attachments to the celebrity beyond harmless preoccupation. For example, the individuals might drift into fantasy scenarios believing that the celebrity would develop feelings for them if they were to engage. The relationship is always one-sided, and the celebrity does not reciprocate feelings. However, not being reciprocated does not prevent the individual from believing a relationship could happen between them and the celebrity. As a result, the individual can lose grip with reality and exist in fantasy.

Parasocial and Virtual Communication

Social media *influencers* and content creators are new-age celebrities producing their content. The content can feel more personal than a movie or television show because the influencers can make direct eye contact with the camera. Social media video communication allows users to replicate eye contact virtually (Anacleto & Fels, 2015). Eye contact is mediated between the user and the screen in the virtual environment. Pellizzaro and Gimbal (2018) stated, "YouTube personalities duplicate conversational gestures, and characteristics of an informal

face-to-face gathering, which removes the line that divides the home audience from the show"
(p. 16). These similar verbal and nonverbal signals exist but in TikTok's asynchronous
environment. The conversation is not back-and-forth, but the attachment can still allow the
individual to feel connected with the content creator. Pellizzaro and Gimbal (2018) noted that
social media content creators "are creating their shows out of their homes, rather than a TV
studio; allowing them to come off more genuine than a broadcast personality" (p. 16). The
setting can feel more intimate with less production value than a Hollywood movie or television
show. The false feeling of intimacy can confuse the audience and develop Parasocial
Relationships.

Bérail et al. (2019) discussed, "Theoretically, Parasocial relationships with YouTubers
may lead to addictive behaviors toward other social media platforms if these platforms promote
the development of Parasocial relationships with YouTubers through their architecture" (p.200).
For example, Youtube and TikTok allow the audience to view the creator as talking directly to
them. This eye contact can build attachment. Dibble et al. (2016) discussed, "A Parasocial
interaction is triggered if media performers acknowledge the presence of the audience in their
performance, adapt the conversational style of informal face-to-face gatherings, and bodily and
verbally address their user" (p. 23). For example, TikTok videos are conversational and informal.
This informal style makes it easier for viewers to connect with the performer and their content.

Content creators on TikTok typically speak directly to the camera, thus addressing the
viewer. This direct performance style can nurture the connection between the viewer and the
performer. Speaking directly to the camera gives the viewer the impression that the content
creator addresses them directly. Kim and Kim (2020) stated, "Such a relationship makes the fans
believe they share similar beliefs, values, and interests with the celebrity and other fans through

the social media platforms' engagement tools, such as clicking the like button and commenting" (p. 2). Creators can choose to break the fourth wall. Performers that break the act and acknowledge the audience directly break the fourth wall (Stichter, 2016). Yuksel and Labrecque (2016) discussed, "It is evident that social media consumers interact with social media personae Parasocially through cognitive relationships fueled by the in-depth knowledge available on social media platform" (p. 313). For example, many TikTok content creators share personal details about their lives. Letting the audience in on their private life these personal life details further deepens the intimacy. Creators can address the viewer as if they are carrying on a conversation, discussing their personal lives, and including pauses as if the viewer were responding to them specifically.

In other words, the greater the viewer's connection to the performer, the more they feel invested in the content produced. This connection can work to the creator's advantage, gaining *followers* invested in their content. For example, TikTok allows a creator to comment back to viewers on a post. These small interactive moments can also deepen the viewer's connection and feelings toward the creator. These interactions increase the individual's content saturation, allowing their attachment levels to rise. Extra engagements can have the same effect on the audience as finding new content. Also, the content creator may have accounts on other social platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, or Only Fans. These diverse offerings give viewers many opportunities to discover content and information about creators and develop a Parasocial Relationship. However, interacting across many platforms can cause the viewer to lose touch with reality and feel a level of investment in the relationship.

Bystander Intervention Model

The Bystander Intervention Model developed by Darley and Latane (1968) explained that the more bystanders witness an emergency, the less likely they are to intervene. The model was developed after the brutal murder of Kitty Genovese in 1964. The woman was murdered in New York streets, and it was believed the crime was witnessed by 38 people and lasted over half an hour; no one intervened to save the woman or call the police. This event led to the development of the Bystander Intervention Model (also known as Bystander Syndrome or Genovese Syndrome) to understand why a crime, large or small, could be witnessed and why a person may choose to intervene or not. Darley and Latane (1968) stated, "These considerations lead to the hypothesis that the more bystanders to an emergency, the less likely, or the more slowly, any one bystander will intervene to provide aid" (p. 378). The model explored how likely a bystander is to offer help, become involved, walk away, and distance themselves from the situation.

The audience is the bystander of TikTok bullying reaction videos. First, the content creator will make a reaction video to the bullying incident. Second, the creator will make an emotional appeal with their verbal and nonverbal communication to the audience about their cyberbullying experience. Third, the audience can choose to interact with the video through the app's *likes*, *saves*, *shares*, or *comments*. Without interaction, the audience does not acknowledge the creator's emotional appeal or the bullying incident. The audience may not interact because the creator did not communicate properly, the audience could not decipher the message, or the audience could choose not to be involved. By withholding interaction, the audience becomes a bystander to cyberbullying.

There are many reasons a bystander may choose not to get involved. Darley and Latane (1968) discussed, "I didn't want to get involved, is a familiar comment, and behind it lies fears of

physical harm, public embarrassment, involvement with police procedures, lost workdays and jobs, and other unknown dangers" (p. 377). Bystanders' motivations to get involved in a situation are interesting. They may stem from personal feelings about the situation, such as past trauma or feelings of helplessness. Regardless of the exact reason, it is crucial to understand why bystanders may remain silent in various situations ranging from minor to life-threatening.

The Bystander Intervention Model comprises a five-stage model. Jenkins and Nickerson (2019) discussed, "The five-stage model consists of notice the event, interpret the event as an emergency, accept responsibility for intervening, know how to intervene and implement intervention decisions" (p. 141). The decision to act or not comes after the bystander has fully assessed the situation. Nickerson et al. (2014) explained, "It was suggested that bystanders refused to take action because each observer was either unsure if there was an emergency (pluralistic ignorance) or expected other neighbors to help the victim (diffusion of responsibility)" (p. 392). Bystanders may often question if they are helpful or harmful to a situation and worry about their impact if they decide to get involved.

The Bystander Intervention Model applies to the world of social media platforms and, more specifically, to TikTok because each video and comment has a limitless number of bystanders. Just as cyberbullies perpetrate cyberbullying, some *cyberbystander*s witness the bullying. Dillon and Bushman (2015) discussed, "The wider the audience or networks the cyberbullying images or text are distributed, the larger the population of possible cyberbystanders who can intervene" (p. 144). However, a broad audience does not mean that *cyberbystander*s are more likely to intervene because of a large number. Cyberbullies go through the same five-stage model as in-person bystanders when assessing bullying and deciding to act.

Inaction by *cyberbystander*s is not uncommon on social media. Many *cyberbystander*s may be unsure of their role in a situation or how impactful their involvement may be. Machackova (2020) defines, "Cyberbystanders can affect the incidents by helping or defending the victim and by assisting or reinforcing the aggressor, but also by their passivity, which may be interpreted as condoning the act and making the whole situation more severe" (p. 130). Many bystanders feel that no action is better than taking the wrong step and facing the consequences of their role in the situation. This inaction can be perceived as agreement with the bully and the acts they have perpetrated.

The actions of *cyberbystander*s that choose to become involved can take many forms. *Cyberbystander* intervention is more likely to take indirect forms, such as flagging content rather than directly confronting the bully (Dillon & Bushman, 2015). Many bystanders will choose to take the path of least resistance and confrontation. These individuals may choose to report the account of the bully and flag comments or posts. Other *cyberbystander*s may decide to confront the bully on behalf of the victim and go on the attack confronting the bully for their actions. Both paths of action have consequences that *cyberbystander*s must consider before acting.

It is difficult to gauge the percentage of *cyberbystander*s on any given post. There will be far more bystanders than victims when analyzing social media. Kazerooni et al. (2018) noted, "Since it is common for one person to be targeted for bullying on a social networking site (SNS) in the presence of many onlookers, there are often more *cyberbystander*s than there are victims" (p. 147). In the origins of the theory, the murder of Kitty Genovese was discussed. There were 38 physical witnesses to the crime. There is limitless potential for witnesses to cyberbullying acts in an online setting such as TikTok, a global social media platform.

The Bystander Intervention model fits the application of social media cyberbullying well because it is applicable regardless of the severity of the incident. Dillon and Bushman (2015) explained, "The model proves useful, regardless of whether the situation is seemingly benign or extremely serious, and regardless of victim characteristics. It helps explain why most people do not intervene in an emergency" (p. 145). There is a wide range of cyberbullying behaviors on TikTok. The Bystander Intervention Model is applicable in small situations such as a single rude comment. This model could also be appropriate for severe bullying, perhaps causing the victim trauma or triggering experienced trauma.

Spiral of Silence

Noelle-Neumann's (1974) Spiral of Silence theory stated that people would rather stay silent with their opinions if they would be perceived to be against the majority opinion. Fearing isolation from the leading group, people would instead not express opinions and then state the opposite opinion that could be met with resistance by the majority. As the majority opinion is restated, it further promotes the idea that it is the main opinion. As opposing viewpoints are silenced, the minority viewpoint diminishes in importance. The spiral is the process that reinforces majority viewpoints and silences minority viewpoints. The majority opinion may not be the best option, but decreasing the availability of other minority opinions removes choice. Those with the minority opinion will avoid controversy by staying silent.

The Bystander Intervention Model (Darley & Latane, 1968) and Spiral of Silence theory (Noelle-Neumann, 1974) work together with social media because cyberbullies and users can comment anonymously without the fear of retribution. Cyberbullies can take control of the expectations for social media posts. Arntfield (2015) stated about cyberbullies, "It is not only anonymity but also membership in a deviant community where anti-social (and by extension

negative social capital) is an accepted form of informal control" (p. 384). The internet's free reign allows cyberbullying comments to be socially accepted as normal expectations on social media platforms. Speaking out against cyberbullying can prevent this from being accepted as a social norm.

Agenda Setting Theory

McCombs et al. (2014) recognized that social media could shape public opinion. Agenda Setting Theory is no longer limited to traditional media. Social media creators can design content to shape their audience's viewpoints and opinions. Traditional media is no longer the only driving force in shaping public opinion. McCombs et al. (2014) refer to the social media community can "provide routes of information, coordination, recruitment, and social support" (p. 799). Social media creators can use their content to support social causes.

Creating content against cyberbullying can overrule the expectation that cyberbullies should have free reign to make negative comments on social media. Overruling the majority opinion can allow the minority opinion to have a voice. Social media creators can use their content to empower minority opinions. The content must engage the audience to act against cyberbullying, creating a social agenda. Social media activism is an example of shaping public opinion through Agenda Setting Theory (McCombs et al., 2014). This voice can allow the numerous *cyberbystander*s (Dillon & Bushman, 2015) to give opinions and not feel marginalized within the "Spiral of Silence" (Noelle-Neumann, 1974).

Theory Summary

These communication and psychological theories provided structure to this study. It guided how the verbal and nonverbal communication methods between sender and receiver in

TikTok's virtual environment exist between cyberbullies, content creators, and the audience. Within virtual environments, meaning exists from shared experiences and knowledge between sender and receiver. To better understand the need to study cyberbullying, it must be understood where social media started and how it impacted virtual reality communication.

Social Media History

From its inception to its current iteration, social media has become more complex in what users can do and how society utilizes it. This history will show how the growth of social media has also impacted the development of cyberbullying. It will also discuss how social media affects virtual reality communication between senders and receivers. The primary path examines social media and its evolution into today's platforms.

Social Networking

When considered the source of instant messaging, social media can be traced to the telegraph and its impact on relaying messages (Standage, 1998). However, messages were far from instant in the beginning. In its early inception, messages were sent from station to station using flags to relay messages. Without a unified code system, this proved unreliable. As code systems became more standardized, the electric telegraph became more prevalent. As a result, sending messages became more user-friendly. However, the process was time-consuming, and messages could still be misinterpreted. With the advent of electricity, the system did become more reliable. As stations were added, the world became more connected.

When discussing social media platforms, the first one to appear was Compu-serv. Campbell-Kelly and Garcia-Swartz (2013) explained, "Originally established in 1969 as Compu-Serv in Columbus, Ohio, in the 1970s, it operated in a niche market as a time-sharing service for insurance companies" (p. 26). Though it originated in the late sixties, it was widely used in the

eighties and early nineties. This early social media version used a bulletin board system where users could leave messages for one another. The most professional of the bulletin board systems was known as The Well; it was run by Whole Earth Review (Campbell-Kelly & Garcia-Swartz, 2013). The GENie, an online service created for General Electric, was prevalent and used well into the late 90s. These early systems allowed for sharing messages though it was far from instant communication, and the capabilities were minimal.

AOL and Prodigy entered the social networking marketplace simultaneously and quickly became popular with in-home users (Campbell-Kelly et al., 2008). In the beginning, AOL did not have impressive features and was not a flashy platform. Nevertheless, it was very user-friendly and, through powerful marketing, gained a large and dedicated customer base. Prodigy was a similar platform, but when subscribers began to stall out for Prodigy, AOL continued to grow. AOL tended to focus on the experience of new users, having dedicated areas and teaching new users its features. Although other platforms provided a service, AOL took the initiative to teach users how to get the most out of their software.

In 1997 the first modern social media platform was born with Sixdegrees.com. Heidemann et al. (2012) explained, "Andrew Weinreich founded the first remarkable OSN, SixDegrees, that was named after the six degrees of separation concept. Only one year later, SixDegrees already attracted 1 million registered users" (p. 3869). SixDegrees was sold in 2000 and shut down in 2001. This platform allowed users to connect with friends, message each other directly, and begin what would be considered a modern social networking site.

Many other similar platforms came onto the market around the same time. For example, Edosomwan et al. (2011) explained, "In 2001, Fotolog, sky blog, and Friendster were launched, and in 2003, MySpace, LinkedIn, LastFM, tribe.net, Hi5, etc." (p. 81). Many of these platforms

experienced some success and then faded out as other more developed platforms took their place. For example, Myspace allowed making a user profile, posting pictures, creating a friend's list, and messaging other users (Jones et al., 2010). In addition, Myspace allowed users to customize their profiles with music, colors, and embedded videos allowing users to personalize and tailor their profiles to their personalities.

Facebook, in its early days, was intended for college students. However, its membership grew once it opened to the general public. Edosomwan et al. (2011) stated, "Facebook was founded by Mark Zuckerberg and others when he was a student at Harvard; though the site was initially launched, it was restricted to Harvard students only." (p. 82). In later years Facebook was opened to the general public. Facebook has become a staple social media platform and is one of most individuals' most common social media platforms. Facebook does not use user names and instead uses the actual names of people on their accounts. Facebook has grown and changed over the years to include a marketplace, charity donation options, and gaming. The messenger app allows users to carry on real-time conversations, like cellphone texting. Many brands use Facebook for marketing, and many businesses rely on it for conducting business transactions.

Unlike Facebook, Instagram is based on visual content. Casaló et al. (2020) discussed, "The originality of the content posted on an Instagram account can have a direct impact on the user's perception that the author is an opinion leader" (p. 512). Instagram is where many influencers find their beginnings. Berne-Manero and Marzo-Navarro (2020) explained, "Social media platforms enable faster and more effective strategic implementation and facilitate brand sponsorships through influencers, which are widely acknowledged leaders of opinion and key

brand prescribers" (pp. 1-2). Through the fan base gathered on Instagram, influencers shape industries such as makeup and fashion.

Snapchat is a social media platform heavily reliant on messaging with the critical feature that posts are viewed and removed forever. As a result, this platform is popular with teenagers that use it for messaging. Vaterlaus et al. (2016) defined, "Snapchat is a social media platform that allows users to send images, videos, and text with a specified amount of time for the receiver(s) to view the content before it becomes permanently inaccessible to the receiver" (p. 594).

TikTok is a social media app growing in popularity and lends itself to creating content with its short-form video format. Kiss (2020) stated, "TikTok was created by a Chinese company called ByteDance. Founded in 2012 in Beijing, the company has a growing collection of apps powered by artificial intelligence or AI, a computing system that learns by processing vast amounts of data" (p. 37). The format of TikTok tailors the experience to the user. It incorporates the user's *likes* to generate the videos in their feed. With the growing popularity of TikTok, ByteDance is becoming a powerful social media platform and organization. The feed of TikTok is shaped by the user's interest and the video content they choose to watch. Other clips will not be shown in their feed if users block clips due to disinterest or conflicting views. Yang et al. (2019) discussed, "TikTok is a music creative short video social software, which is a 15-second music short video community" (p. 340). The brief time emphasizes the need for creativity.

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Related Literature

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Social Media

Social media is how people share their lives with others. Gündüz (2017) discussed, "The social media platforms have a growing importance in our lives since they are the places where

we 'showcase' our living experiences. They also reflect a variety of dimensions regarding our position in the virtual and physical social life" (p. 85). For example, social media posts have become a primary outlet to share stories with friends and family in today's digital global interconnected world. Caplan and Purser (2019) discussed, "Social media is a rapidly expanding set of technology tools that people use to communicate, learn, interact, document, create, and participate in societies worldwide" (p. 417). Society once thought of the telephone as a novel means of communication. As a result, it became ingrained in the culture be commonplace. The same can now be said of social media.

Many people use social media for entertainment as well as information. Therefore, social media content must be kept fresh to keep viewers returning. Chen (2015) discussed, "Social media must be entertaining, or people will not use it" (p. 36). Society pressures content creators to gain *followers* as quickly as possible and produce content. Once creators have a substantial *following*, these creators are known as *influencers*. These *influencers*' views, fashion, and language shape their audiences' popular culture (Bhatia, 2018). *Influencers'* views and opinions have significantly more importance regarding everyday topics such as products to buy and fashions to wear. Branthwaite and Patterson (2011) discussed, "Social media exaggerate and transform everyday attitudes and personalities, enabling us to live in two (or more) separated worlds" (p. 433). Many viewers cannot separate the content creator from the character, leading to opposing opinions and bullying the content creator.

The hope of becoming an *influencer* can be a powerful motivator to create social media content. Many social media platforms send influencers plaques or gifts when they reach milestones, such as one million viewers. These gifts can prove a powerful motivator for individuals to push to gain a large *following*. De Veirman et al. (2019) acknowledged, "Similar

to traditional celebrities, influencers with many followers on one or more platforms have a large

reach; however, the origin of their fame and nature of their influence is different" (p. 6). The

motivations to post on social media can vary. Some individuals may seek brand partnerships

with fashion or make-up companies. Many companies have a baseline of *followers* that an

influencer must have before considering a partnership. Wagner (2015) acknowledged, "When we

sacrifice complexity for mediated communication, we may lose something fundamental:

honesty" (p.119). The drive to become an influencer can warp a creator's view and motivate

them to post a wide array of content that viewers may not always receive well.

Many individuals are so desperate to gain a *following* that they allow the number of *likes*

and *Followers* to define their self-worth. Zhang et al. (2019) stated, "The excessive use of short-

form video apps can be considered a state in which people spend substantial time using these

apps despite experiencing negative consequences" (p. 1). As a result, the comments on their

content begin to define their opinion of themselves. When these comments become more

weighted, the individual may find that the negative comments can be damaging.

People turn to social media looking for a community they do not have outside of their

virtual existence. Zhang et al. (2018) discussed, "Although human interaction, socializing, and

communication activities are all moving to online platforms, people who are liked in online

contexts also tend to be liked offline" (p. 669). Therefore, finding a community online can prove

beneficial to individuals who feel isolated outside of their virtual existence. There are a wide

variety of online communities across many social media platforms. Social media platforms have

given individuals the opportunity to find like-minded peers and share common interests. Yuksel

and Labrecque (2016) acknowledged, "In addition to brand and peer-to-peer communities, social

media accounts also represent digital platforms where consumers come together for shared

consumption interests" (p. 317). In addition, some individuals use social media to create awareness for social advocacy. Marginalized social groups, such as the LGBTQ community, BLM, and others, can find an online voice versus offline.

There is no clear, structured format for what content will prove popular on various platforms. What proves entertaining on one platform may fall flat on another. A social media post is viral when shared quickly and said to be infectious (Nikolinakou & King, 2018). Going viral does not have a set number of views. Still, it is more about engagement speed with the posting and its popularity. The elusive goal of going vial and gaining *followers* is a dream many content creators chase without considering the content they post.

TikTok

Unlike Instagram and Facebook, which heavily rely on pictures and text, TikTok uses short-form video. The clips can be recorded in multiple takes and edited together. Zhang et al. (2019) explained, "With easy-to-use video editing tools, users easily create entertaining videos, such as short-form comedy, dancing, singing, cooking, physical exercise, or other daily activities, such as brushing teeth." (p. 1). Filming a short video clip makes it easy for creators to share their narratives quickly.

TikTok's short-form video format offers unique capabilities and motivation for its creators. TikTok videos can be anywhere from ten seconds to one minute. This short window removes the pressure to create lengthy content such as YouTube videos. Editing can be extensive or kept to a minimum. The TikTok app includes a wide variety of tools to make editing easy. Filters, audio, and closed captioning make it possible for creators to produce high-quality content. The tools provided on the app and the short length of videos allow content creators to quickly make content and keep up with the fast pace of TikTok.

Format

TikTok is a self-contained app that provides all the tools needed to make video content without leaving the platform. The app regularly updates features to increase the editing capabilities available. Hayes et al. (2020) explain, "Creators can set videos to music in a lip synchronization feature, upload video clips with their audio, or even create videos using audio clips, sound bites, and visual footage from other TikTok videos" (p. 3859). Many content creators find TikTok a more creative and expressive social media than other platforms. This creative freedom is a significant motivation for many creators to utilize TikTok versus other social media platforms. Bi and Tang (2020) explained, "The main motivations of short video's creators to influence creation behavior are information communication, economic benefits, emotional control and self-expression" (p. 188,426). The tools on TikTok offer a creator complete creative control, and the sound files available offer limitless opportunities for creative expression.

For You Page

The *For You* page is the main feed of TikTok and where viewers can scroll through videos or select the *following* feed and only view the videos of creators that they follow. The TikTok algorithm controls the content that a user views on their *For You* page. Xu et al. (2019) stated, "TikTok App analyzes the user's preferences through the powerful algorithm technology and accurately recommends the short video content so that the user frequently sees the short video content of the similar label and feels the homogenization of the content" (p. 61). In addition, the TikTok algorithm shapes the content in a user's feed by searching for *hashtags, likes*, and comments. Therefore, the more content a user views, the more dialed in the *For You* page will become for their account.

The main page of TikTok offers users control over what they view on their feed. Ostrovsky and Chen (2020) discussed, "TikTok generates a wider and more diverse audience than the traditional 'follower'-based social media model. " (p. 730). If viewers object to the content on their feed, they can block the specific creator or select not to view similar content. However, this process is imperfect as it does not specify what elements of similar content it is eliminating. The process makes it harder to stop specific types of content without *blocking* individual users.

TikTok Algorithm

TikTok's algorithm utilizes the user's preferences and viewing habits and generates a personalized feed based on these preferences. Anderson (2020) explained, "The default video feed is the algorithm-driven 'For You,' but at the top of the screen, a user can choose to limit their video feed to just those users that they follow" (p. 8). In addition, having a second feed of preferred accounts provides a personalized experience. This customized experience allows users to see only the creators they already know without adding unfamiliar or unwanted content. In addition, this freedom to customize content enables users to block content they find offensive.

Short-form video content on TikTok is typically 15 seconds to one minute long, shorter than other social media platforms. Feng et al. (2019) stated, "Compared with traditional video APPS, videos from short video apps tend to be shorter, thus better-filling users' fragmented time. Also, it features a low production threshold, strong editing functions, convenient sharing, intelligent platform, and easy accessibility" (pp. 1-2). TikTok has many built-in filters, sound clips, and editing tools that provide users the tools to create and share short-form videos with quality production value. Wang (2020) discussed, "Despite a length limit of 15s, short-form videos can be substantial in content. With all user-generated content, users follow and interact

with each other by viewing, liking, commenting, and sharing videos" (p. 2). Filters and sound files allow users to post video content with altered appearances and voices. Some creators use these tools to create characters and stories. Other creators use the editing tools to hide their identity if they are not comfortable being on screen.

Some individuals feel pressured to gain social media *followers*. For example, Zhu et al. (2019) explained, "TikTok users may be more engaged with a micro-video connected with a popular topic at first but will often become disinterested if the video is not entertaining" (p. 8). As a result, many individuals resort to vulgar language and risqué dancing, hoping to gain *followers* and *likes*—these content choices shape which content will appear in their TikTok main feed.

Creativity on TikTok

Due to the vast array of special effects on TikTok, many creators choose to create personas or characters. These are sometimes inspired by books, movies, or video games. Other creators decide to make entirely original characters. These characters that may have in the past only been seen at Comic-Con events can now gain a global *following*. Patel and Binjola (2020) asserted, "TikTok is a preferred tool to showcase the talent and find the following and audience without barriers of national boundaries or limitation of physical and local interferences" (para. 24). Unlike other social media platforms, creativity is highly valued on TikTok, with many dance challenges and artist showcasing their work. It is not required on TikTok to verify name or identity like on Facebook, allowing for creativity in username and identity. The global nature of TikTok enables creators to generate a worldwide audience versus a local *following*.

The growing popularity of TikTok has solidified its impact in the realm of social media platforms. Omar and Dequan (2020) stated, "TikTok reached 150 million daily active users in

June 2018 and was the world's most downloaded app in the first quarter of 2018, with an

estimated 45.8 million downloads" (p. 121). TikTok has a vast demographic of users ranging

from teens to older adults. There is a large demographic of adult users on TikTok, and their

behaviors shape younger users' content. Teen girls are significant social media users, and their

content creates social challenges and viral trends that shape language and culture among young

audiences (Kennedy, 2020). Young users are likely to replicate adult users' behaviors such as

risqué dancing, crude language, and bullying behaviors. Young users incorporate these behaviors

into their challenges and trends as they are normalized within the platform.

Negative Impact of TikTok

Though TikTok is a well-established app, not all activity is positive. Though community

guidelines prohibit certain things such as weaponry and nudity, there are many harmful activities

not picked up by the algorithm. Weimann and Masri (2020) discussed, "This app has a darker

side. TikTok users are sharing calls for violence against people of color and Jews, as well as

creating and sharing neo-Nazi propaganda" (p. 1). The community guidelines establish

appropriate behavior on the platform. Still, many harmful activities such as obscene language,

sexual content, and cyberbullying are not permanently eliminated due to the number of users on

the app. Unless comments and users are specifically reported, many activities go unchecked. It is

often up to the viewers to advocate for and defend creators when they are bullied.

Cyberbullying

Many studies on the effects and prevention of cyberbullying focus on the victims and

adolescent populations (Barlett, 2015; Barlett & Heath, 2019; Doane et al., 2016). The definition

of cyberbullying varies among scholars, and there is no clear consensus on the exact meaning.

Where traditional bullying is perpetrated in person, cyberbullying exists online. There are many

similarities between cyberbullying and traditional bullying. However, cyberbullying being online sets it apart from conventional bullying.

Barlett Gentile Cyberbullying Model

The Barlett Gentile cyberbullying model evaluates how a positive attitude towards cyberbullying develops and perpetrates cyberbullying (Barlett, 2017). For example, suppose a child in a classroom is ridiculed for being different. In that case, the children learn to justify bullying the weird kid, and the behavior goes unpunished. Due to the anonymous nature, cyberbullies feel less connected to those they are bullying due to not witnessing the repercussions in person. The lack of consequences enables cyberbullies to think they can bully others regardless of their physical stature or limitations. With each successful perpetration of cyberbullying, the bully learns a positive reinforcement of their behavior. Chan et al. (2021) stated, "The intentionality originates in the perpetrator's action. A person's feelings can also be hurt by a teasing meme responding to their physical appearance circulated on their social network. The intention to harm is thus interpreted from the victim's perspective" (p. 2).

There has been little research on the impact of cyberbullying across the lifespan (Barlett & Chamberlin, 2017). Barlett and Chamberlin found in their study that cyberbullying decreased with age, and the older demographic was shown to be the perpetrators less often (Barlett & Chamberlin, 2017). While attitude and perpetration were studied, it was not determined how often the adults were victims or what age group the aggressors were against adult cyberbullying victims. Usually, it is found that adolescents are the perpetrators against each other. It is harder to determine the age of cyberbullying aggressors due to many online forums' anonymous nature.

Using the Barlett Gentile Cyberbullying Model shows how cyberbullies learn their behaviors. Barlett and Kowalewski (2019) stated, "The BGCM posits that learning, via continued

cyberbullying actions, leads to the development of (a) perceptions of anonymity and (b) the belief that one's muscularity (i.e., physical stature and size) is irrelevant in the online world" (p.437). Due to the anonymous nature of cyberbullying, perpetrators can hide their identity, and many aggressors are never caught and thus suffer no repercussions for their actions. This freedom from consequences gives those seen as physically weak a false confidence in an online setting. Continued cyberbullying without punishment provides the bully with the confidence to become more aggressive.

Attitudes Toward Cyberbullying

As more people are becoming connected digitally, there is an ample opportunity for people to connect socially. Unfortunately, those who feel weak and unseen in everyday life may choose to take out their aggressions through cyberbullying (Barlett & Helmstetter, 2018). In addition, adult victims of cyberbullying may be ill-equipped to deal with the mental trauma resulting from victimization. Therefore, many theories have been applied to determine how best to decrease cyberbullying perpetration. For example, the Theory of Reasoned Action argues that decreasing positive attitudes towards a behavior will decrease intentions to perform the behavior, ultimately decreasing the likelihood of an enacted behavior (Doane et al., 2016). Therefore, it is reasoned that if attitudes towards cyberbullying are influenced to show it negatively, the number of cyberbullying acts will decrease.

Though social media platforms are not legally responsible for policing their cyberbullying behavior sites, many employ preventative measures. For example, TikTok suggests only allowing comments from approved friends or turning off comments for all videos (*Bullying Prevention*, 2021). Milosevic discusses (2016), "Cyberbullying is context-dependent and varies from case to case, which is why supervised machine learning may result in a lot of

false positives, and much of the valid content could be taken down, potentially infringing upon users' freedom of speech" (p. 5172). Because cyberbullying is primarily based on context, it is most beneficial when sites utilize human moderators to analyze complaints. Social media platforms use the banning of members and suspension of accounts to curb cyberbullying behaviors. However, these actions do not stop the cyberbullying as the bully can start a new account and continue their bullying behavior.

Anonymity

Barlett and Helmstetter (2018) noted, "Results suggest that anonymity perceptions, the belief that one's physical stature is irrelevant in the online world, and cyberbullying attitudes are important process variables that explain why people may cyber-attack another" (p. 568). This idea suggests that those physically weaker and helpless feel bolder and more capable in an online environment without a physical threat to themselves. Likewise, those not in a position of power in the physical world can feel safe anonymously power-playing their victims online. The more anonymous a person believes they are, the bolder they will become in their action.

When a bully feels they can remain anonymous, they may become bolder in their actions against a victim. Barlett et al. (2016) noted, "Aggressor-perceived anonymity was related to cyberbullying behavior. Specifically, the more people feel that they are anonymous online, the more they are likely to cyberbully others." (p. 177). The feeling of being able to remain anonymous lessens the fear of repercussions. Without consequences, bullies may take bolder liberties and escalate their behavior to a dangerous level. Victims may know their perpetrator's identity, but they may feel powerless to stop the behavior without proof.

Adults and Cyberbullying

Adolescents are heavy digital technology users in today's online connected world (White et al., 2018). Much of their lives take place online, and they are constantly connected. However, adults must learn to adapt to this level of connectivity. This learning curve has made adults less adapted to social media and online communities. A systematic review of empirical academic papers on cyberbullying showed the lack of studies on cyberbullying in adult populations (Jenaro et al., 2018). An abundance of research focuses on cyberbullying in a school setting and with school-aged adolescents and young adults. The upper end of the age spectrum is predominantly college-aged university students. Less research on cyberbullying is conducted using adults outside of a school-related setting. More research focusing on the adult population would determine if adolescent interventions proved effective.

The lack of adult cyberbullying studies shows a significant gap in the current research. Lowry et al. (2016) stated, "Studying adult cyberbullying is challenging because most of the research involves juveniles, and the nascent literature has not yet developed a cohesive approach to studying cyberbullying" (p.964). Additionally, because cyberbullying is not an ancient issue, there is no significant depth of historical research on cyberbullying. The newness contributes to the limited age groups studied regarding cyberbullying. Additionally, working to examine older demographics would give a better understanding of the onset of cyberbullying.

There is limited research on adults with disabilities and cyberbullying experiences (Jenaro et al., 2018). The current study has primarily explored adults with intellectual disabilities in a care facility. There has been little examination of adults with various physical and other disabilities, such as blindness, mobility issues, and physical deformities. Further research is needed on the impact of cyberbullying on this demographic.

Adolescents

Adolescents are the most prevalent online media users utilizing computers and text messaging (Kennedy, 2020). This heavy online communication use makes teens and adolescents more vulnerable to cyberbullying. Teens using electronic communication devices value the ease of communication and perceived safety of always being connected to their social circle (Tulane et al., 2017). Additionally, teens value the ease of connections and the less direct nature of device-mediated communication. The disconnection of being without a device is viewed as more detrimental to adolescents than the risk of cyberbullying or harassment.

When adolescents are being cyberbullied often, they withdraw from those around them (Sampasa-Kanyinga & Hamilton, 2015). Parents who do not track their children's online activities may be unaware of their child's experiences. Many parents feel that limiting their child's internet access and imposing rules is the answer. Barlett and Fennel (2018) discussed, "Paired together; these findings suggest a conundrum for parents in terms of reducing their child's cyberbullying—parents need to know what their kids are doing without imposing too many rules" (p. 554). Parents should be aware of their child's activities and allow their children enough freedom not to feel the need to hide their activities. The more rules a parent places on their child, the more trapped they may feel. The child may feel they can be less open about their online activities and become defensive when approached.

If a parent is not open in communication with their child, it can lead to the child seeking answers online. Katz et al. (2015) discussed, "The more the parent trusts their child, the more likely they are to overestimate how often their child uses the Internet for help with homework, identity development, and health information" (p. 593). Parents may assume that their child is only online to get help with homework. However, they may be engaging in other activities such

as sexting or seeking mental health resources. Knowing what their child is seeking out on the internet can provide a parent with valuable insight into what their child is dealing with in life. Dealing with cyberbullying can be harmful if teens and adolescents do not have the proper support.

Cyberbullying can negatively impact adolescents' mental health (Tahamtan & Huang, 2019). The use of social networking sites opens adolescents up to the opportunities of cyberbullying. Cyberbullying victims with low support are at higher risk for suicidal ideation and attempts. Adolescents are highly vulnerable to mental health issues, and cyberbullying contributes to mental health and suicide ideation and attempts. Felt (2017) states, "A more measured response to what is framed as the social problem of cyberbullying might include less restriction on teen technology use and more education of respectful and civil behavior" (p. 907). Studying the impact of cyberbullying on mental health can reduce the number of people impacted by suicide due to cyberbullying. More research is needed to correlate other mental issues, cyberbullying, and suicidal ideation. Determining if psychological conditions make adolescents more at risk for cyberbullying could prove insightful.

Cyberbullying and Mental Health

Social networking sites and mental health problems have been shown to have a direct connection (Sampasa-Kanyinga & Hamilton, 2015). The use of social networking sites opens individuals to opportunities for cyberbullying. Cyberbullying victims with low support are at higher risk for suicidal ideation and attempts. Individuals with prior conditions can be heavily impacted by cyberbullying, contributing to issues in mental health and suicide ideation and attempts. Studying the impact of cyberbullying on mental health can help reduce the number of people impacted by suicide because of cyberbullying. More research is needed to correlate other

mental issues, cyberbullying, and suicide ideation. Determining if psychological conditions make individuals more at risk for cyberbullying could prove insightful.

Traditional Bullying vs. Cyberbullying

The online aspect of cyberbullying sets it apart from traditional bullying. There does not have to be contact between the perpetrator and the victim. It is much harder to prosecute as a criminal act due to cyberbullying's anonymous nature (Arntfield, 2015). The lack of consequences enables cyberbullies to feel that they can bully without limitations. With each successful perpetration of cyberbullying, the bully learns a positive reinforcement of their behavior. Many perpetrators are bolder online because there is no threat of physical harm or repercussions (Barlett, 2015). As the perpetrator is successful, they become bolder because there is no punishment for their actions. The thrill of getting away with the act encourages them to bully their victims more.

Cyberbullying can happen at any time and is not limited to in-person settings such as a school or workplace. Muhonen et al. (2017) discussed, "Cyberbullying behaviours have a large potential audience as they are communicated through different digital media, which means that they can be easily stored, shared and viewed repeatedly" (p. 377). Internet shareability changes the nature of bullying, and victims can feel isolated because bullying can happen at any time. There is no limit to where the victim may encounter their cyberbully. Van Bruwaene et al. (2020) explained, "Cyberbullying victims may not recognize their experiences as bullying, and they may not report them or seek help for associated emotional difficulties" (p. 852). This freedom from physical constraints makes many cyberbullies more aggressive because they do not fear physical repercussions.

Interventions

Many styles of intervention programs have been created to attempt to decrease cyberbullying. There has been a heavy focus on targeting the behaviors that place adolescents at risk for cyberbullying (Ang, 2015). The parent-child bond was a significant factor in decreasing behaviors that put adolescents at risk of becoming victims of cyberbullying. The stronger a child's bond with their parent, the more likely cyberbullying would be more openly addressed and handled healthily. A review of existing programs showed little or no effectiveness in combatting cyberbullying (Garaigordobil & Martinez-Valderrey, 2018). It was deemed that many programs proved very weak or showed no positive impact on the prevalence of cyberbullying

In recent research, significant focus has been placed on creating game-styled interventions for children and adolescents. Creating intervention programs that teach bystanders how to support cyberbullying victims is essential—making a game-style intervention that can be played in a school setting or at home is crucial in getting children to talk about cyberbullying (Liau et al., 2017). Unfortunately, the research on the impact of these intervention styles on adults has been nonexistent. Intervention programs have focused primarily on college-age down to adolescents. The adult demographic has not been the direct focus of interventions studied in recent research. Balakrishnan (2018) states, "The experience of cyberbullying may vary widely according to context and individual factors; therefore, interventions require a more detailed understanding of this phenomenon in specific populations" (p. 1191). In addition, adult interventions will need to handle the topic more maturely and focus on work environments and the legal measures against a bully.

Victim Response

The research on the reactions and responses of cyberbullying victims is limited. The previously conducted study has focused on bystanders' responses rather than the victims themselves. High and Young (2018) noted, "Bystanders to cyberbullying can communicate several different messages, and scholars interested in supportive communication are well-equipped to provide insight into how to comfort targets of cyberbullying and to develop interventions to assist those individuals" (p. 29). While the reaction of bystanders is essential, it is crucial to ensure that victims are emotionally equipped to handle cyberbullying and understand their options on how to deal with a bully should it be severe enough to require legal action.

Victim response to cyberbullying can range from emotional upset to suicidal ideation, emotional trauma, and PTSD (Reason et al., 2016). In addition, victims may experience feelings of rage and helplessness as they cannot fight back against their bully because cyberbullying is often perpetrated anonymously. Without sufficient coping mechanisms, many victims may turn to self-destructive behaviors such as drinking and drug use to cope with their emotional trauma (DeSmet et al., 2019). Therefore, studying how victims feel can better equip them to cope and stand against bullying.

Victim Support

When discussing the roles in a cyberbullying situation, the bystanders must also be examined for their role in supporting victims of cyberbullying. Pabian et al. (2016) state, "Adolescents who have witnessed multiple cyberbullying acts, might react differently when they are a bystander of cyberbullying compared to adolescents who have not witnessed these kinds of acts before" (p.480). Further research on bystanders' inactivity could explain why some choose not to assist victims. Fear of attracting the bully's attention and becoming a victim could contribute to bystanders' inaction and explain why they do not help victims (Pabian et al.,2016).

Summary

The literature review analyzed the topics needed to understand TikTok, cyberbullying, and virtual environment communication with existing theories. Through the study of the Primary Framework, Narrative Paradigm, Symbolic Interactionism, and Parasocial Interaction, a better understanding of cyberbullying is viewed through a Communication lens. Chapter Three will explain the method used to conduct the research presented. Chapter Four will provide the research samples and connect them to Communication theories within the literature review. Finally, Chapter Five will summarize the results and answer the research questions.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

Chapter Three will discuss the Narrative Content Analysis methods utilized in this research. Narrative design "begins with the experiences expressed in individuals' lived and told stories" (p. 67, Creswell & Poth). In addition, Krippendorff (2018) stated that narrative content analysis is a research technique to find observations and data from texts that can be reproduced.

This study could not be conducted with one approach only, so it used two: narrative analysis and content analysis. Thus, the qualitative study aspects should be a narrative content analysis. In this study, TikTok content creators' cyberbully narrative response videos were analyzed for verbal and nonverbal communication performance elements to understand their Primary Framework (Goffman, 1986) and use of the Narrative Paradigm (Fisher, 1989). Moreover, this information allowed for a discussion of audience engagement and how it provided anti-cyberbullying awareness and advocacy for social issues. The narrative content analysis explained how these theories provided knowledge about TikTok audience engagement.

This study's objectives could not be reached through quantitative methods because TikTok's algorithm does not consistently show the same videos. Therefore, there would be no guarantee of the same data sample. The number of videos sampled would need to be replicated to saturation to find if the numbers are accurate findings. This process would lead to infinite samples due to TikTok's algorithm.

Furthermore, this study cannot reach its objectives through qualitative methods because it would be difficult to interview the content creators or the bullies. Each account would have to be contacted individually and permission granted. Making contact is not easy on TikTok if the creator and the researcher do not *follow* each other on the app. The TikTok messaging function is

not allowed between users that do not *follow* each other. TikTok does not share contact information, so there are no consistent methods to contact other users. It is also unlikely that all the cyberbullies would grant permission. Also, cyberbullies' accounts are consistently blocked by users or deleted by their owners. The anonymous nature of TikTok discussed in Chapter Two would make contact difficult.

Therefore, Narrative Content Analysis was selected for this research study to examine the narratives of the storytellers (i.e., content creators as they present their stories and feelings on the cyberbullying within their postings) that they have experienced. Terrell (2016) stated about Content Analysis, "This type of analysis is focused on answering a research question by identifying themes in selected material related to your area of interest" (p. 173). The research samples were videos on the social media app TikTok, recorded by content creators about their cyberbullying experiences.

On TikTok, video content is the medium; it does not use text like Twitter or pictures like Instagram. Instead, creators record narrative video content composed of their experiences. Since the video clips were analyzed, Narrative Content Analysis was the appropriate method for this research. Schreier (2012) stated, "Qualitative Content Analysis is a method for systematically describing the meaning of qualitative material. It is done by classifying material as instances of the categories of a coding frame" (p. 1). For example, video content was analyzed; therefore, it was impossible to ask the content creators questions about the context or intent of the videos. Instead, the meanings were interpreted. These meanings shaped the codes used for analyzing the data.

Research Method

Terrell (2016) stated, "Content Analysis- a method of objectively analyzing recorded

communication" (p. 146). For example, analyzing content creators' cyberbullying reaction videos showed how verbal and nonverbal communication and performances were framed to generate audience engagement. In addition, analyzing the videos allowed the verbal and nonverbal communication performance elements to present a framework that could be coded into themes.

Narrative Design

This study focused on Narrative Research Design. TikTok provided an opportunity to conduct a Narrative Research Design because the videos told the content creators' stories. Analyzing the videos, the researcher interpreted the meaning. Carless and Douglas (2017) defined, "Narrative offers rich insights into lived experience. Rather than focusing on constructs, opinions, or abstractions, narrative methods prioritize an individual's experience of concrete events" (p. 307). The Narrative Design allowed for video analysis of each creator's performance, story, and experiences. These performances offered insight into how cyberbullying shaped the creator's framework and narratives. Bruce et al. (2016) stated, "A common approach employed in Narrative Analysis is generating themes" (p. 3). Therefore, as video content on TikTok was viewed, the framework was analyzed for themes. The emergent themes provided an understanding of commonalities between content creators and their experiences.

Narrative Content Analysis

Schreier (2012) stated, "Qualitative Content Analysis allows you to develop a systematic description of your material by assigning segments of the material to the categories of your coding frame" (p. 58). A manual coding system was created to understand which reactions and frameworks were the most prevalent. Content Analysis and Narrative Design were essential methods suitable for this research. Schreier (2012) described, "Qualitative research deals with symbolic material – verbal data, visual data, artifacts [sic] – which leaves much room for

interpretation" (p. 20). The videos analyzed in this research were content recorded by creators and uploaded publicly to TikTok. These were not direct interview questions. Therefore, the content was interpreted and coded to gain the information necessary to answer the research questions.

Research Questions

TikTok's limited academic research on video content prompted this study to use a Communication-based approach. Therefore, it was necessary to understand the Communication issues to help explain both the narratives and the performances. Examining these criteria with content analysis for Primary Framework (Goffman, 1989) and Narratives (Fisher, 1989) allowed coding to categorize the data. The videos were analyzed for verbal and nonverbal communication to explain how the performance affected engagement. It also recognized the relationship between engagement and creating awareness for anti-cyberbullying and social advocacy issues. The following research questions addressed how cyberbullying influenced content creators' response videos.

RQ1: How does TikTok cyberbullying influence a content creator's verbal and nonverbal communication performance on a response video?

RQ2: How does a TikTok content creator's performance influence account engagement?

RQ3: How does a TikTok content creator's bullying response video build awareness for anti-cyberbullying and social advocacy causes?

Samples

TikTok video samples for the Narrative Content Analysis were collected and sorted by the researcher from the TikTok app. Patton (2001) stated, "The primary focus of data collection will be on what is happening to individuals in a setting and how individuals are affected by the

setting" (p. 228). Therefore, a Tik Tok video had to pass the initial screening to be included. This screening included that a content creator must have experienced cyberbullying in a previous video and recorded a response video. Videos were not included in the study that did not contain these criteria. Therefore, the sample size for this research was 200 videos that met the requirements and reached saturation.

Data Collection

A new TikTok account was created to ensure the algorithm did not have preexisting biased preferences. Additionally, *hashtags* were selected and added to the *Favorite* list to shape the algorithm toward cyberbullying content. These *hashtags* included: #cyberbullying #nocyberbullying #nobullying #stopcyberbullying #endbullying #stopbullying2021. Su et al. (2021) stated, "The processing of user-relevant video content discovered by the algorithm, therefore, would include self-referential processes in terms of favorite, interested, and familiarity" (p. 8). The TikTok algorithm determined the content generated on the *For You* section's main page. Without *hashtags*, the algorithm would only show the most recent videos posted to TikTok.

For this data collection, videos were selected from the *For You* page, as shown in Figure 1. To ensure that all analytic data such as numbers of *likes*, comments, and *shares* could be obtained, videos were kept within the TikTok app while recording this information. Due to the download format of TikTok, all data except the username was removed when a video was downloaded from TikTok. In addition, all videos were saved to a *Favorite* list for this data collection. The *Favorite* option can be found when the *Share* button is selected.

Figure 1

For You Page

Removed for Copyright

The *Share* button will present the options seen in *Figure 2*. This option allowed a video to be downloaded. Once favorited, a video was added to a separate playlist where it could be viewed and examined later. Two hundred videos were sent to the *Favorite* list and downloaded. In addition, analytics such as the number of *followers* and video views were obtained. This data is represented in Figure 2, showing the profile view for the content creator. Appendix A lists all users and their analytics.

Figure 2

Creator Account Page

Removed for Copyright

Once a video was selected for coding, all analytic data was recorded in a manual coding form, as seen in Figure 3. Because there was no direct contact with the creators in this narrative content analysis, all available analytics were obtained from public information available on each creator's user profile. As a result, the following data was collected from each video:

- **Number**- This is how the videos were viewed and coded.

- **Coding**- The codes assigned to the video were recorded here.

- **Coding Reason**- A brief explanation of why this code is assigned to this video.

- **Date Coded**- The date coded ensures that the data collection was done on time

- **Username-** The username on the account was recorded, so the account may be found if further data is needed.

- **Video Link-** A copy and paste of a link to the video.

- **Gender**- The gender of the individual in the video.

- **Follower #-** The number of *Followers* a content creator has *Following* their account.

- **Date Posted**- The original date the creator uploaded the video.

- **Caption**- The words a creator attaches to a video to describe the content.

- **Views-** The number of times a video has been watched.

- **Comments-** The number of comments made on a video. Screenshots were collected of

  comments to determine how bystanders react to the content creator being cyberbullied.

- **Likes**- The number of times a viewer has clicked like on a video. The more times a video

  is liked, it will show up on the *For You* page of more viewers.

- **Shares**- The number of times the video was shared outside the TikTok platform. This

  number includes sharing other social media platforms, downloads, and adding to a

  Favorite list.

- **Hashtags**- The hashtags are posted in the caption section of a video.

- **Audio/User**- This code notes if the creator chooses to use an audio file or if they speak in

  the video creating the audio.

- **Time**- The length of the video

- **Visual Notes**- Notes were made on the visual elements used in the video, such as filters,

  effects, and the overall mood of the video

- **Verbal Notes**- Notes were made on the spoken words of the creator. If the creator did not

  speak, notes were made on the audio or music used.

- **Nonverbal notes**- Notes on the actions, body language, and other nonverbal elements of

  the creator in the video.

- **Commenter Notes**- Notes were made on the top twenty comments on whether the

  audience had dialogue supporting the creator, building their self-esteem, anti-

cyberbullying ideas, or attempted awareness for social causes.

Figure 3

Blank Manual Coding Form

Number	
Coding	
Coding Reasoning	
Date coded	
Username	
Video Link	
Presenting Gender	
Follower #	
Date posted	
Caption	
Views	
Comments	
Likes	
Shares	
Hashtag	
Audio/User	
Time	
Visual Notes	
Verbal Notes	
Nonverbal Notes	

Once all analytics data was obtained from TikTok, each video was downloaded for further viewing and coding. Twenty screenshots of the comments on each video were saved to analyze the audience's reactions and whether they supported the content creator. These comments were also studied for anti-cyberbullying dialogue and support for social causes. Creswell and Poth (2018) recognized that extreme detail must be taken when coding. Screenshots allowed the researcher to review the data for accuracy and not rely on memory. Each video and all screenshots were saved to a file folder labeled with the number assigned to the video.

Procedure

The TikTok *For You* page was viewed, and any videos not about cyberbullying were

immediately discarded and not included in the 200 video samples.

A cyberbullying response video was included in the 200 samples if it met these criteria:

- Adult creator- either age stated in Bio or a visibly older adult at researcher's discretion

- The creator must have mentioned or shown a comment that they perceived as bullying and shown or mentioned that the bullying happened on the TikTok app.

- A video was included if it used hashtags about cyberbullying such as #cyberbully, #bullying, #nobullying, and #endbullying. A video was not eliminated if it did not have a hashtag.

- Videos were not eliminated if they did not have comments. However, some creators turn off the comments as TikTok recommends this to combat cyberbullying.

- The creator also expressed how cyberbullying made them feel in the video.

- On videos without any hashtags, the video content and captions were reviewed.

When a video was encountered that fit the criteria, it was saved to the favorites tab on TikTok. Videos that did not match the needs of this research were clicked as 'Not Interested' so that the algorithm would not show videos of that nature (Anderson, 2020). Next, the visuals were analyzed for verbal and nonverbal performance elements that showed the content creator's response to the bully. In addition, it was noted if the creator responded to a specific bully or responded to general treatment from bullies on TikTok. Next, each video was coded into a theme based on the emotions of how the creator responded. These emotions represented the Primary Framework (Goffman, 1986) for the narrative. Finally, the video was deconstructed how creators performed on short-form video through persuasive storytelling.

Data Analysis

A coding frame was constructed for framework themes to help analyze the video content. Schreier (2012) stated, "A coding frame is a way of structuring your material. It consists of main categories specifying relevant aspects and of subcategories for each main category specifying relevant meanings concerning this aspect" (p. 61). Themes were added to the code list as they emerged, and similar codes were combined as needed. Saldana (2021) guided, "Themes are also applicable for case study research, small-scale ethnographic projects, and social media inquiry" (p.260). Themes were analyzed to help the researcher understand any framework commonalities from the content creator's experiences.

McAlpine (2016) discussed, "Narrative is one of many interpretive approaches in the social sciences though perhaps less well known than case study, ethnography, or grounded theory (p. 34). Coding was conducted manually. Open coding found the initial categories within the transcribed data. Axial coding allowed the researcher to find connections between the categories within coding (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Manual codes were created by the researcher and then linked when commonalities were found. Videos with the same code were compared to ensure the consistency of coding. This careful analysis ensured that all coding was kept consistent. Finally, the researcher determined the connections between the themes and created a series of hypotheses based on the data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). During this process, some codes were more prominent than others. New codes were discovered and compared against existing codes to determine commonalities.

Disclosure of Researcher

The researcher has a background in social media content creation, artistic performance, and video production. The researcher holds a bachelor's degree in Human Development and a master's degree in Communications. The researcher is currently pursuing a Ph.D. in

Communications at the time of this study. The researcher has extensive knowledge of TikTok, which provided practical experience for data collection, preventing errors due to inexperience with social media. This ethnographic knowledge has allowed the researcher to understand better the terminology specific to TikTok and the unique aspects of the app. In addition, as a TikTok content creator, the researcher is familiar with the different challenges and struggles a typical TikTok user may experience. These experiences provided accuracy with data collection.

Ethical Concerns

The samples collected and saved for this research were public TikTok posts by content creators. Creswell and Poth (2018) stated that researchers should not bring any harm to the individuals involved in the study. These creators understood the expectation that uploading a video to TikTok would share their video to a public forum and global audience. The expectation was also understood that any viewer could download, save, and view the content outside the app. Additionally, there was no contact between the researcher and any content creator. Coding analysis may misinterpret the intent of the original sender of the TikTok message; however, Creswell and Poth (2018) recognized that researchers would work to interpret the narratives to the best of their abilities. Every effort was made to ensure that all research was consistent and unbiased. There was no contact between the researcher and any content creator. There were minimal ethical concerns other than analyzing and interpreting the visuals in the videos collected. Every effort was made to ensure that all research was consistent and unbiased.

Summary

This study analyzed TikTok cyberbullying response videos for verbal and nonverbal communication, focusing on performance and audience engagement. The data will also determine if the content creators' response videos effectively raised awareness for TikTok

cyberbullying and social advocacy platforms. Cyberbullying videos were coded by the creator's emotions used to create themes. Furthermore, this type of analysis sought to answer the research questions by identifying themes in the selected material. Since these were the content creators' experiences on recorded video, narrative content analysis was the most appropriate research method. For example, prerecorded content was analyzed; therefore, it was impossible to ask content creators questions about the videos. Instead, meanings were interpreted, which influenced the coding used to interpret the data.

A TikTok video serves as a medium for communication on the platform. Narrative Research concerns stories, and TikTok promotes sharing of stories. TikTok provided an opportunity for Narrative Design research due to its storytelling nature. The researcher interpreted the meaning of the content creators' stories by analyzing their videos.

In Chapter Four, the methods stated above were implemented, and the data was collected. The data was added to the manual coding page. Coding allowed for themes to emerge, providing insight. Analytics data was recorded from the screenshots. Finally, the data set was applied to the research questions to provide answers. The themes led the research to describe the content creator's verbal and nonverbal communication performance and the audience's engagements with the creator. Engagements created dialogue showing whether the audience supported the creator with anti-cyberbullying messages and support for social causes. Chapter Four will discuss the research findings using narrative interpretations and analytics data. Chapter Five will conclude the study by answering the research questions, providing information for future research, and providing a pathway flowchart describing the process.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

TikTok cyberbully research is essential to understand how content creators respond to negative comments. Their narratives must be examined for their verbal and nonverbal performance. Analyzing this information helped explain how the audience reacted to their videos, engaged the creator, and generated awareness for cyberbullying and other social advocacy causes. Engagements were examined using analytics data. Chapter Four contains the results of the content analysis TikTok study conducted to answer these research questions:

RQ1: How does TikTok cyberbullying influence a content creator's verbal and nonverbal communication performance on a response video?

RQ2: How does a TikTok content creator's performance influence account engagement?

RQ3: How does a TikTok content creator's bullying response video address the issue of TikTok cyberbullying?

This Chapter also discussed whether the study reached its goals through narrative content analysis of the samples. Finally, chapter Four reflects the literature review in Chapter Two and compares academic theories to the samples collected. The samples included detailed descriptions and analyses of the content creators' response videos to bullying. Coding was a manual process that included these five steps:

1. A detailed description of any analytics available was recorded into notes.
2. Analysis of videos for verbal and nonverbal communication performance- Themes were developed organically based on the creator's emotional framework as the content was analyzed.

3. Codes were assigned that developed into themes for each video representing the creators' emotions. New themes emerged as data was coded.

4. Screenshots were taken of video comments, and these were analyzed for bystander support or animosity.

5. Engagements were further studied for support of anti-cyberbullying and social advocacy messages.

Narrative Content Analysis Findings

Themes emerged as the TikTok samples were coded and analyzed. As shown in Figure 4, eight emotional responses were identified during the coding process. These codes became themes recognized within the video samples. Content creators' videos had common traits and were placed within these themes based on the videos' content. These themes guided the content creator's Primary Framework (Goffman, 1986) for verbal and nonverbal performance through emotions in their cyberbullying response videos. The themes included the emotions: Depression, Explanation, Humor, Empowerment, Positive, Anger, Sarcasm, and Extreme Emotion/Other. A breakdown of each theme is provided below.

Cyberbullying Response Themes

Figure 4

Cyberbullying Response Themes Graphic
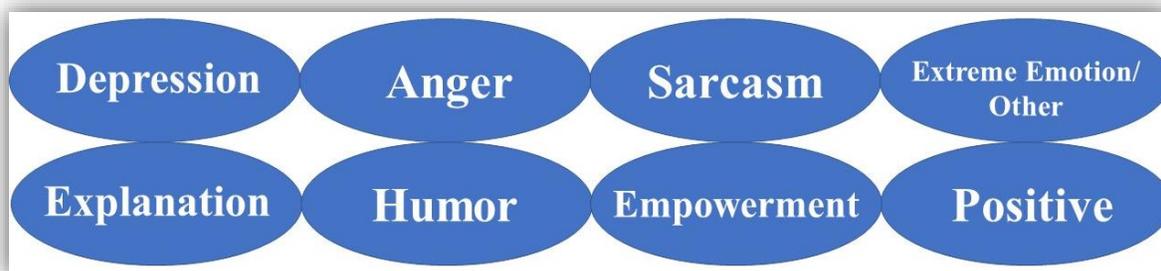
The following eight emotions coded as themes were identified during the coding process.

Theme 1: Depression

The Depression Theme consisted of content creators displaying sadness and crying. Also, creators specifically discussed experiencing depression because of the bullying comments they experienced. Many of the creators in this category did not look at the camera and often did not speak. They instead used text on the screen to express themselves.

Theme 2: Explanation

The Explanation Theme explained the bully's comment and why the bully was wrong. The theme also included creators that defended their actions. In these videos, the creators stated they should not have to explain themselves but then would offer an explanation. The explanation was provided with anger or sadness. These videos were coded to emphasize the explanation rather than the secondary emotion presented.

Theme 3: Humor

The Humor Theme noted those that used comedy in replying to the bully. The creators made fun of the bully in a joking manner. This joking style also includes creators who used self-deprecating humor to deflect the bully's comment. Many creators had comedic audio clips rather than using their voices in the videos. The creators that chose to speak with their voices were already known for producing comedic content.

Theme 4: Empowerment

The Empowerment Theme used the bully's comment showing it did not affect the content creator. For example, creators shamed for being overweight shared a message of body positivity. The creators in this category did not criticize the bully or insult them.

Theme 5: Positive

The Positive Theme included creators who spread a positive message that they were not bothered by the bully's comments. This theme also contains creators who expressed concern for the bully. Many creators in this theme chose not to acknowledge the bully. The creators of these videos asked that viewers and commenters not attack the bully.

Theme 6: Anger

The Anger Theme consisted of creators who yelled, swore, and showed obvious signs of anger. This theme was used for creators who expressed that they were angry through on-screen text. Content creators also showed physical signs of aggression, such as throwing things or balling up fists to throw a punch. Many creators in this category addressed the bully directly, calling them names and insulting them. Creators in this category also expressed looking for details on the bully, such as profile name, follower count, and type of content.

Theme 7: Sarcasm

The Sarcasm Theme included creators who made humorous replies but delivered the performance sarcastically. The tone of voice and facial expressions of these creators contributed to the assignment of this code. In addition, many of the creators in this category used prerecorded audio clips. Finally, they offered thinly veiled insults to the bully.

Theme 8: Extreme Emotion

The Extreme Emotion Theme was used for creators, which showed emotions that reached extreme rage. Rage consisted of screaming, crying, or loud emotions. This theme reflected creators that were out of control and overly emotional. Also, creators who showed an extreme lack of emotion were included in this category. No facial expressions or speaking would be examples of a lack of emotion in their videos. The only indication that this lack of emotion responded to the bullying was the inclusion of bullying comments on the screen.

Theme Video Samples

This narrative content analysis was conducted to obtain the creator's verbal and

nonverbal communication and emotional framework within their reactions to the bully's

comments. TikTok content creators' videos were analyzed, responding to their bullies. TikTok

does not require demographic details in their profile information, so this data was not always

available. Data for this study was recorded for any identifying information available on the clip.

Data included criteria such as the number of *followers*, *likes*, and *views*. Because age

demographics cannot be verified on TikTok, any questionable videos for being under the age of

18 were discarded. The TikTok accounts chosen were public accounts and not set to private.

Public accounts allowed anyone with TikTok access to view the account. Since this information

was available to the public, usernames were not changed or coded to conceal identity.

Sample videos were taken in June 2021, and creators included all races, classes, gender,

and sexual orientation picked from the feed. Available user information was collected from the

200 videos analyzed. In addition, the account name, theme, reason given for bullying, number of

followers, *views* on the video, and *likes* were collected for data. All data collected has been

compiled in Appendix A. All data was recorded in the order the videos were viewed. Figure 5

represents the gender breakdown.

Figure 5

Gender Breakdown

Row Labels	Count of Gender
Female	135
Male	52
M to F trans	4
None	3
F to M trans	3
Non Binary	2
Trans F to M	1
Grand Total	**200**

Figure 5 noted that 67.5 percent of the 200 samples were female. Likewise, Boatman et al.'s (2021) TikTok HPV video study found similar numbers, with 71.1 % female from 170 videos. Clement's (2021) statistical data recognized that as of March 2021, 61 % of TikTok users were female. The 200 samples in this TikTok cyberbullying study were 6.5% higher than Clement's (2021) TikTok statistical data and 2.6% below Boatman et al.'s (2021) TikTok HPV study with a similar sample size. This TikTok cyberbullying 200 video sample was consistent for the number of female users compared to Clement's (2021) statistical data and Boatman et al.'s (2021) HPV TikTok study, with all three within 11 %.

According to this TikTok cyberbullying study's 200 video samples, females recorded more cyberbullying response videos than males. The researcher interpreted gender from the videos since TikTok does not provide demographic data for its video clips. Schreier (2012) noted that the researcher must interpret visual data. Gender data was analyzed using visual and verbal confirmation from the videos. One hundred thirty-five females recorded cyberbullying response videos compared to 52 for men and 13 with various gender identities. Within the context of this sample, more women were TikTok cyberbullied than men. This study would need to be replicated or the sample size increased to verify and find consistency with these numbers. This study's gender breakdown numbers were consistent with Clement's (2021) statistical data and

Boatman et al.'s (2021) HPV TikTok video study.

This study's 200 video sample provided eight themes that emerged from coding. The content creators' most popular themes were Anger, Sarcasm, Depression, and Explanation. Conversely, extreme Emotion/Other and Empowerment were the least popular. According to this data set, Anger was the most popular theme in the cyberbullying response videos. Sarcasm, Depression, and Explanation were closely behind by a few percent. Extreme Emotion/Other was the least preferred by the content creators.

Figure 6

Video Sample Theme Percentages
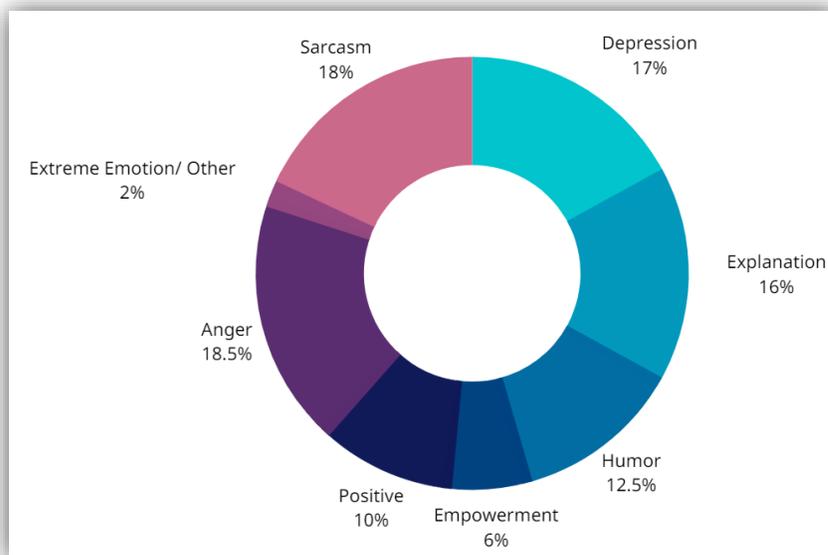
These were the first 200 videos that met the researcher's criteria. A new TikTok account was used for the samples to avoid algorithm inconsistencies. The 200 videos were analyzed extensively for their framework using their narrative performances' verbal and nonverbal aspects. Four steps were taken to code each video to recognize themes and collect information.

1. First, analyzing the performance helped interpret the creator's Primary Framework (Goffman, 1989), coding the emotional theme for the video.

2. Second, the videos were studied for visuals, tone, verbal language, symbols, body language, and emotions. This step allowed the researcher to interpret the narrative meaning of the video further.

The final two steps involved collecting relevant analytics data necessary to study engagement.

3. The third step analyzed all analytics data, including *likes, views*, comments, and *shares*. Screenshots of the top twenty comments were also taken. These comments were studied for creator support, anti-cyberbullying messages, and advocacy for social causes.

4. Finally, all data pieces were recorded and manually entered into the coding form. In addition, videos and screenshots were downloaded and saved into a digital file folder.

Results

The reasons content creators stated they were bullied are identified in Figure 7. Some content creators did not state the reason they were bullied. The study analyzed the negative comment if the content creator addressed the bully's comment via on-screen texts or verbally.

Figure 7

Reasons Creators were Bullied
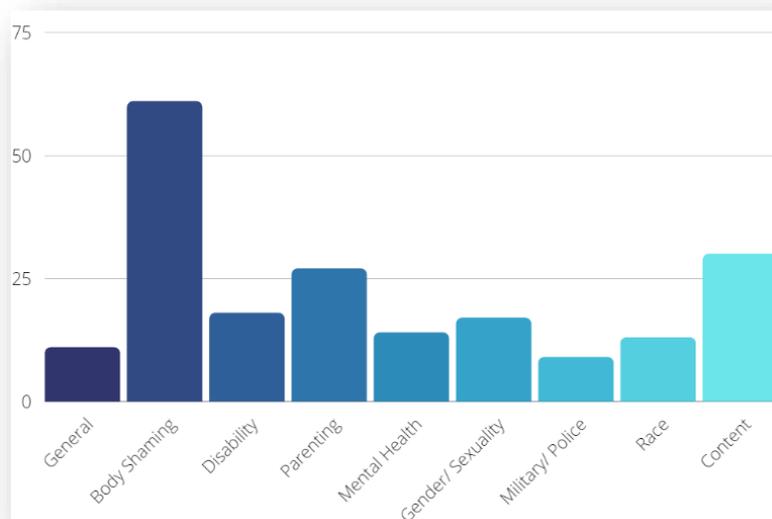
Figure 7 provides knowledge of nine common occurrences of TikTok cyberbullying using the 200-video data set. Again, Body-Shaming was the most prevalent in this study, with military/police showing the fewest occurrences. This 200-video data set can be the start of additional research to help explain which forms of bullying are most common. Additionally, future research can increase the number of data sets confirming or denying these figures as representative for all of TikTok. These figures are representative of the top occurrences using this 200-video data set. Examining Figure 6 and Figure 7, females experienced body shaming as the most common group and reason for being cyberbullied.

Sample Comments Made by Bullies

The samples and figures below reflect bullies' comments. In addition, they provided data that described the content creator's response videos. Finally, the examples also described the bully's negative comments and personal attacks.

Figure 8

Creator @kyauchiha
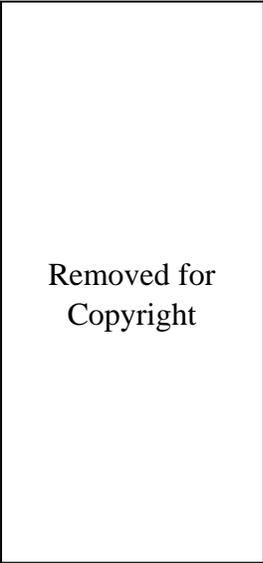
Removed for
Copyright

This account is an example listed in Figures 6 and 7, noting women and body shaming as the leading group and reason for cyberbullying in this data set. For example, creator @kyauchiha, shown in Figure 8, is a plus-sized woman. She was a burn victim whose videos promoted body positivity for plus-size women and representation for burn survivors. She recorded a video in a bathing suit and showed visible burn scars. Cyberbullies harassed her for her obesity and burn scars. She included an exert in her response video of her original video where she was bullied. She then expressed anger at the bullies' comments.

Fisher's (1984) Narrative Paradigm stated that people are storytellers. Creator @kyauchiha's response video's story was to create awareness for burn victims. She also noted that others get shamed into covering up their burn scars. She expressed that it angered her that the bullies chose to focus on her weight. She said this distracted from her story for burn victims. The purpose of her story was to persuade others that they should not be ashamed of burn scars. Her message created engagements in the comments scroll with anti-bullying messages and body positivity social advocacy. Figure 8's first picture is a screenshot from the original video clip on

the left. The second picture on the right was a screenshot from the content creator's response video.

Figure 9

Creator @robynpugin

Figure 9 was also an example of female body shaming. The video showed a creator displaying bullying comments about her make-up. She started the video looking very overwhelmed by the bullies' comments. The video then transitions to the creator in full makeup, showing her skills and pride in her look. She used words on the screen and an audio clip to express herself. The video showed how she felt about the bullies' comments. Through her facial expressions and body language, she felt empowered and confident. Fisher's (1989) Narrative Paradigm stated that stories are told through verbal and nonverbal language.

Content creators need to make sure the audience understands the same symbolic meanings of the facial expressions. Blumer (1986) recognized that language and nonverbal

expressions are symbolic and have socially accepted meanings. The nonverbal language and expressions in Figure 9's video showed the emotions of being overwhelmed and upset. The transition included a music change and special effects. The next scene showed her in complete make-up with exciting emotions. The music change presented a symbolic shift in attitude and presentation in the video. It was a substantial storytelling shift from depression to empowerment during the video. The audience would need to share similar experiences and values with the music chosen. Music's emotions, such as happy and sad, are socially defined. If the audience does not connect with the music shift, the transformation in the video may be misinterpreted. In this video, the engagements were positive, and the comments left by the audience shared anti-bullying sentiment. The comments also stated social advocacy for body positivity. The transformation style of video editing was a nonverbal risk for shared symbolism that reached its goal. Sharing the socially accepted nonverbal communication helped the audience understand her transition from being bullied to feeling empowered.

Video Content Connections to the Audience

TikTok's community is a social group that shares commonalities. A creator's *followers* will likely understand their videos' verbal and nonverbal symbolism. Katz et al. (1973) recognized, "the uses and gratifications approach highlights the audience as a source of challenge to producers to cater more richly to the multiplicity of requirements and roles that it has disclosed" (p. 521). The content creators produce videos that they feel will connect with an audience. Katz et al.'s (1973) recognized that producers must consider the audience's needs and desires. Their audience can become *followers* by choice. Followers decide to see more of the accounts they find desirable.

Creating content that an audience decides meets their needs can lead to an audience member becoming a *follower*. Therefore, the content creator must develop their audience with like-minded users who share their experiences. These shared experiences can allow verbal and nonverbal performances to be viewed as acceptable, leading to engagements. Engagements can create dialogue in the comments. This dialogue is essential for creating awareness for social advocacy and anti-bullying.

Content creators can become unofficial social group leaders who influence symbolism and meanings. The term, *influencer*, recognizes the influences creators can have on their audience to influence thoughts, attitudes, and actions *(*Berne-Manero & Marzo-Navarro, 2020). As the audience feels connected to the creator, a bond is formed that enables the creator to influence the audience. Horton and Wohl's (1956) Parasocial Interaction discussed, "In addition to creating an appropriate tone and patter, the persona tries as far as possible to eradicate, or at last, to blur, the line which divides him and his show, as a formal performance, from the audience both in the studio and at home" (pp. 218-219). As a result of the creator's performance, the audience can see them as friends and build trust. These relationships are one-sided from the audience to the creator and not reciprocated.

The creator can leverage the Parasocial Relationship (Horton & Wohl, 1956) to influence and persuade their audience. The more of the creator's content that the audience watches and engages with, the more connected the audience may feel to the creator. Giles and Maltby (2006) described three levels of Parasocial Relationships for performers: Entertainment-social, Intense-personal, and Borderline-pathological. At the Entertainment-social level, an individual is familiar with a performer and their work. The Intense-personal increases content saturation, and the audience will feel a stronger connection to the performer. Finally, the Borderline-pathological is

the strongest of the three levels representing an individual's belief that the relationship is mutual between them and the performer. The more content that an individual watches of the performer, the level of saturation increases. As saturation increases, progressing to a higher Parasocial level can increase.

TikTok content creators that can establish their audience to the second and third level will have the most substantial ability to shape their audience's opinion. For example, a content creator producing multiple videos and engaging with their *followers* in the comments can increase the audience's bond. As the audience consumes content and feels more engaged with the creator, they can increase the Parasocial Relationship from level one to levels two and three (Giles & Maltby, 2006).

On TikTok, the creator can perform videos about anti-cyberbullying and social causes that can be echoed in the audience's comments within the engagements. This process creates a video that can shape the audience's opinion using Agenda Setting Theory (McCombs et al., 2014). In addition, the creator's performance can use emotions to persuade the audience against the bully and create social cause awareness for causes. Fisher (1984) recognized that a story would be more convincing than an argument. Therefore, a passionate performance with a well-told story will help aid persuasion.

The content creator can ask their audience to leave comments on the video's comment scroll against the bully. Additional interactions further the Parasocial Relationship between the audience and creator and increase content saturation. As the audience makes comments, *likes*, and *shares*, the video increases its position in the Algorithm (Anderson, 2020). When a clip becomes popular with interactions, the algorithm will rotate it on the *For You* page allowing more viewers to have access (Anderson, 2020).

As a result, more TikTok users will view the video. When the audience sees previous comments left by other viewers, they may feel they can discuss opinions and not feel marginalized, diminishing the "Spiral of Silence" (Noelle-Neumann, 1974). The creator's video clip with the audience's engagements and comments can become a platform for speaking out against cyberbullying and promoting social advocacy causes. The video clip becomes a well-rounded message, including a performance, audience comments, and the potential to share the video with other social media outlets. A direct path can be followed of how a content creator can leverage their audience's relationship using their cyberbully response videos to promote anti-cyberbullying messages and create social advocacy awareness.

Samples -Best Representation of the Eight Themes

The content creator's performance must connect with their audience to create engagement. Therefore, the performances were coded for emotions serving as the performances' narrative frameworks. The eight themes in this narrative content analysis emerged as videos were coded. The themes included the emotions: Depression, Explanation, Humor, Empowerment, Positive, Anger, Sarcasm, and Extreme Emotion/Other. First, each video was assigned a single theme. Next, videos were coded based on the communicator's verbal and nonverbal expression, which developed into themes. If a video seemed to fit multiple codes, it was analyzed predominantly from the verbal communication expressed by the creator. In instances where the creator did not speak, it was further analyzed nonverbally for the most consistent appropriate code. As themes emerged, they were added to the list. Each video's verbal and nonverbal elements were watched multiple times to ensure the proper theme was applied. Once an appropriate theme was used, videos were compared with others within the theme for commonalities.

The themes represented the creators' Primary Framework (Goffman, 1986). The framework gave the creator content boundaries to make a persuasive TikTok cyberbullying response video. The emotions chosen by the creator became the boundaries used to present the argument in the performance. The creator should work to stay consistent with the theme and not go outside the boundaries. Content outside the boundaries could confuse the audience and miscommunicate the message. Therefore, the theme represented the creator's primary emotion and how they performed with their verbal and nonverbal communication. The videos were analyzed for framework and narrative effectiveness gauged by audience interactions.

Sample Format

A picture of each content creator will be listed in the figures below. In addition, the first three comments from the scroll were recorded and listed below each figure. Finally, the analytics *likes*, *shares*, and *views* will also be included. Success is a relative term, and there would not be a way to contact the creator to understand their definition of success for the clip. For example, those with a smaller number of *followers* may not have a goal of going viral or creating lots of views. Viral status is reached when a clip reaches many considerable views (Nikolinakou & King, 2018).

Because the creators' intents are not known, success cannot be measured through a specific view count, shares, or comments. Instead, data was obtained by reading the comments. The comments showed how the audience responded to the video with support or lack of support for anti-cyberbullying messages, creator self-esteem, and awareness for social causes. Example videos were selected for each theme. Examples were chosen based on saturation and repetitiveness. When the theme was saturated, no further examples were added.

Framework Themes

Theme 1: Depression

Content creators coded into this theme showed nonverbal signs of extreme sadness, expressing the Depression Theme. Nonverbal behaviors such as crying, looking down, and crossing arms across the body were all exhibited. The more severe the bully's comments, the creators' nonverbal communication appeared stronger, creating the need for the Depression Theme. The bullies' comments included death threats and personal insults.

The audience expressed offers of support and worked to build the self-esteem of creators in this theme. Martínez- Castaño et al. (2020) noted, "The impact and prevalence of common mental disorders, such as depression, is severe. In January 2020, the World Health Organization estimated that more than 264 million people of all ages suffer from depression" (p. 1). The depressed behaviors expressed by creators were prevalent in the language they used to express themselves.

Creators in this theme discussed their personal feelings about the comment of their bully and how it made them feel. In addition, creators referred to their mental state and the impact the bully's comments made on their life outside of the platform. Uban et al. (2021) analyzed, "Depressed people speak about causes more when more negative emotions are communicated, and the opposite happens to not depressed people: the less they speak about causes, the more negative emotions they express" (p. 489). The language used by creators under the depression theme exhibited their struggle with the topic pointed out by the bully.

The following accounts were chosen as the best framework for verbal and nonverbal communication representing the Depression Theme. The figure name consists of the TikTok usernames and the number the account represents in Appendix A. The number also represents

the order in which they were coded. A list of analytics information is below the graphic and three comments on the video.

Figure 10

(65) @african_hippie

Removed for Copyright

Analytics:

Likes- 13,300

Shares- 32

Views- 80,300

Comments- 765

The Top 25 comments in the scroll were overwhelming supportive

1. "You are such an incredible Mom."

2. "So Sorry for Your Loss"

3. "Wow, the nerve of some people."

The creator in Figure 10 is a mother who has suffered the death of two of her infant children. She made a video sharing her story and her struggle with grief. The bully commented, "How many dead ones did you push out before adopting?" This creator did not speak in her video but told her story through words on the screen. The music playing behind the video was

very somber instrumental piano music. In her performance, she chose nonverbal communication to set the framework with the music and silence. In addition, the creator shared her struggles with grief and depression with the on-screen text.

She shared that the bully's comments sent her into a downward spiral that took her a long time to recover. In the audience comments, the creator responded to many of her *followers*. She expressed her appreciation for the support of *followers* who came to her defense. The video was successful in creating *likes*, *views*, and comments. Interacting with her audience allowed the creator to further the relationship between them.

The creator also stated that the original bully deleted the comment after people came to her defense. She discussed how hard it has been for her to recover from her grief and care for her other children. The creator displayed many behaviors that indicated the Depression Theme as the appropriate code for this video. The creator looked down through most of the video. Her nonverbal communication included a frown and a sad expression of pain. The audience connected to the creator's theme and had robust engagements with *likes, shares*, and comments. The comments were positive and were consistent with support for anti-cyberbullying, building the creator's self-esteem, and creating awareness for infant deaths.

Figure 11

(72) @keenayoulittleshit

Removed for Copyright

Analytics:

Likes- 148,000

Shares- 1,844

Views- 1,400,000

Comments- 1,700

The Top 25 comments in scroll were unsupportive

1. "So why are you telling us?"

2. "OK, Sounds Staged"

3. "What are you trying to achieve by posting this

   private stuff?"

This creator in Figure 11 showed many signs of depression. The creator was crying and hysterical in the video addressing the viewers. The bully's comment stated, "She's not wrong. Wish I knew the ex-husband so I could buy him a beer." The creator was visibly upset by the bully's comment and chose to use on-screen texts. She also spoke during the 15-second video. She stated in the video, "My ex-husband beat me, raped me, and hurt our children. Do you guys not understand that I'm a person?" She was crying so hard that it was difficult to understand her audio.

Figure 11 showed numerous comments from unsupportive *followers* who sided against the creator. Many individuals in the comments questioned the validity of the creator's story and showed minimal sympathy for her. There was very little empathy from commenters as they felt that the creator should not be sharing such personal information on such a public platform. The comments told the creator that she should be seeking the police or therapy. The video had over 11,000 comments, and most of them in the top 20 were antagonistic towards the creator. It is interesting to note that this creator has deleted her account since this post. It is unknown if she chose to delete her account or if the TikTok algorithm banned her. This creator has since started a new account, but the video addressing her bullies is not on her new account.

She did not connect with her audience with her verbal and nonverbal performance. The audience did not accept her emotional plea and did not act to engage with her video. It is unknown why the audience did not connect with this video because it is impossible to interview her *followers*. Zohourian et al. (2020) argued that social media popularity prediction could vary based on many criteria, including visual features and production values, potentially affecting message clarity. This content creator's appeal, although very emotional, lacked audio clarity due to her crying. It made the video hard to understand. This clip did not have back and forth comments with the audience. In addition, the top twenty comments did not promote anti-bullying messages or support social causes.

Figure 12

(144) @tyshonlawrence

Removed for Copyright

Analytics:

Likes- 199,100

Shares- 162

Views- 804,500

Comments- 3,393

The Top 25 comments in the scroll were overwhelmingly supportive.

1. "Don't cry because you look perfect."

2. "Don't let them bother you. You are AMAZING."

3. "Don't cry, haters don't like you, but I love you, you are king."

On TikTok, there is a trend of people who read mean comments from bullies to make a joke of the comments. The creator in Figure 12 started out reading the mean comments intending to make jokes. While reading the negative bully comments, he became overwhelmed and began to cry. His emotions shifted from humor to sadness, confirming this as a video in the Depression Theme. His verbal attempts to communicate became difficult to understand within his emotional appeal. He stated, "These hate comments are getting to me, man. I can't do this anymore." The video ended with the creator covering his face and crying. This emotional act displayed nonverbal communication, sadness, and depression.

His nonverbal reactions while crying showed that he was upset and hurt by the bullies' comments. The creator did not specify what he was being bullied for and did not respond to the bully directly. The caption on the screen lets the viewer know that this is a response video to a bully's comments from a previous video. The comments on this video supported the creator, recognizing that the audience chose to engage with his video. The audience comments supported the creator encouraging him not to listen to the bullies. The top twenty comments included messages about depression support and anti-cyberbullying themes creating awareness for both causes.

Figure 13

(160) @amandamariexxo

Removed for Copyright

Analytics:
Likes- 22,800
Shares- 37
Views- 160,400
Comments- 1,028

The Top 25 comments in the scroll were overwhelmingly supportive

1. "You are beautiful just the way you are, queen."

2. "Don't be sad, we love you."

3. "Don't let the mean people bring you down, queen."

The creator in Figure 13 does not address the bully or the audience. This video showed the creator lying on her back in the pouring rain. She was crying, and her body was shaking as she cried. The comment on the screen from the bully states, "Zoom zoom to the gym." There was soft, sad music playing in the video setting the frame for Depression. The video's mood showed that the creator was in pain. She chose to use nonverbal expressions to express her sadness. The comments on this video were highly positive. The audience told the creator how beautiful she was and condemned the bully for body shaming the creator. There were no negative comments, and the creator pointed out that the bully deleted the comment and account. The audience's comments were incredibly protective of the creator and identified with her pain. This video succeeded with the nonverbal performance. The top twenty comments consisted of messages promoting self-esteem, body positivity, and anti-cyberbullying.

Figure 14

(165) @getfumkywithjanice

Removed for Copyright

Analytics:

Likes- 140,100

Shares- 499

Views- 566,500

Comments- 5,068

The Top 25 comments in the scroll were overwhelmingly supportive

1. "Whoever did this to her, your days are numbered."

2. "They are insecure because you are so stunning."

3. "I love you, you are loved."

The creator in Figure 14 does not respond to a specific bully comment. Instead, she addresses her bullies in general. She does not speak but uses text on the screen to communicate nonverbally. The text she posted read, "I give up. You guys win. These comments are hitting me differently than I thought. So, thank you, guys." Throughout the entire video, she was crying hard. She had tissues and was trying to calm down as the text appeared on the screen. She chose to emphasize her nonverbal communication emphasizing her Depression framework theme. Her eyes were red and puffy. Her nose was running throughout the entire video.

The Depression Theme was furthered by her sad demeanor and the depressing style of music playing over the video. The video's mood was very somber. On the other hand, the audience's comments on this video were highly favorable and supportive, as shown in Figure 14. Many comments expressed concern for the mental health of the creator. This creator chose not to interact in the comments. She did not *like* comments or respond to them in any way. Though the video caption said, "K bye now," the creator's account still existed at the time of this research and had new videos posted. She did not choose to leave TikTok. The audience's top twenty comments included messages to build the creator's self-esteem and promote anti-cyberbullying. One comment included a threat to the bullies for the situation. Since the creator did not name a reason she was bullied, additional social agendas were not promoted in the comments by the audience.

Figure 15

(199) @misshaleymichelle

Removed for Copyright

| Analytics: |
| Likes- 11,000 |
| Shares- 46 |
| Views- 75,700 |
| Comments- 1,542 |

The Top 25 comments in the scroll were overwhelmingly supportive

1. "We Love and appreciate you."

2. "I support you as you are."

3. "I'll be your friend."

The creator in Figure 15 was intensely verbal and direct, discussing her feelings about being bullied on TikTok. She did not address a single bully or comment but instead talked about her sad feelings. She did not cry or show nonverbal signals of crying. She described how the bullies had caused her self-doubt. She stated the bullies made her feel like she could not post content without worrying about how it will be received. She discussed her depression from the bullies' comments placing this in the Depression Theme.

This creator was interactive in the comments section of her video with the audience. She clicked like and responded to many commenters. It is interesting to note that, as shown in Figure 15, the creator only responded to the positive comments and ignored the negative comments. Though she is visibly upset by the bullies' comments, the creator rebounds with positive comments. She frequently used smiley faces and heart *emojis* to respond to her comments. *Emojis* are symbolic animations that represent emotions that can be shared on social media (Danesi, 2016). Her video created lots of engagement, and her message connected to the audience. The audience overwhelmingly supported her in the comments. The comments included messages to build the creator's self-esteem and anti-cyberbullying sentiments. Unfortunately, since no reason was provided for the cyberbully's message, the creator did not promote social causes.

Theme 2: Explanation

Creators of this theme chose to explain why the bully was wrong. The creators gave context to why the comment was out of line. They explained elements of their personal lives and tried to provide additional information on why the bully made comments. Creators in this category showed a wide array of emotions in addition to their explanations. However, the creators were not emotional and gave straightforward explanations of their situation. Some of the creators in this theme had physical disabilities and used their videos to explain their conditions. These creators chose to use their videos to create awareness about disabilities. They informed the audience on medical devices, mental health diagnoses, and awareness. Other creators with mental health conditions, such as ADHD and Tourette's Syndrome, used their video responses as opportunities to advocate for their mental health conditions.

Krämer and Schäwel (2020) defined these style explanations as, "Self-disclosure has been defined as providing personal information about the self to other individuals and is seen as a precondition for the development of interpersonal relationships" (p. 67). Within the Explanation Theme, self-disclosure is a crucial element. Self-disclosure is a common form of building a relationship between creators and their audience. Luo and Hancock (2020) discussed, "People now regularly disclose information to their social network and beyond through posts on social media and conversations shared in a variety of messaging platforms" (p. 110). Through these explanations, creators find comfort in self-disclosing the cyberbully's reasons.

The following accounts were chosen as the best framework for verbal and nonverbal communication representing the Explanation Theme. The figure name consists of the TikTok usernames and the number the account represents in Appendix A. The number also represents

the order in which they were coded. A list of analytics information is below the graphic and three comments on the video.

Figure 16

(2) @theresavandamstylist

Removed for Copyright

Analytics:

Likes- 425,000

Shares- 3,142

Views- 1,800,00

Comments- 17,900

The Top 25 comments in the scroll were overwhelmingly supportive

1. "People are so dumb."

2. "The damn savior complex on people is astounding, honestly."

3. "Oh Friend. I'm sorry. I love you and think you are wonderful. Folks are sometimes the worst."

This creator in Figure 16 explained her experience with hearing loss. She described herself as hearing impaired and almost entirely deaf. With her hearing aids, she described herself as hearing impaired instead of deaf. Bullies, in her comments, said she was defining her disability wrong. She explained that it was her disability, and she felt she had the right to describe it how

she wanted. She felt they did not have a right to define her disability, especially if they were not hearing impaired. Her video was coded to the Explaining Theme for her describing her disability. The explanation was the reason she was bullied online.

In the reaction video, she verbally and nonverbally expressed frustration about the bullying comments. The framework was an explanation and not anger. Her nonverbal communication did not express anger but had sweeping hand motions showing frustration. The clip was coded to the Explanation Theme because the focus was on explaining the situation to others more than being angry at the bullies. She does not tag a specific bullying comment. Her goal was to create social awareness and not attack any exact negative comment. The comments section on this video was very supportive. Her framing, verbal, and nonverbal communication allowed her to connect with her audience and receive account engagement. Many audience members that made comments had disabilities. The audience comments stated that they had similar experiences with people telling them how to define their disabilities. This clip successfully created audience engagement for anti-bullying and support for the deaf community.

Figure 17

(22) @codyjayartistry

Removed for Copyright

Analytics:
Likes- 169
Shares- 1
Views- 1,278
Comments- 37

The Top 25 comments in the scroll were overwhelmingly supportive

1. "I love your videos."

2. "I love the sassy side LOL."

3. "I love your makeup, I see a lot of boys with makeup."

The creator in Figure 17 is a male makeup artist who demonstrated his makeup skills on himself. First, he verbally reads several of the bullying comments made in his video. Then, he chose to respond to them verbally. The negative comments ranged from accusatory to general insults. After each comment, the creator explained why the bully was wrong and how he felt about the negativity. For example, one insult claimed that wearing makeup was not for boys. In addition, the creator explained that he had never wanted to be a girl. These examples placed the video in the Explanation Theme.

He further described that historically makeup was never intended for just women. He had very animated nonverbal facial expressions. His performance was passionate and entertaining. He stated that in today's culture, many men wear makeup, and it has no bearing on what gender they identify. The audience comments on this creator's video were very supportive. Many audience members commented on his right to wear makeup. As a result, he connected to his audience and created engagements successfully. The audience's comments showed support for gender identity, the LGBTQ community, and the freedom for individuals to express themselves artistically. There were also comments made against cyberbullying.

Figure 18

(29) @immarollwithit

Removed for Copyright

Analytics:

Likes- 1,200,000

Shares- 6,011

Views- 4,300,000

Comments- 9,836

The Top 25 comments in the scroll were overwhelmingly supportive

1. "You said this with so much grace."

2. "She is gorgeous, not gonna lie."

3. "Felt the same fear using a cane at work."

The creator in Figure 18 uses a wheelchair due to a mobility issue. Her video stated she received daily comments that she should not use a wheelchair. People saw she could move her legs and argued that she did not need a wheelchair. The creator explained that she had never claimed to be paralyzed. She further explained that while she can move her legs, she cannot walk. She noted that many people have disabilities that are not obvious. She said that because a person has an invisible disability, they should not be shamed for using a medical mobility device. These comments coded her video in the Explanation Theme.

Her vocal performance was solid and informative. Her nonverbal communication expressions showed intensity but lighthearted in her facial expressions. Her audience was supportive, with others sharing their experiences of being bullied using medical devices. Many of the comments asked questions about the creator's condition. The creator responded to comments by offering explanations and support for others with disability struggles. The creator did not use anger as a frame for the video. Instead, she was very upbeat and offered a robust and well-supported argument. Her performance outlined why people with disabilities should not be judged for needing mobility assistance. She successfully connected with her audience and created engagement. The audience comments supported the social cause for disability awareness and anti-cyberbullying.

Figure 19

(98) @raegreen135

Removed for Copyright

Analytics:
Likes- 742,200
Shares- 263
Views- 3,100,000
Comments- 1,458

The Top 25 comments in the scroll were overwhelmingly supportive

1. "The ignorance of some people."

2. "Who's that ignorant to say something like that."

3. "You're the reason why I understand these things."

The creator in Figure 19 is blind and received multiple negative comments from people that she was not blind because she responded to comments on her videos. She used the video to explain how she answered comments. The video was placed in the Explanation Theme from this creator's creative method of demonstrating how she answers comments. She showed her assistant the comments and had help answering comments. Together, they acted out a sample interaction. The assistant read off a question someone asked in the comments, and once the creator responds to the assistant, she responds to the comment for the creator.

The skit was a solid performance to understand her disability. She used her and the personal assistant to demonstrate the situation. The demonstrations furthered the explanation. This video used verbal and nonverbal performance elements projecting energy and fun from her and the assistant. The result was an entertaining and informative clip that explained her disability. It was able to connect with the audience and create engagement. The comments on the creator's video were strongly supportive. Most of the comments asked follow-up questions, and the creator responded. The responses created further engagements and helped build relationships. The dialogue in the comments promoted anti-cyberbullying and disability awareness between the creator and the audience.

Figure 20

(141) @kierstenondemand

Removed for Copyright

Analytics:

Likes- 534

Shares- 3

Views- 15,100

Comments- 43

The Top 25 comments in the scroll were overwhelmingly supportive

1. "I am so sorry For Your loss."

2. "I am so sorry. You did great bringing calm to your response and not anger."

3. "Your videos are really inspiring to me, and I love them."

This creator in Figure 20 was grieving the death of her infant twins. The bully commented that God killed this creator's infants so she would spend more time with her first-born child. The creator very calmly explained her religious beliefs and how she felt about the death of her children. She used a calm framework and controlled her verbal and nonverbal communication with this demeanor. She discussed original sin and God's plan for his children. She explained that her twin's death was not a punishment by God.

She further noted that her story had inspired others in similar situations. Although she mourned the loss of her children, she is thankful her story could help others. The comments left by the audience were very supportive, and her calm framework allowed her to explain the situation successfully. She created engagement with her audience, and there are comments from those who also experienced infant loss. The audience's comments were also complimentary of the creator, telling her how beautiful, calm, and well stated her response was to the bully. The engagement comments worked to build the creator's self-esteem, raised awareness for infant death, and had anti-cyberbullying messages.

Theme 3: Humor

Content creators used humor in their bully response videos. Many of the humor responses were self-deprecating. Creators often chose to take the issue the bully was using and make fun of themselves. This style of comedy lessened the effect and the pain of the comments. Trindade (2020) recommended that virtual humor with a self-deprecating response can deescalate the online situation like one that would be face-to-face. Examples include overweight creators making jokes about them being overweight. Many of the creators in this category were bullied for physical reasons.

Reyes et al. (2012) explained that when humor is used on social media, textual indicators such as hashtags and captions are used to clarify the post's intent. Creators in this theme used texts to help them with their responses. Hashtags and captions clearly stated that a joke was intended. Creators chose to acknowledge and dismiss the bullies' comments. Still, they used humor as a method to make the issue less personal.

Many of the creators in this category were standup comedians or were already known for their comedic TikTok content. Other creators used self-deprecating humor at their own expense.

The following accounts were chosen as the best framework display of verbal and nonverbal communication representing the humor theme. The number in the title represents where these accounts appear in Appendix A. The number also represents the order in which they were coded. A list of analytics information is below the graphic and three comments on the video.

Figure 21

(75) @chelseahartisme

Removed for Copyright

Analytics:

Likes- 267,000

Shares- 7,322

Views- 838,500

Comments- 3,333

The Top 25 comments in the scroll were overwhelmingly supportive

1. "OMG YES"

2. "Why can't people just worry about themselves?"

3. "You do rock those clothes better than me."

The creator in Figure 21 is known for her comedic content, and she used a humorous framework to respond to the bully's comment. She works as a stand-up comedian and creates social media comedy content. The bully said she looked like a transgender person dressed in men's clothing. However, her verbal and nonverbal communication was significantly animated and passionate during her performance. Her approach placed this video in the Humor Theme.

When responding to the bully, she explained that there was nothing wrong with being trans as the word transgender was not an insult. She also stated that transgender people are beautiful and delivered a positive message about the cause. She reminded the bully that people did not care about their negative comments. Using humor as her framework, she stated in the video that the bully was only mad because she looked better in men's clothing than the bully did. Throughout the video, she laughed and smiled, showing positive energy with her nonverbal and verbal communication. She successfully connected to her audience. created engagement and received positive comments on the video. The comments raised awareness for the transgender community and had anti-cyberbullying content.

Figure 22

(78) @fat_and_fit_life

Removed for Copyright

Analytics:

Likes- 3,343

Shares- 12

Views- 17,000

Comments- 120

The Top 25 comments in the scroll were overwhelmingly supportive

1. "Best Clapback I have seen."

2. "You are flippin' amazing."

3. "OMG That is an excellent response 10/10."

The creator in Figure 22 received a bullying comment that asked, "how am I supposed to be turned on by a boulder?" This comment was a negative sexual comment about her weight. The creator used humor as a framework and laughed throughout the video. The use of comedy placed the video in the Humor Theme. She stated she often had hate comments and did not usually respond to them. She found this comment funny and chose to make a video responding to it. Her verbal and nonverbal communication was upbeat and was consistent with her cheerful manner.

She played a clip of the Universal/Dreamworks movie, *Shrek*, where the character named Donkey looks at a rock and says, "That is a nice boulder." The creator reappears onscreen, laughing at the movie clip and comparing it to the bully's comment. Again, she was able to connect positively with her audience creating engagement. The comments on this video were supportive, and the audience complimented her creativity and humor. Comments also described the bully as inappropriate and complimented the creator's physical appearance. These comments supported the social cause for body positivity and promoted anti-cyberbullying content.

Figure 23

(161) @scottywartooth

Removed for Copyright

Analytics:

Likes- 25,400

Shares- 404

Views- 172,400

Comments- 834

The Top 25 comments in the scroll were overwhelmingly supportive

1. "Christian Follower Here! You are hilarious."

2. "This is amazing."

3. "You are a gift."

The creator in Figure 23 *cosplays* as Jesus Christ. In his video, the creator reads and responds to hate comments from bullies while dressed as Jesus. He does not pretend to be Jesus or disrespectfully use any Christian ideology. He read the hate comments he often received from people watching his videos. His framework was humor, and he had very animated facial expressions for nonverbal communication. His verbal communication had a very playful feel to his words. He also used nonverbal communication with facial expressions to communicate comical elements. He used funny voices and made comedic comments about the bullies' negativity. The comedy placed this video in the Humor Theme.

The audience's comments on his video were supportive. The audience repeatedly commented that the bullies could not take a joke. Some commenters identified as Christians and said they found the clips entertaining. The comments had anti-cyberbullying content and worked to build the creator's self-esteem. No social cause was named, and no promotion or awareness was created for a cause.

Theme 4: Empowerment

The creators coded to Empowerment used their response to show support and create awareness for social causes. Although many of the videos in other themes promoted social causes, this theme recognized the social cause as the framework for the video. Social media is widely used to create awareness of social causes and spread messages of empowerment (Leong et al., 2019). Showing pride in social causes takes away the power from the bully. It allowed the content creator to use their TikTok account to promote social justice causes. Siddarth and Pal (2020) recognized that when using social media platforms, "individuals can identify with and support a social movement in light-touch,low-risk ways, without acquiescing to the greater demands, actions, and sacrifices that traditional collective action may require" (p. 3). Social media allows users to promote social causes without making financial or physical sacrifices. TikTok account users can identify with social movements and causes, allowing them to feel belonging to a community.

Berger and Luckmann (1966) noted that communication with others is how an individual will shape their social knowledge. Socializing allows individuals to connect with others and find similarities within their symbolism. Empowerment creates a sense of pride within an individual for the social group they choose to attach to their identity. Promoting a social cause can show that the content creators identify and connect to others who share these same interests.

Creators coded in this theme chose to use their response to the bullying comments to spread awareness of social issues ranging from medical conditions to LGBTQ awareness. The following accounts were selected as the best framework display of verbal and nonverbal communication representing the humor theme. The number in the title represents where these accounts appear in Appendix A. It also represents the order in which they were coded. A list of analytics information is below the graphic and three comments on the video.

Figure 24

5) @themcleodfamily

Removed for Copyright

Analytics:
Likes- 130,300
Shares- 843
Views- 531,600
Comments- 5,090

The Top 25 comments in the scroll were overwhelmingly supportive

1. "The world desperately needs more humans like you."

2. "He is stunning. You a great Momma."

3. "OMG I am so jealous of him he looks amazing."

The creator in Figure 24 is a mother to a young LGBTQ boy that chooses to dress in elaborate costumes. The video began with the mother pointing out the bully's comment stating that they would beat their son for this behavior. The mother defended her son and said he has more style and confidence than other kids. As she spoke, a slideshow played of her son's detailed costumes. She pointed out her son's talent. She also stated that the bullies should admit they are jealous of her son. Her video created strong engagement from the audience, and the comments were highly favorable in support of the boy and the mother. There were no negative comments in all the comments viewed on this video. The mother in this video is highly cheerful about her son. She stood up for social justice of a boy's right to wear any clothes they choose, placing this in the Empowerment Theme.

The frame of this video was empowerment for the LGBTQ community. The verbal communication style expressed pride for her son. The energy was powerful, and the mother beamed with support. The nonverbal communication was equally strong, with positive facial expressions. The social justice theme was present throughout the clip and was the video's main point. She also interacted in the comments and responded to comments with positive feedback. The comments created engagement showing support for anti-cyberbullying and the LGBTQ community.

Figure 25

74) @daddyy.dess

Removed for Copyright

Analytics:

Likes- 247,700

Shares- 1373

Views- 747,700

Comments- 1,748

The Top 25 comments in the scroll were overwhelmingly supportive

1. "Anyone who says you look better with it on is ableist."

2. "You look best with whatever makes you most comfortable"

3. "I love how even with no hand you manage a perfect mic drop walkaway."

This creator in Figure 25 does not speak in her video but does use nonverbal body language to respond to the bully. The creator is missing an arm and has a prosthetic. The bullying comment on the screen read, "You look better with it on." The creator danced to hip-hop music, ripped off her prosthetic arm, and showed her missing limb. She displayed nonverbal communication in her facial expressions and body language when removing the prosthetic. She

showed off her missing arm and performed to show that she disagreed with the bully's comment. With her nonverbal performance, she was able to engage her audience. Her framework was empowerment and showcased body positivity within her video. This performance helped engage her audience, who commented positively on the response video. Many commenters remarked that they watched the video multiple times because the creator was so confident they did not notice her missing arm the first time they viewed it.

The creator used the Empowerment Theme to display her confidence, promote the social movement for body positivity, and create disability awareness. Comments were also made against cyberbullying and promoting anti-cyberbully awareness.

Theme 5: Positive

The creators of this theme stated that they would keep their response videos positive towards the bullies. They also implied that they were not affected by the bully's comments through their performance. Their framework involved delivering a positive message about the bully's comments and did not use negativity in their videos. Some creators expressed concern for the bullies and were worried about the state of mind they may be in for making negative comments on TikTok. This theme's creators acknowledged that the bully's comments were hurtful. Still, the comments did not lower their confidence. The creators noted that if the same comment was left on a different creator's account, the comment could have detrimental effects. Concern was shown for both the bully and future victims of the bully.

The reasons these content creators were bullied varied, but the commonality was in the positive framework for the response. Some of the videos used symbolism within their response (Blumer, 1966), attaching to existing experiences they share with the audience. The positive framework was implied through the symbolism instead of directly stated. The following accounts

were chosen as the best framework for verbal and nonverbal communication representing the positive theme. The number in the title represents where these accounts appear in Appendix A. It also represents the order in which they were coded. A list of analytics information is below the graphic and three comments on the video.

Figure 26

(7) @michael.quintock

Removed for Copyright

Analytics:	The Top 25 comments in the scroll were overwhelmingly supportive
Likes- 46,800	1. "She's so pretty."
Shares- 48	2. "So happy For Your sweet family."
Views- 359,300	3. "How can anyone say anything bad about this
Comments- 2,061	beautiful moment."

The creator in Figure 26 is the single parent of three adopted children. The video's framework represented the Positive Theme, and the performance used nonverbal communication through facial expressions. The creator did not speak in the video but told his story through

onscreen texts. He explained that he was a single dad with three children. Bullies left comments on many of his videos expressing negativity about being a single parent. He stated through on-screen text that people would not ruin the happy occasion of finalizing his daughter's adoption. At the end of the video, the on-screen text said, "You will not stop our Happiness. Be nice or keep scrolling." While the text shows on the screen, happy music plays over the video, showcasing the positive theme. The creator and his daughter are smiling, using their nonverbal expressions and performance to show happiness and positive feelings.

The creator was successful with the performance. The clip had engagement from the audience and had many positive and supportive comments. One audience member commented, "No room for haters on such a positive page!" Other audience members remarked on how beautiful the creator's daughter was and that their family looked happy. The creator responded positively to comments creating further engagement. He clicked like on some of their comments and responded to others, thanking them for their compliments. In addition, the audience responded with anti-cyberbullying comments. The audience also left comments supporting single and adoptive parents raising awareness for the cause.

Figure 27

(47) @officer_vest

Removed for Copyright

Analytics:

Likes- 14,000

Shares- 63

Views- 74,100

Comments- 1,485

The Top 25 comments in the scroll were

overwhelmingly supportive

1. "Perfect Response."

2. "You are such a class act."

3. "Absolutely amazing response."

The creator in Figure 27 is a police officer. Although his verbal tone and nonverbal expressions in the response video were intense, the framework was representative of the Positive Theme. He showed no ill will towards the bully. The bully commented on the screen, "quit your job or eat your gun." The creator calmly explained that suicide is prevalent in his line of work, and he has had to deal with it repeatedly. His framework was to discuss bullies and criminals, but not in a negative light. This clip fits the Positive Framework because he shows concern for the bully. The bully's comment was negative toward him, but the creator was emotionally unaffected

by the comment. The creator chose to stay positive towards the bully. He used empathy to try and understand that the bully may not like police officers. The officer also explained that he does not like arresting criminals, but he does not wish ill will upon them. He showed concern for bullies and criminals while staying positive about his job as a police officer.

The video created engagement with the audience. The audience's comments on the video were supportive. Many commented positive feelings about police officers and thanked him for being a police officer and making videos. The audience also commented on the creator's positive message stating that he handled the bully perfectly and acted honorably. The creator engaged with the audience and responded to many commenters with *likes* and additional comments. The clip's comments consisted of anti-cyberbullying messages and support for police officers. It created awareness for both causes.

Figure 28

(87) @hotmessheidi

Removed for Copyright

Analytics:

Likes- 696

Shares- 4

Views- 7,111

Comments- 74

The Top 25 comments in the scroll were overwhelmingly supportive

1. "This is terrible. I am so sorry."

2. "That's horrible, so sorry this happened."

3. "This is heartbreaking."

The creator in Figure 28 does not express why she was being bullied. She instead focuses on her experience of being bullied. She verbally speaks directly to the bully and expresses concern for the bully's mental well-being. The on-screen bully's comment stated, "Your life is a joke; please end it." The creator keeps a positive framework and displays many concerns about the bully's mental state. The creator's nonverbal expressions show concern and vocalize in a calm tone that she is "heartbroken for whatever pain in their life would prompt you to tell someone else to end their life." Her remarks to her bully placed this video in the Positive Framework.

In the video, she begged the bully to stop posting negative comments. The creator stated that other TikTok users may have weakened emotional states. She recognized that a young child or teen could suffer emotional harm from receiving such a message. The optimistic tone of the performance and message created engagement with the audience. The audience's comments were positive and complimented the creator for the positive response toward the bully. The creator responded to many of the comments creating further engagements. The comments supported anti-cyberbullying, but the video did not name a social cause. Social cause comments were not within the top twenty.

Theme 6: Anger

This theme presented anger in the creators' verbal tone and nonverbal reactions. Many of the creators in this category used vulgar language. The nonverbal hand gestures expressed anger towards the bully. The creators' emotions included frustration and being upset at the negative comments. Many of the creators did not indicate why they were being bullied. Instead, they showcased their emotions from the negativity.

Anger could be expressed mildly or enraged, and this range was prevalent in the performances. The mild anger videos stated that they were angry and addressed the situation. The enraged videos insulted, threatened, and yelled at the bullies. The following accounts were chosen as the best framework for verbal and nonverbal communication representing the Anger Theme. The number in the title represents where these accounts appear in Appendix A. It also represents the order in which they were coded. A list of analytics information is below the graphic and three comments on the video.

Figure 29

(18) @imdatmom

Removed for Copyright

Analytics:
Likes- 84,500
Shares- 1,245
Views- 353,600
Comments- 2,878

The Top 25 comments in the scroll were overwhelmingly supportive

1. "Say it louder, girl. I completely agree!"

2. "Look at Mama Bear!"

3. "Yes! Say it louder, Mama!"

This creator in Figure 29 verbally and nonverbally expressed her anger towards the bully's negative comment placing this video in the Anger Theme. The creator is a breastfeeding mother. The bully's comment stated she should cover up when she breastfeeds because the covering is not challenging to do. The creator's verbal communication uses swearwords and yelling. Her nonverbal expressions are also powerful, and she is not pleased with the comment. She uses the anger framework in the video, and her performance shows that she is distraught. She recorded the video while breastfeeding her child, displaying defiance within symbolism. The symbolism of breastfeeding the child showed she disagreed with the bully. This visual was planned to see if the audience would connect to her symbolic act.

Blumer (1966) stated that knowledge is symbolic and requires the shared experience of others for understanding. Without directly stating she was defiant towards the bully, breastfeeding her baby symbolically showed she disagreed with the bully's statement. The creator also verbally noted that her child does not like to be covered while feeding. She responded that the bully should sit and eat their meal covered by a blanket. Her performance connected with the audience, and she created video engagement. Her story was cohesive and easy to understand. The audience's comments were very supportive and included support from other breastfeeding mothers. The shared experiences allowed the audience to connect to the

creator's use of symbolism and the anger framework. The creator continued engagement with additional audience *comments* and *likes*. This engagement created social cause awareness for breastfeeding mothers and promoted anti-cyberbullying ideas.

Figure 30

(43) @zacheryjosephh

Removed for Copyright

Analytics:

Likes- 18,000

Shares- 491

Views- 96,600

Comments- 1,881

The Top 25 comments in the scroll were mixed between non-supportive and supportive

1. "I'mma call their mother."

2. "Comment isn't available. What a joke."

3. "I am sorry for these stupid people."

The creator in this video is a trans woman, and the bully commented that trans people would burn in hell. The creator in Figure 30 used a mild anger framework performing with verbal language stating they were "fuming." The language and tone were furious towards the bully but mild in the delivery. Compared to those with extreme anger, this delivery was calm but still

angry. The nonverbal expressions matched the angry verbal content but maintained a calm demeanor nonverbally. This video was placed in the Anger Theme due to this content.

The audience comments were split between negative and positive. The creator responded to the negative comments by saying that they are welcome to leave the thread and block their page. Other commenters were highly optimistic. Some of the audience comments supported both the creator and the trans community. Many of the commenters stated that they went to the profile of the bully and the account no longer exists. It is not known if people defending the creator impacted the bully deleting their account.

The creator was successful in creating engagement with their video. The engagements were positive and negative, making both supportive and further negative comments. The positive comments did show support for the trans community creating awareness for the social cause. However, the results were mixed because some remarks about the trans community were negative. The dialogue in the comments included back and forth between trans supporters and those that do not support the trans movements. This clip successfully had a back-and-forth discussion. Still, it was unsuccessful in creating overwhelming supportive messages for the trans community and anti-cyberbullying.

Figure 31

(79) @h.ennesyy

Removed for Copyright

Analytics:

Likes- 1,326

Shares- 10

Views- 6,380

Comments- 15

The Top 25 comments in the scroll were inconclusive.

1.   "You make me cry, but happy cry."

2.   "Dumb people just be trippin."

3.   "I love you."

The creator in Figure 31 did not address a specific bullying comment. However, her verbal communication showed anger and was the basis for her framework placing this video in the Anger Theme. Her nonverbal expressions match her vocalizations with intense movements from the eyebrows. It is not immediately clear if she is addressing being bullied herself or the topic of bullies in general. She verbally swears repeatedly in the video. The text on the screen is large and takes up most of the screen, providing an aggressive tone.

The performance had over 6000 views but only 15 comments. The very few audience comments on the video did not seem invested in the creator's anger. Comments were not left that expressed concern about the creator or against the bully's comments. Though the creator was

angry and passionate, the performance did not engage the audience. Account engagement was not successfully created. Because there were so few comments, the dialogue was not created about social causes or anti-cyberbullying.

Theme 7: Sarcasm

This theme emerged during the coding process when specific videos could not fit in either the comedy or anger theme. The Sarcasm Theme formed when multiple samples displayed commonalities and did not fit into those categories. As a result, sarcasm can be difficult to detect in the videos. Sarcasm is communicated differently compared to other emotions because it relies on the receiver's ability to have shared experiences and shared symbolic meanings with the sender (Sagarika et al., 2021). The creator's performance effectiveness relies on the audience's interpretation depending on their shared experiences and shared symbolism of both verbal and nonverbal communication. Shared experiences between individuals allow verbal and nonverbal communication to have meaning (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Without the creator and audience agreeing upon shared meanings, the sarcastic performance may not be understood.

The following creators were coded for the sarcasm theme. The verbal and nonverbal elements in the performance had sarcastic tones and frameworks. Many creators within this theme chose to use prerecorded audios without using their speaking voices. Their nonverbal body language communicated sarcasm between humor and anger towards the bullies. The following accounts were selected as the best framework for verbal and nonverbal communication representing the anger theme. The number in the title represents where these accounts appear in Appendix A. It also represents the order in which they were coded. A list of analytics information is below the graphic and three comments on the video.

Figure 32

(24) @alexwithabeanie

Removed for Copyright

Analytics:

Likes- 22,200

Shares- 581

Views- 215,700

Comments- 991

The Top 25 comments in the scroll were overwhelmingly supportive

1. "Good work; we knew you could do it."

2. "I so wish that would work."

3. "Good point that you are making, I think you nailed It."

The creator in Figure 32 received repeated comments bullying her for mental health. She used sarcasm as a framework in her video response, placing this video in the Sarcasm Theme. Her vocal tone borders both anger and humor, although she is not serious in what she says. She comments about deciding not to be mentally ill that was done tongue in cheek. Her nonverbal behavior matched the verbal behavior as having playful, anger, and humor within the response. Her voice tone had a forced, high pitch, providing a sarcastic nature.

The video performance created engagements. The comments section prompted sarcastic responses from the audience. The audience made comments that had humorous elements claiming the video cured them of physical and mental ailments. The comments were witty but were made with sarcastic tones. The audience and the creator seemed to agree on the symbolic nature of the sarcasm. This agreement included back and forth responses between the audience and creator. The back-and-forth comments continued for multiple threads that used sarcastic comments. In addition, comments were left by the audience that supported mental health awareness and anti-cyberbullying.

Figure 33

(48) @veterangamerttv

Removed for Copyright
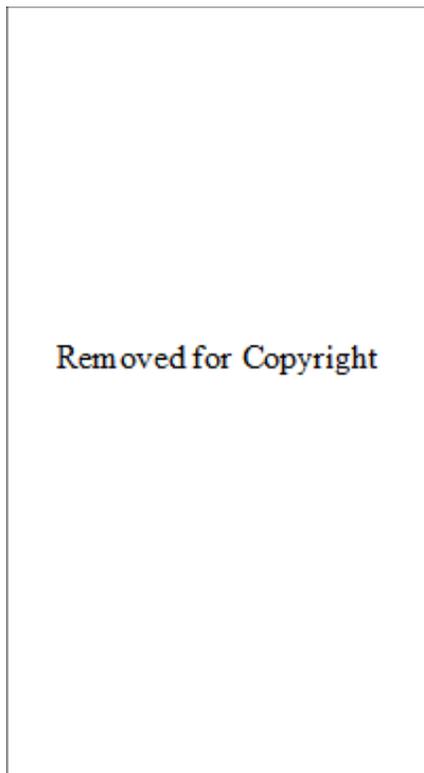
Analytics:

Likes- 19,600

Shares- 74

Views- 244,700

Comments- 1,936

The Top 25 comments in the scroll were

overwhelmingly supportive

1. "Thank you For Your Service."

2. "Don't listen to them."

3. "I wish I could like this a million times."

The creator in Figure 33 is a military veteran, and the bully commented that he should have died. The clip is brief, and the creator does not speak. He used nonverbal facial expressions to communicate with sarcasm placing this video in the Sarcasm Theme. He also used text to communicate with the audience. The video showed the creator walking on screen and then rolling his eyes at the camera. He took a backpack off, flipped it upside down, shook it, and looked inside. The on-screen text stated obscenities that referenced that he did not care. The bag was symbolic that all his cares were in the bag. Flipping the bag upside down showed no care inside the bag. This example was a symbolic risk that could have failed to communicate the message if the audience did not understand or share the symbolic meaning. The sender and receiver must share symbolism to convey the meaning. Language and meaning are socially constructed (Blumer, 1966).

This clip engaged with the audience, and the comments left showed that the audience understood the creator's symbolism and sarcasm. The comments stated they disagreed with the bully's statements and left positive comments about the sarcastic style of the video. The audience also left positive messages thanking him for his military service. Despite many positive comments, the creator did not interact with the audience. There were no *likes* or comment replies from the creator. The bully has since deleted their comment and account. It is unknown if the

creator's response video or the comments were responsible for the bully deleting the account. The audience engagement supported military veterans' social cause and anti-cyberbullying in the comments.

Figure 34

(104) @anubhamomin

Removed for Copyright

Analytics:

Likes- 9,126

Shares- 36

Views- 149,300

Comments- 146

The Top 25 comments in the scroll were mixed negative and supportive

1. "Why do people feel it is ok to comment on another person's appearance."

2. "But you look amazing with it."

3. "Ignore them girl, you look great."

The creator in Figure 34 was bullied for her nose piercing. The response video stated that the creator wears the piercing for cultural reasons, and it is semi-permanent. The creator said that the piercing could not be taken in and out quickly. The bully's comment told the creator that she

should take her piercing out and look natural. The creator used sarcasm for the video's frame placing this video in the Sarcasm Theme. She mimicked a conversation between herself and another person. One person told her to take the piercing out. She answered verbally with satire and showed that she could not take the piercing out. She made a dramatic production of pulling on the piercing that shows it could not be removed. The movements were not done in anger. The actions did have a comical feel but were not framed in slapstick, comedic style. The humorous elements were making light of the situation with a sarcastic tone.

The creator demonstrated through exaggerated motions to pull on her piercing. These nonverbal movements were sarcastic, showing that she was poking fun at the situation. The clip did create engagement, but not all the comments left were positive from the audience. She had comments that agreed with the bully and stated she should take out the piercing. The creator commented on the positive comments, but not the negative comments. The results were mixed between those that supported freedom of expression and those that did not. The clip did have comments with anti-cyberbullying content, but freedom of expression was not entirely supported as a social cause. The content creator's risk with symbolism and sarcastic tones failed to connect with the audience. The audience may not have understood or agreed with her sarcastic tones or perspective. The symbolism did not seem shared between creator and audience, which failed to create further social cause awareness.

Figure 35

(110) @corynation

Removed for Copyright

Analytics:

Likes- 58,000

Shares- 1,381

Views- 345,700

Comments- 2,389

The Top 25 comments in the scroll were

overwhelmingly supportive

1. "Oh god, the clapback gave me life."

2. "OMG you are perfect."

3. "This is how all people should handle trolls."

The creator in Figure 35 is a professional makeup artist. He used sarcasm for his framework and decided to read and respond to the bullying comments he received. The framework placed the video in the Sarcasm Theme. He stated that the comments did not bother him. He was able to perform verbally and nonverbally in jest and satire to discuss the situation. Bullying comments were made about his sexuality and wearing makeup. For example, a bully criticized him for wearing makeup. The bully also told him he was a boy and not a girl. The creator responded jokingly by looking down between his legs and then at the camera. He

sarcastically stated, "Is that what that thing is" and then used nonverbal communication to represent frustration by rolling his eyes. Both verbally and nonverbally, the performance did not have a serious tone—neither communication method focused solely on comedy.

The clip created multiple engagements with the audience. The comments were positive and supportive of the creator. The creator was very active in the comments with both *likes* and replies. This engagement created multiple backs and forth conversations with the audience about his sexuality and wearing makeup. The interactions promoted social awareness for the LGBTQ community and anti-cyberbullying.

Theme 8: Extreme Emotion/ Other

This theme was used for creators that showed an extreme emotion beyond what other creators displayed in the various themes. It was also used for any video that could not be coded into any other theme. Intense rage was a common theme found in these videos. This theme is separate from the existing anger code because of the extreme emotions the content creators chose to use in their videos. There were also instances where the content creators showed zero emotions. This example created the code labeled as other for this theme.

The following accounts were chosen as the best framework for verbal and nonverbal communication representing extreme emotion/another theme. The number in the title represents where these accounts appear in Appendix A. It also represents the order in which they were coded. A list of analytics information is below the graphic and three comments on the video.

Figure 36

(14) @prettyboi_wit_pink_socks

Removed for Copyright

Analytics:

Likes- 2,400,000

Shares- 190,100,000

Views- 15,100,000

Comments- 0

The Top 25 comments are null. The comments are

turned off.

1.

2.

3.

The creator in Figure 36 used the most powerful emotional framework of all videos

sampled, placing this in the Extreme Emotion Theme. The creator is a transgender male

struggling with their gender identity. This creator is a biological female but is working to

transition to male. The bully commented the term girl on every video this creator has posted. The

creator made a response video and screamed. The anger displayed out-of-control emotions with

their verbal communication. The nonverbal communication examples include the creator pulling

at their hair and making extreme facial expressions. The creator's emotions shift to sobbing and

hyperventilating, making it difficult to understand their verbal communication.

The comments on the video are turned off, and there are no further engagements for comments. However, the video has 15.1 million v*iews* and 2.4 million *likes*. The number of *likes* shows that many viewers support the creator. In addition, the creator has posted an additional follow-up video explaining that they have now begun hormone therapy and are transitioning from female to male. It is unknown whether this clip created awareness for anti-cyberbullying or gender identity. The clip had millions of *views, shares*, and *likes*, but there is no way to study the audience's reactions without comments. Furthermore, it was impossible to analyze why clips were shared without interviewing users who shared them. Clips that turn off the comments can limit engagement and dialogue about social causes.

Figure 37

(55) @ajangham

Removed for Copyright

Analytics:

Likes- 20,100

Shares- 341

Views- 128,600

Comments- 1,333

The Top 25 comments are null. The comments are

turned off.

1. "Haters always gonna hate."

2. "This person has so much hate in his heart."

3. "His comments speaks volumes about him."

The creator in Figure 37 showed an extreme lack of emotion for the framework in her video, placing it in the Extreme Emotion/Other Theme. The comment from the bully stated, "She hasn't posted in a while. I hope a bomb got her." The creator does not speak throughout the entire video. She looked at the screen, took a sip from a coffee cup, and put the cup down. She did not smile or frown. Instead, she looked at the camera for the entire video and drank her coffee. There was no verbal communication or changing facial expressions for nonverbal communication. Instead, she used text that read, "I'm out of words, so can someone else please respond?" She used symbolism in the clip to acknowledge that she did not have the words to describe the bully's comment.

The symbolism showed no words that could do the situation justice by not speaking. As Blumer (1966) noted, symbols must be socially acceptable to have meaning. People that had shared meaning and experiences could understand the silence in the video as a unique response to the bullies. It is a possibility that some viewers did not understand the symbolism, The video did create engagement with many unrelated political comments about Middle Eastern nationalities. The creator asked the audience within the comment scroll for them to comment

back to the bully. Once the bully deleted the comment, the creator messaged back to let the audience know the comment was gone.

The video had mixed results on whether it created awareness for social causes and anti-cyberbullying awareness. The audience was diverse with comments, and the video's symbolism may not have been shared between creator and audience. The use of symbolism can be a risk if the audience and creator do not share values.

<div align="center">Top Five Accounts Analytics Data</div>

Each theme was examined for the analytics data available on each clip for *likes*, *shar*es, *views*, and comments. This information presented engagement data from the audience to the content creator. In addition, this data provides enlightenment on how content creators framed emotions to create engagement.

Table 1

Theme 1: Depression

Name	Likes	Name	Shares	Name	Views	Name	Comments
69 jasminechiswell	1,700,000	41 gabeadams	7,988	69 jasminechiswell	11,000,000	32 baidaugh	19,300,000
8 cowphobia86	563,200	147 cute_king22	5,008	13 lisalute001	3,300,000	147 cute_king22	131,300
13 lisalute001	336,500	13 lisalute001	4,307	41 gabeadams	2,700,000	8 cowphobia86	77,200
32 baidaugh	332,800	69 jasminechiswell	4,185	8 cowphobia86	2,500,000	69 jasminechiswell	43,000
147 cute_king22	311,500	8 cowphobia86	2,298	32 baidaugh	1,800,000	1 wheezyfitness2.0	29,800

This chart has analytics data from the Depression Theme for the top five accounts. The number on the left represents the account in Appendix A in the order it was coded. JasmineChiswell ranked in the top position for *likes* and *views*. She was in the top four for shares and comments. Through all four analytics categories, her video showed high engagement. The video reached viral status with over 11 million views (Nikolinakou & King, 2018). The bully

commented that they hoped her baby would die. Her video used nonverbal communication with the creator looking down at the ground creating a somber framework. Her verbal communication condemned the bully calling the comment "wrong" and "disgusting." The video had over 43,000 comments creating solid engagements. The creator's performance was sincere and garnered sympathy from the audience. The subject matter, theme, and performance created strong engagement and combined to produce a persuasive anti-cyberbullying video.

Table 2

Theme 2: Explanation

Explanation

Name	Likes	Name	Shares	Name	Views	Name	Comments
35 aspenessence	2,500,000	17 anthonypaul359	50,200	16 sweettartesss	159,500,000	17 anthonypaul359	44,600
29 immarollwithit	1,200,000	35 aspenessence	6,878	35 aspenessence	14,900,000	136 webkinny	18,800
98 raegreen135	742,200	34 renegadescienceteacher	6,183	29 immarollwithit	4,300,000	2 theresavandamstylist	17,900
17 anthonypaul359	724,100	29 immarollwithit	6,011	17 anthonypaul359	3,600,000	25 mercurystardust	12,200
26 jiaoyingsummers	476,100	26 jiaoyingsummers	5,969	98 raegreen135	3,100,000	35 aspenessence	12,100

This chart has analytics data from the Explanation Theme for the top five accounts. The number on the left represents the account in Appendix A in the order it was coded.

Anthonypaul359 appeared in all four categories with the top shares and top comments. The video had over 3,600,000 views with a viral status. There were other videos with more *views* and *likes*, but they did not appear in all categories representing total engagement. The video was coded to the explanation theme because he explained his special needs and autism. He never directly commented on a specific bully but reminded the audience not to be mean to those with special needs. His nonverbal communication included a lack of eye contact with the camera. His verbal communication repeated the framework about special needs and autism. The video had over 724,100 *likes* and over 44,600 comments showing strong engagement. The special needs

subject, the explanation theme, and the honest performance led to high levels of audience engagement and created special needs awareness.

Table 3

Theme 3: Humor

	Humor								
Name	Likes	Name	Shares	Name	Views	Name	Comments
166 ashlelnok	958,200	89 og_kim_possible	15,000	15 jarrettstod	6,300,000	89 og_kim_possible	31,900
15 jarrettstod	896,700	75 chelseahartisme	7,322	166 ashlelnok	6,200,000	15 jarrettstod	9498
89 og_kim_possible	515,400	166 ashlelnok	6,772	89 og_kim_possible	2,500,000	68 paulieepaul	9,361
75 chelseahartisme	267,000	15 jarrettstod	1,761	4 blue_eyed_darkness	1,900,000	166 ashlelnok	6,382
4 blue_eyed_darkness	174,800	4 blue_eyed_darkness	877	75 chelseahartisme	838,500	4 blue_eyed_darkness	3896

This chart has analytics data from the humor theme for the top five accounts. The number on the left represents the account in Appendix A in the order it was coded.

OG_kim_possible was the leader in shares and comments. She was in the top three for views and *likes*. She had over 2.5 million views and 515,400 *likes*. She was at the top in shares and comments appearing in the top four in every category. There were two other creators in all four categories within the top five, but she was the only one at the top in the two categories.

This video was coded to the Humor Theme because of the comical content. The bully comment is about her physical appearance and weight, telling her to stop eating sugar. The creator chose not to speak verbally during the video. Therefore, the video's humor exists in nonverbal communication. The creator made fun of the bully by replicating a striptease into a bikini. Sugar is poured on her head in the tease, replicating the movie scene from the Paramount Studios 1980s movie *Flashdance.* The music is also the 1980s Def Leppard hit, *Pour Some Sugar on Me*. The symbolism required the audience to understand 1980s pop culture to get the joke entirely.

Miscommunication can occur if the audience and the creator do not have shared symbolic meanings. The sender and receiver must share everyday experiences and meanings to arrive at meaning (Blumer, 1966). Without understanding the symbolism, the video is still comical. For example, the bully made comments about eating less sugar, and the content creator stripped to a bikini and had sugar poured on her. The video had 515,400 *likes* and 31,900 comments that indicated strong support for her. The video humor framework created strong views of successful engagement and raised awareness about body positivity social causes.

Table 4

Theme 4: Empowerment

Empowerment

Name	Likes	Name	Shares	Name	Views	Name	Comments
9 tiffnicole143	2,500,000	9 tiffnicole143	54,000	9 tiffnicole143	10,200,000	9 tiffnicole143	87,700
10 fat.girl.fit	642,000	66 fatimadetetuan	1,562	66 fatimadetetuan	2,000,000	170 jesthejemini	10,800
66 fatimadetetuan	351,900	74 daddyy.dess	1,373	170 jesthejemini	1,700,000	66 fatimadetetuan	10,600
11 theasystem	283,300	170 jesthejemini	1,102	11 theasystem	1,600,000	10 fat.girl.fit	8645
170 jesthejemini	266,600	5 themcleodfamily	843	74 daddyy.dess	747,700	5 themcleodfamily	5090

This chart has analytics data from the Empowerment Theme for the top five accounts. The number on the left represents the account in Appendix A in the order it was coded.

Tiffnicole143 was the Empowerment Theme's top *likes*, *shares*, *views*, and comments. She had over 10,200,000 views and 54,000 shares. The bully stated that the creator was not dressing for her age, called her old, and told her she should act her age. The content creator's video used lip-syncing and did not have verbal communication from the creator. Instead, a prerecorded rap song played, and the creator used nonverbal communication through dancing to promote body and age positivity. This video was coded into the Empowerment Theme because she exhibited extreme body confidence in her appearance and never insulted the bully.

The creator dressed in provocative clothes and presented confidence with her movements. She shifted camera angles to present her strong opinions on her physical appearance. The video engaged her audience with over 87,700 comments and 2.5 million *likes*. In addition, the creator chose to comment back with the audience, further engaging with more interaction. The video was successful with the Empowerment Theme creating views, engagement, and awareness for body positivity.

Table 5

Theme 5: Positive

Positive

Name	Likes	Name	Shares	Name	Views	Name	Comments
28 brittikitty	687,300	28 brittikitty	6,121	28 brittikitty	5,600,000	28 brittikitty	27,000
59 kshaye98	74,400	59 kshaye98	635	59 kshaye98	648,900	59 kshaye98	16,400
7 michael.quintok	46,800	71 itsa_meme_mario	251	7 michael.quintok	359,300	45 raisinghonor	7720
71 itsa_meme_mario	34,500	64 farahleahheg	243	45 raisinghonor	264,500	64 farahleahheg	2266
45 raisinghonor	26,900	45 raisinghonor	155	64 farahleahheg	253,000	7 michael.quintok	2061

This chart has analytics data from the positive theme for the top five accounts. The number on the left represents the account in Appendix A in the order it was coded.

The top account for the Positive Theme was brittikitty. She was the leader in all four categories with over 5,600,000 views and 6,121 shares. The bully stated that the little girl collecting bugs in the video should have her whole collection die. The bully stated nobody cared about her bugs. The bully's comments were not addressed in the response video.

The response video included a happy little girl continuing collecting bugs. The verbal and nonverbal communication in the video was happy, and the video was not a performance. It was an unrehearsed video of the little girl playing with bugs. The upbeat theme did not attack the bully or the negative comments, which allowed this video to be coded into this theme. The

positive response was necessary to remind others that individuals do not have to engage, argue, or battle back when bullied. The video had strong engagement with 27,000 comments and had positive comments from the audience. The videos also had over 687,300 *likes*. The creator continued to like and comment, furthering audience engagement. The video successfully created views and engagements and provided an example of a positive response.

Table 6

Theme 6: Anger

Anger							
Name	Likes	Name	Shares	Name	Views	Name	Comments
46 goofball.n.company	2,000,000	46 goofball.n.company	15,400	46 goofball.n.company	9,630,000	46 goofball.n.company	77,600
42 xchechinex	508,800	27_odriewdlocenots_	9,580	42 xchechinex	2,800,000	27_odriewdlocenots_	22,400
12 kyauchiha	369,100	12 kyauchiha	8,204	27_odriewdlocenots_	1,800,000	42 xchechinex	19,900
27_odriewdlocenots_	361,400	42 xchechinex	2,146	149 thirstyonmain	1,500,000	149 thirstyonmain	15,800
148 lauraallicem	252,500	18 imdatmom	1,245	148 lauraallicem	1,300,000	12 kyauchiha	9743

This chart has analytics data from the Anger Theme for the top five accounts. The number on the left represents the account in Appendix A in the order it was coded.

Goofball.n.company was the top account in the Anger Theme. The account was top four in all categories. The video had over 9,630,000 views and 15,400 shares. The video does not list any specific bully or comment. Instead, the text on the video addresses and asks bullies to "stop slandering people with disabilities." The creator used strong verbal language to speak on behalf of his girlfriend, that has cerebral palsy. His nonverbal actions included making a fist and angry facial expressions. The framework for the video was heavily structured with the Anger Theme.

The video was not a rehearsed performance but existed with robust verbal dialogue. As a result, it had over 15,400 shares and over 77,600 comments. The audience was overwhelmingly supportive in the comments. In addition, the creator clicked like and commented, creating further engagement.

Table 7

Theme 7: Sarcasm

Name	Likes	Name	Shares	Name	Views	Name	Comments
150 drachnik	164,900	110 corynation	1,381	142 aysheaydin	810,700	44 ash.e.e	4468
44 ash.e.e	106,800			44 ash.e.e	755,800	150 drachnik	2,617
99 kallmekris	82,200	24 alexwithabeanie	581	150 drachnik	531,600		
		150 drachnik	422	99 kallmekris	466,400	110 corynation	2,389
109 mrs.frazzled	66,500	109 mrs.frazzled	420			93 crayola_killa	2,327
110 corynation	58,000	142 aysheaydin	185	50 themccartys	385,800	109 mrs.frazzled	2,159

This chart has analytics data from the Sarcasm Theme for the top five accounts. The number on the left represents the account in Appendix A in the order it was coded.

Drashnik was the top account in the Sarcasm Theme because the account appeared in all four categories. Ash.e.e was also ranked high but did not appear in the shares category. Corynation was at the top in the shares category but only appeared in three of the top four. Since Drashnik had the most consistent results across all four categories, this video was determined as the top account. The video had over 531,600 views and 422 shares. The content creator read multiple bully comments. This video was coded in the Sarcasm Theme because the video creator read and responded to the bullies using satire. The verbal communication had a slightly aggressive theme with hints of comedy. Her nonverbal expressions with hand movements and hair flips were playful but had slight angry tones.

The themes and the satire performance allowed this video to be coded in the Sarcasm Theme. The video had over 2617 comments and 164,900 *likes*. The comments were very supportive of the content creator from the audience. However, the creator did not comment or click like to create further engagements. Nevertheless, the video successfully created views, engagements, and social awareness for anti-cyberbullying.

Table 8

Theme 8: Extreme Emotion/Other

Extreme Emotion

Name	Likes	Name	Shares	Name	Views	Name	Comments
						52 notjamminlu21	133,300
						55 ajangham	1333
14 prettyboi_wit_pink_socks	2,400,000	14 prettyboi_wit_pink_socks	190,100,000	14 prettyboi_wit_pink_socks	15,100,000	156 toonibug	219
52 notjamminlu21	654,500			52 notjamminlu21	5,200,000		
55 ajangham	20,100	52 notjamminlu21	8,186	156 toonibug	132,100		
156 toonibug	7,846	55 ajangham	341	55 ajangham	128,600	14 prettyboi_wit_pink_socks	0
		156 toonibug	0				

This chart has analytics data from the Extreme Emotion/other Theme for the top five accounts. The number on the left represents the account in Appendix A in the order it was coded.

Prettyboi_wit_pink_socks was the leading account because it was the number one rated in three categories. Even with comments turned off, it was the clear leader. Only four videos were coded in this theme, so all four were in the top four. Since there were low numbers, the video was the greatest number of top categories was chosen for the top account. The video had over 15,100,000 views and 190,100,000 shares. The framework expressed strong emotional outbursts allowing them to be coded into the extreme emotional/other themes. The bully referred to the transgender male as a girl in the video. The creator responded with strong verbal and nonverbal rage. The rage included yelling, screaming, crying, hair pulling, and strong facial expressions.

The comments on the video are turned off, and there are no further engagements for comments. However, the video has over 2.4 million *likes*. The framework with an extreme show of uncontrolled emotions did not show signs of being a rehearsed performance. There are no filters, effects, or audio loaded into the video. With the comments turned off, it is challenging to measure audience engagement. However, with the strong views, *likes*, and shares, the video

creates an engagement even with a lack of comments. The video successfully created views and engagement. It is unknown if awareness for transgender individuals was created because there is no dialogue in the comments. With the comments turned off by the creator, there are no comments made by the audience.

Top Ten Views, Comments, Shares, and Likes

The figures below represent the top ten accounts within the theme analytics. When analyzing the top ten accounts data, there was no theme dominating all four analytics categories. Themes and frameworks cannot guarantee views and engagement. Engagement will be decided by the audience's view of the performance. Using a specific style theme cannot ensure engagement.

Table 9

Top 10 Views

	Name	Code	Views
16	sweettartesss	Explanation	159,500,000
14	prettyboi_wit_pink_socks	Extreme Emotion	15,100,000
35	aspenessence	Explanation	14,900,000
69	jasminechiswell	Depression	11,000,000
9	tiffnicole143	Empowerment	10,200,000
46	goofball.n.company	Anger	9,630,000
15	jarrettstod	Humor	6,300,000
166	ashlelnok	Humor	6,200,000
28	brittikitty	Positive	5,600,000
52	notjamminlu21	Extreme Emotion	5,200,000

Table 10

Top 10 Comments

	Name	Code	Comments
32	baidaugh	Depression	19,300,000
52	notjamminlu21	Extreme Emotion	133,300
147	cute_king22	Depression	131,300
9	tiffnicole143	Empowerment	87,700
46	goofball.n.company	Anger	77,600
8	cowphobia86	Depression	77,200
17	anthonypaul359	Explanation	44,600
69	jasminechiswell	Depression	43,000
89	og_kim_possible	Humor	31,900
1	wheezyfitness2.0	Depression	29,800

The performance must connect with the audience and does not require any combination of verbal and nonverbal communication. There was no clear style performance style that ranked ahead of any other. No theme dominated the categories appearing at the top for views, comments, shares, and *likes*. Themes were scattered throughout the top ten within all the engagement categories

Table 11

Top 10 Shares

	Name	Code	Shares
14	prettyboi_wit_pink_socks	Extreme Emotion	190,100,000
9	tiffnicole143	Empowerment	54,000
17	anthonypaul359	Explanation	50,200
46	goofball.n.company	Anger	15,400
89	og_kim_possible	Humor	15,000
27	_odriewdlocenots_	Anger	9,580
12	kyauchiha	Anger	8,204
52	notjamminlu21	Extreme Emotion	8,186
41	gabeadams	Depression	7,988
75	chelseahartisme	Humor	7,322

Also noted, the style performance did not change the ranking. Based on the narrative content

analysis, some clips experienced successful engagement with verbal and nonverbal

communication combinations or just nonverbal communication. Neither style of video

guaranteed success or failure creating engagement

Table 12

Top 10 Likes

	Name	Code	Likes
9	tiffnicole143	Empowerment	2,500,000
35	aspenessence	Explanation	2,500,000
14	prettyboi_wit_pink_socks	Extreme Emotion	2,400,000
46	goofball.n.company	Anger	2,000,000
69	jasminechiswell	Depression	1,700,000
29	immarollwithit	Explanation	1,200,000
166	ashlelnok	Humor	958,200
15	jarrettstod	Humor	896,700
98	raegreen135	Explanation	742,200
17	anthonypaul359	Explanation	724,100

When analyzing the data, any method that creates views, tells a story and creates engagement

can allow a cyberbullying response video to promote anti-cyberbullying and awareness for social

causes. Therefore, views and engagement are paramount regardless of the method.

<div align="center">

Summary

</div>

The information in Chapter Four provided connections between the themes and the

existing scholarship in Chapter Two. Chapter Four discussed sample videos representing the best

examples for each theme from the 200 videos examined in this research. It also included an

analytics breakdown with a detailed narrative content analysis of the top account videos. Chapter

Five will tie all the Chapters together, answer the research questions, provide a pathway

flowchart, and discuss future scholarly research for TikTok and social media cyberbullying studies.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

This narrative content analysis research aimed to show how TikTok creators' cyberbullying response videos could be analyzed to understand how the verbal and nonverbal performance and framework can create audience engagement with measurable analytics for anti-cyberbullying and social causes awareness. Over 200 TikTok accounts that experienced cyberbullying were analyzed using narrative content analysis. These videos were grouped and coded into eight themes. The themes included: Depression, Explanation, Humor, Empowerment, Positive, Anger, Sarcasm, and Extreme Emotion/Other.

These themes were analyzed for data analytics to show engagement. First, engagements were ranked according to themes using analytics. Next, the coded themes were analyzed with narrative content analysis for content descriptions. Finally, the verbal and nonverbal elements were studied and compared to the analytics. A new pathway flowchart emerged from this study that showed a process for how cyberbully response videos create engagement and social awareness for anti-cyberbullying and social causes.

Harmen and Grand (2013) noted that emerging data will provide "some collective property of an arrangement of components that has a novel capacity to preserve that arrangement" (p. 9)." Harmen and Grand (2013) also recognized that since Newton's time, researchers work to "linearize" data (p. 8). The pathway flowchart provided a focused pathway to understand the process between TikTok cyberbully response videos and engagement leading to awareness for anti-cyberbullying and social advocacy causes.

Chapter Five will first include a research summary, describe the pathway flowchart in detail, and discuss answers to the three research questions. Secondly, Delimitations and Limitations will be examined for the research. Next, future research recommendations will be made for new scholarly research. Finally, a conclusion will finalize the study.

Summary of Findings

The 200 cyberbullying videos were discovered through the *For You* feed on a new, TikTok social media account. This new account did not have a previous viewing history that could potentially affect the algorithm. The videos were found and coded for instances of cyberbullying in the content and comments. Cyberbullying videos were coded for the cyberbullying occurrences, downloaded, and analyzed further as they were found. Content Analysis with Narrative Theory was chosen to properly code the videos into themes, research their content, discover analytics, and make connections to existing scholarly research. This study provided new knowledge about both viewer engagement and anti-cyberbullying social awareness. In addition, this research provided insight on verbal and nonverbal communication for TikTok to help understand user engagement promoting social causes. This study combined theoretical and practical applications providing researchers and social justice advocates valuable information on how to increase engagement and create awareness for social causes using TikTok. It also helped understanding of the pathway and relationship between cyberbullying comments, response videos, and audience engagement.

Research Questions

The 200 videos were coded manually and placed into themes. Each theme and individual video were studied using narrative content analysis. The data and analytics were discovered and compared to existing scholarly research. The analytics were researched to provide statistical data

to coincide with the narrative content analysis data. Narrative Theory allowed the research to be compounded and presented, telling a complete research story. The data and theories answered the research questions. A flowchart will be presented in the next section, followed by answers to each research question.

RQ1: How does TikTok cyberbullying influence a content creator's verbal and nonverbal communication performance on a response video?

RQ2: How does a TikTok content creator's performance influence account engagement?

RQ3: How does a TikTok content creator's bullying response video build awareness for anti-cyberbullying and social advocacy causes?

Cyberbully Response Video Pathway Flowchart

The pathway flowchart in Figure 38 emerged from the data that described the cyberbullying process leading to social advocacy awareness. Chapin (1971) stated that flowcharts allow a communication visualization to describe a "time ordering" step-by-step process (p, 714). Chapin (1971) also notes that block-style charts show how information can follow a path from one activity. The Cyberbully Response Video Pathway Flowchart is a block-style flow chart to help visualize the Communication process outlined in this study.

A pathway flows from a creator's original TikTok post when the video receives cyberbullying comments and how that progresses to raising awareness for social causes. This visualization helps provide clarity for the path described in the research. Ansary (2020) noted that there is a "lack of agreement" for a clear definition or model that explains cyberbullying (p. 2). This flowchart pathway aims to clarify and explain the connection between cyberbullying, audience engagement, and creating awareness for social causes. This flowchart is a visualization summarizing the research contained in the study. The flowchart aids in a visual representation of

the patterns discovered when researching the topic. Each flowchart step is explained below to describe its function in the path. In addition, the pathway flowchart will help conceptualize the RQ answers listed in the next section.

Figure 38

Cyberbully Response Video Pathway Flowchart
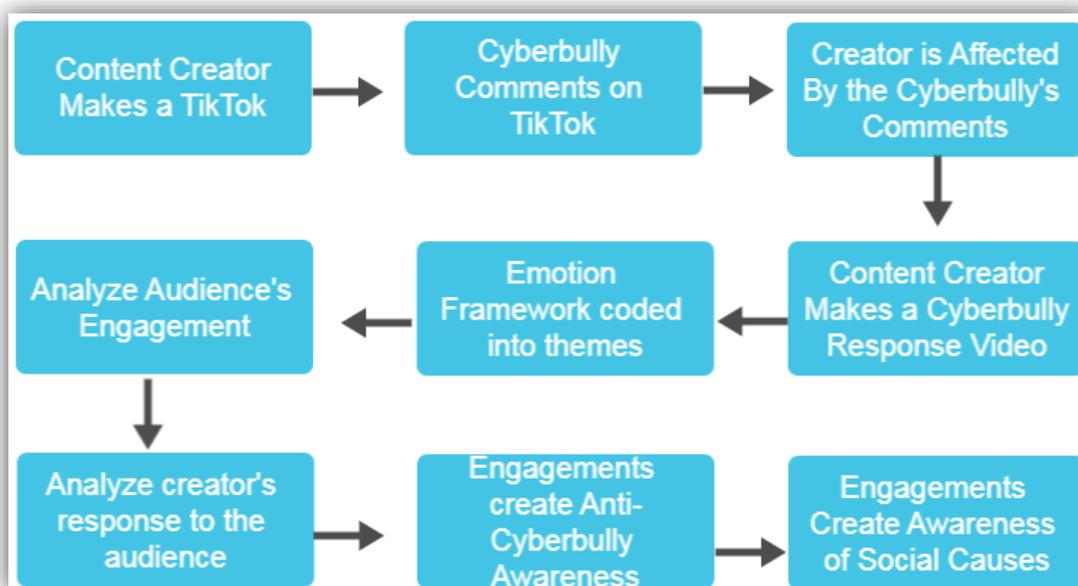
Step 1- Creator makes a TikTok video

The content creator must have a TikTok user account and choose to make original content on the TikTok app. The creator will then make a video and post it to the available feed on the *For You* page. Once the video is on this page, the algorithm will determine its placement and popularity with the audience (Anderson, 2020).

Step 2- Cyberbully engages with a video

A cyberbully must find the creator's video on the *For You* page. Then, the cyberbully will post a negative comment in the comments, personally attacking the content creator, the creator's subject matter, or video content. Watts et al. (2017) defined cyberbullying as any intent

to cause harassment or harm through social media or electronic means with the goal of

"defamation, public disclosure of private facts, and intentional emotional distress" (p. 269). The

psychological reason for cyberbullying is not a focus of this study but rather the cyberbullying

act.

Step 3-Creator affected by the bully's comments

The creator will receive the bully's harassment posted on the comments scroll. In

addition, the creator will be affected mentally by the bully's negative message. In this stage, the

creator's emotions will provide a framework for their response video.

Step 4-Creator makes a response video to the bully

The creator will produce a TikTok video responding to the bully. In this stage, the creator

will decide to use their emotions and create a framework (Goffman, 1986) that the video will

follow. The purpose of the video will also be determined. Fisher (1984) recognized that

storytelling is more effective than an argument. Framework and narrative create a cohesive story

that stays within the boundaries of the audience's expectations. Finally, the creator can decide if

their response video will address the bully's comments, a personal situation, and a more

significant social cause. Again, the emotions and purpose will help the creator choose the

framework.

Step 5- Response Video Emotional Framework

The framework can be coded into research themes (Saldana, 2021). These eight themes

include Depression, Explanation, Humor, Empowerment, Positive, Anger, Sarcasm, and Extreme

Emotion. All videos are considered production. TikTok is a performance-based entertainment

app. TikTok does not have a way for the audience to verify authenticity. There is no way to

quantify how many times the creator rehearsed for the clip or verify any editing the clip may

have received. Therefore, all TikTok clips are a planned production. The creator must purposely

pick up their phone, open the TikTok app, and press record.

The recording is a deliberate process. Recording on its own takes forethought. Editing

and posting videos to TikTok also take planned steps. These planned steps allow the content

creator to conceive ideas of how to present the content. The uploading process for a TikTok

video allows for both complicated and straightforward productions. Clips may have more

elaborate editing, special effects, and graphics than others. Just because a clip does not feature

fancy edits, special effects, and graphics does not mean it is more authentic than one that does.

Clips edited with simple changes and highly elaborate edited clips are considered productions.

Neither style of production can be taken as authentic because both are productions. An authentic

video would require the subject to be unaware of the camera reacting to natural, unstaged events.

There is no way to prove a clip's authenticity with the creator talking directly to the

camera versus a planned skit featuring characters. The emotional framework, verbal techniques,

and nonverbal techniques are all considered performance elements. These performance elements

will influence the audience and are persuasion techniques. Therefore, no video can be taken as

entirely authentic. Performance and production will alter the message's authenticity. TikTok

studies that argue authenticity must note that the persona can never be proven as authentic and

not a performance. The creator's awareness of the audience makes the video a performance.

Goffman (1969) noted that performers would have a backstage and frontstage persona.

The front stage persona can have elements in their personality geared towards the audiences'

preferences. This persona can allow the performer to gain influence over the audience. The

backstage persona may not match the front stage persona. The backstage persona is associated

with the true persona of the individual. The frontstage persona will create the performance.

The performer's frontstage persona forms the Parasocial Relationship with the audience. Horton and Wohl (1956) noted that these Parasocial Relationships could create strong bonds between the audience and the user. Likewise, Pöyry et al. (2019) recognized that social media creators tend to develop *followers* in the audience that share similar interests leading to a relationship. These bonds allow the audience to trust the performer. Therefore, the performer will act accordingly with their frontstage persona to develop persuasion within the video.

Step 6- Audience Engagement

Each response video posted can appear on the *For You* page and be available on the creator's account page. *Followers* can access the video from the creator's account page, or it may show up on their *For You* feed, depending on the algorithm. In addition, new viewers may have the video on the *For You* page based on the video's performance with the algorithm. Unfortunately, since TikTok's algorithm is hidden, there is no exact way to prove how and when the audience will see the creator's video (Anderson, 2020).

The audience will have the choice to watch or not watch. If the audience chooses to watch, then they will decide to engage or not engage. Katz et al. (1973) recognized the uses and gratifications approach stating that producers must be aware of the audience's needs and desires. The content creators must produce content that the audience wants to watch. If the content does not meet the audience's desires, they can choose not to watch or interact. If the audience sees the content as desirable, they can choose to watch and engage. When the audience watches and decides to engage, they can respond with *likes*, shares, comments, and views. The audience must understand the meaning of the content and have it provide an emotional response prompting them to engage. The audience will watch the video and decide if the content and messages connect with them.

The audience must also share similar experiences and groups to agree on the meaning (Blumer, 1966). Meaning is based on an individual's experiences and belonging to social groups (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Berger and Luckmann (1966) described primary socialization as the knowledge that develops when an individual is young. They begin as a blank slate and learn knowledge from those around them. Secondary socialization is when an individual merges with a new group. Merging may happen later in life, creating the need for an individual to learn new values and knowledge from a different group. There will be a period of adjustment and change while a new socialization system is learned.

Primary and secondary socialization will affect the audience's connection to the clip. The audience's primary socialization will recognize the emotions behind the video and connect to similar experiences they have experienced with these emotions. The secondary socialization will teach the audience about new experiences and information they may not have experienced or may not understand. These new situations become a teaching tool from the creator to the audience. The secondary socialization prompts the audience to accept new information from the creator and merge it into their current understanding (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). For example, the audience may understand the feelings about being bullied for physical appearance, but it may require a new understanding when dealing with transgender issues.

Horton and Wohl's (1956) Parasocial Interaction theory recognized that one-sided relationships are formed between performers and the audience. The creators use this relationship to build influence over the audience. Suppose the creator performs in a manner that the audience is conditioned to expect. In that case, the creator can leverage the relationship. The audience's trust in the creator can prompt the audience to react emotionally to the creator's video. This reaction can lead to engagements such as *likes* and comments.

Step 7- Creator Engagement

The creator can comment back to the audience with *likes,* and additional comments as the audience make their comments. These back-and-forth engagements by the creator help further the relationship with the audience building further leverage. Direct contact between the creator and the audience can create stronger bonds. These bonds can make the audience feel like they have a personal connection with the creator. However, direct creator comments responding to the audience's comments must stay in the front stage persona (Goffman, 1969). The audience bonds with the front stage persona and expect the comments from that persona. Responding out of character could potentially break trust and diminish the leverage between the performer and the audience.

Step 8- Awareness of Social Causes

The research showed that accounts created additional support for social causes when the content creator addressed the bully's comments. When the bully's comments were addressed, the audience created further dialogue in the comments section. The audience offered sympathy, worked to build the creator's self-esteem, and mentioned the social cause. The audience's comments allowed the creator to respond and create further back-and-forth messages on the comment scroll.

When open dialogue between the creator and the audience happened on the message scroll, the social cause was addressed. Videos that did not mention the bully's comments did not receive social causes dialogue in the comments scroll. The audience would address the creator and work to build their self-esteem but did not name exact social causes. Social causes received the most awareness and support when both the creator and audience supported open dialogue.

When a content creator turned off the comments, no dialogue was possible with the audience. The audience could not comment on the creator, and the creator could not comment back to the audience. Engagements could only be measured through *likes* and *shares*. It was impossible to determine why the audience clicked *like* or *shared* the clip. Without interviewing each audience member, the intent was unknown. The intent could have been for further cyberbullying or concern. Without dialogue in the comments, the audience did not have a chance to voice their opinion. A clip may receive numerous *likes* and *shares*, but the result of these engagements would be unknown. It would be immeasurable to decide if a social advocacy issue was aided or further cyberbullied if a TikTok video's comments were turned off.

Step 9- Cyberbullying Awareness

TikTok excels at giving a voice to people who may feel marginalized by society. Their struggles and messages may not be mainstream media topics, and TikTok gives them a platform to create awareness. Siddarth and Pal (2020) recognized, "Activists also used social media to try and affect long term change in bystander audiences, specifically targeting changes in either held values or performed behavior" (p. 7). This study's video samples showed that response videos promoted activism for many social causes such as cyberbullying, mental health, body positivity, and gender identity.

Siddarth and Pal (2020) also noted that traditional media finds news from TikTok. As a TikTok clip becomes more popular with solid engagement, a traditional news media organization may decide to run the story. Traditional news media organizations now have TikTok accounts and are active users as creators and audiences. When traditional news reports on a TikTok video and account, it creates mainstream coverage for the creator and their cause. This coverage can lead to a new awareness for the cause, increase views on the clip, increase engagement, and build

new viewers for the creator. As the creator builds their audience, they can decide to promote their cause further using their TikTok accounts.

Agenda Setting Theory (McCombs et al., 2014) stated that the media could influence public opinion. Beyond traditional media outlets, social media can strongly influence public opinion. TikTok is now a culture-shaping app. It has the capability of crossing its new trends and content into mainstream culture (Anderson, 2020). TikTok can affect music, fashion, and language trends and promote social causes. Creators control their content and can shape messages capable of promoting causes. They can make persuasive clips with complicated or straightforward production content to entertain and educate the audience. Content that creates views and engagement can help shape public opinion. This publicity creates awareness for social causes and cyberbullying.

The content creators must motivate bystanders into action. Darley and Latane (1968) noted that the more bystanders, the less likely someone would intervene. Content creators that can get their audience to *like*, *share*, comment, and engage can motivate other audience members to do the same. Audience members and content creators must feel that their voices can be heard. When the majority voice silences the minority voice, there is a Spiral of Silence, as Noelle-Neumann (1974) recognized.

When a content creator speaks out against cyberbullies and is in support of social causes, this can energize other supporters. These supporters can engage with cyberbullying content or potentially make the content of their own. Machackova (2020) recognized that "passivity" could lead to others accepting negativity with "cyberbystanders" (p. 130). Speaking out against cyberbullies and supporting social causes can shape public opinion that cyberbullying is

unacceptable. TikTok provides marginalized individuals and groups the voice to promote their social causes to create change.

RQ Answers

All three research questions were answered in this study. In addition, existing scholarly research and the narrative content analysis data studied provided knowledge and information to explain and support the research objectives. Finally, communication theories were applied to the data to provide usefulness for academic and practical purposes.

Answers to RQ1

RQ1: How does TikTok cyberbullying influence a content creator's verbal and nonverbal communication performance on a response video?

This research studied TikTok creators' verbal and nonverbal communication techniques in cyberbully response videos. The narrative content analysis provided data and analytics that examined the videos and audience engagement. The existing scholarly research was also compiled to provide insight into the data. The combined scholarly data and narrative content analysis answered RQ1 that cyberbullies harass and psychologically intimidate TikTok content creators. Creators can produce response videos that create audience engagement. The creator can use the emotions they feel from being bullied as a Primary Framework (Goffman, 1986). The Primary Framework can lead them to produce an emotional response video using the TikTok app made with complicated or straightforward content. Fisher (1984) outlined that a story will be more convincing than an argument. The creator can choose various themes and styles to create their content using a story format. Variations in verbal and nonverbal communication can communicate their emotions and respond to the cyberbullying incident.

The creator has a front-stage persona (Goffman, 1969) that performs within the clip. The goal is to persuade the audience of an agenda. Agenda Setting Theory (McCombs et al., 2014) discussed how the media could influence public opinion. The creator's agenda will be the video's primary focus, working to influence the audience's view of the cyberbullying incident. The framework, story, verbal and nonverbal communication methods, and performance will guide the creator's production process for the video clip's content. The result will be a cyberbullying response video that addresses the creator's agenda of persuading an audience that the bullying incident affected them personally and is unacceptable.

Answers to RQ2

RQ2: How does a TikTok content creator's performance influence account engagement?

This study provided examples of TikTok content creators that produced cyberbullying response videos with large amounts of views and robust engagements. The creators succeeded with their performances in persuading their audience against their cyberbully's actions. The existing scholarly research provided the background for the narrative content analysis information coded from the videos.

The TikTok creator must share social commonalities and connections with the audience for the video verbal and nonverbal communication to be deciphered by the audience. Language and meaning are socially created, and people define themselves by belonging to social groups (Blumer, 1966). Suppose the audience shares similar values to the content creator. It increases the likelihood of the video communication being understood and accepted by the audience. If there are no shared commonalities, the audience may not understand the content creator's intent or message.

The content creator's performance will work to leverage the Parasocial relationship (Horton & Wohl, 1956) developed between the content creator and their audience. This relationship builds as the audience consumes content and becomes connected with a one-sided relationship. As the audience watches and enjoys content, they feel connected to the content creator's performance. The performance will be based on verbal and nonverbal behaviors that will reinforce the relationship with the audience.

The audience expects the performer to have certain personality traits and attributes. These performance elements create a character based on the individual's true self. Goffman (1969) stated that performers have a front stage and backstage personas. The front stage persona uses the performance elements that the audience expects and desires. The backstage performance will be closer to the individual's identity without the performance elements. The front stage performance allows the content creator to perform in manners that can further the Parasocial relationship (Horton & Wohl, 1956). Furthering this relationship enables the content creator and the audience to share commonalities and bonds necessary to create shared meaning.

The shared meaning will guide the performance and allow the creator to persuade the audience of their agenda. If this persuasion is successful, the audience will engage with the creator using TikTok's *likes*, shares, comments, and other forms of engagement. The content creator can further reinforce the relationship by clicking like on comments. They can also continue the performance using text dialog back and forth with the audience in the comments scroll. The creator will need to respond in their front-stage persona. The audience's expectations are for the creator to be the persona on video and in the comments. The creator's performance builds relationships leveraged for persuasive video content against cyberbullying.

Answers to RQ3

RQ3: How does a TikTok content creator's bullying response video build awareness for anti-cyberbullying and social advocacy causes?

TikTok provides individuals a platform to share their voices, creating cyberbullying awareness and dialog for social causes. This study's video samples offered many examples of individuals speaking out against cyberbullying incidents and creating awareness for social causes such as disabilities, gender identity, and body positivity. The creator's framework must connect with the audience to find agreement with meaning. When this is established, the audience's engagement will create awareness. Audience engagement and comments will provide a dialogue about anti-cyberbullying and social causes in the clip's comment feed. This dialogue is open for public viewing and available for each new viewer to read along with watching the video.

The higher the engagement levels, the more awareness can be created. The creator can choose to comment with the audience back-and-forth furthering the discussion. Shares allow the video to be forwarded to other social media platforms, email, and private electronic messaging services. The more popular a clip becomes, the more visibility grows for both anti-cyberbullying and the social causes of the bullying incident. Every video can reach viral status by gaining engagements through likes, comments, views, and shares. Clips can also cross into mainstream media. Mainstream publicity can open dialog and work towards changing and shaping public opinion. In addition, publicity can create awareness for social issues associated with the topics chosen by cyberbullies.

Public discourse about cyberbullying and social causes can help change behavior. For example, the medical industry has worked to shape public opinion using TikTok. Boatman et al. (2021) studied an HPV TikTok campaign to change public opinion about the youth vaccine. The

study noted, "TikToks do garner a high number of interactions, making them an important tool to counter misinformation" (p. 5). The study recognized that interactions were the key to shaping public opinion. It also noted the importance of comments for creating dialogue. Boatman et al. (2021) recognized, "Future research should seek to understand which social media messages encourage behavioral change in young people" (p. 5). This study noted the importance of Boatman et al.'s (2021) study and expanded the concept of cyberbullying and social causes.

Previous Research Theory Discussion

TikTok is a relatively new social media app, and scholars are beginning to study essential issues related to using the app. Existing research consisted of the app's basic use, function, and abilities (Anderson, 2020). Many in the scholarly community are not familiar with TikTok and its capabilities. The algorithm and analytics are also research topics for marketing purposes. The platform does not release analytics and algorithm data (Anderson, 2020). It is not easy for marketing scholars to create extensive data evaluations like those for Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and other forms of social media. Medical journals have found TikTok useful for health issues such as COVID-19 and various vaccines (Boatman et al., 2021).

Cyberbullying research has previously been focused on children, parents, and prevention (Ansary, 2020; Arntfield, 2015; Barlett & Kowalewski, 2019). TikTok Cyberbullying is a new topic that did not have previous research. New social media research mentions TikTok but does not focus on the issue directly. Social media cyberbullying research examines psychological effects that lead to "suicidal ideation, emotional trauma, and PTSD" (Reason et al., 2016).

Theoretical Discussion

This study examined TikTok through a Communication lens. Although other theories were used, the Communication theories helped provide the most vital information to combine

with the narrative content analysis and analytics data. This study used existing Communication theories and merged them with new technology. Walther (2011) noted that Communication theories could be pushed towards their boundaries and applied to modern technology. Craig's (1999) phenomenological tradition focused on meaning and how people interpret the world around them based on their experiences. The Socio-Psychological Tradition focuses on the individual and the social elements of the human experience.

Symbolic Interactionism and Social Construction helped explain how meanings are applied and interpreted. People define existence and meaning through their belongings to social groups (Blumer, 1986). Berger and Luckmann (1966) described socialization as the basis for meaning. As people change social groups, their norms and meanings will also change. These changes help them define the world around them. Content creators and their audience must share commonalities for messages to be understood between sender and receiver. If the content creator and audience do not share similarities in meaning, it increases the chance of miscommunication.

The content creators must understand how the Primary Framework (Goffman, 1986) affects persuasion. The Primary Framework controls the boundaries for content. The content must stay within the boundaries that are accepted by the audience. If the content goes beyond the boundaries, the audience may reject it and its meaning. The content in this study was coded for themes that represented the creator's emotions. The themes were studied as the emotional framework that guided the content. The emotions allowed the content creators to connect with the audience personally, using emotions that the audience was familiar with as the theme of their video. Fisher (1985b) recognized that people were natural storytellers and that their world would be defined through the stories they hear and tell. The framework and the story would work

together to help provide shared symbolism that the creator and audience could agree to arrive at meaning.

Connecting with the audience allowed the content creators to build a Parasocial Relationship (Horton & Wohl, 1956). This relationship is one-sided between the creator and the audience. The audience learns to expect a specific characterization from the performer. Goffman (1969) stated that the performers would have a front stage and a backstage persona. The performer's front stage would include verbal and nonverbal elements the audience enjoys and is bonded with through a Parasocial relationship (Horton & Wohl, 1956). The backstage would be the performer's true identity and self and would not have the elements the audience expects. Using the front stage performance allows the performer to gain influence over the audience. These theoretical discussions guided the research for content creation and engagement. In addition, it provided existing communications scholarship to discuss the narrative content analysis and analytics data.

Empirical Discussion

This study was essential to provide a Communication perspective on TikTok cyberbullying and help understand the performance with the relationship to engagement. This study can be helpful for social activists to learn what style of content could be beneficial for TikTok content production. The analytics and narrative content analysis sections can provide information on what style clips gained popularity and how engagement was created. The theories can also help explain how the content, creators, and audience connected with the messages. Social causes, including cyberbullying, can use this data to promote their messages by creating TikTok videos.

Delimitations and Limitations

Delimitations

The delimitations of this research created boundaries necessary to make the study manageable. A one-time data collection was done rather than a long-term tracking of the TikTok content creator's accounts. The algorithm shifts consistently, and there is no available information on how it works. It is a trade secret kept by TikTok (Anderson, 2020). Another delimitation was that the content creators were not contacted for interviews or clarification of the videos. Establishing personal contact with TikTok creators is difficult. A private message can only be sent if account owners follow one another. Establishing this level of communication is not easy on TikTok. Many creators are selective about who they are mutual *followers* with and do not welcome messages from strangers.

Limitations

The limitations of this study are elements that could be improved or changed in the future. A larger sample of videos could change the data. Although 200 videos were deemed appropriate for this size study, a team of researchers could allow for more videos to be coded. Having a team and more time could create different results with the addition of more samples.

Not having the ability to interview the content creators was a limitation. These interviews would have been considered if there was an easier way to contact. It would have been helpful to interview the creators and learn their feeling about the bullying. Questions could have been asked on how making the response video changed their content. Having the creator give context and intention to their bully response video would have helped verify if the correct theme was assigned during coding.

Another limitation exists in the tracking of accounts on TikTok. Accounts are deleted and added. There is no way to tell why an account gets deleted or removed. Duplicate and spam

accounts also are present. It is also possible for a user to change their username. If the TikTok

algorithm determines a post or account breaches the community guidelines, it may be deleted.

Accounts are deleted by TikTok consistently. A creator may also choose to delete a video or

their entire account. The sudden loss of accounts on TikTok makes it impossible to conduct long-

term research and track the duplicate accounts over a more extended period. Creators can also

turn off comments and shares. This control limits the audience engagement, thus disrupting the

flow of the message

 Another limitation of this study was the inability to determine the life of a video outside

of TikTok. When a video is shared to another platform, the dynamics change. A TikTok video

posted to Facebook or Instagram may have different interactions due to the evolving

demographics and cultural norms. Other social media platforms, such as Twitter, could change

how the audience views the clip. Clips coded with shares could have been shared for any reason.

The shares may have been further bullying, such as making fun of the response video. Once the

video leaves TikTok, the intent is unknown. The analytics are also not attached to the file, so

there is no way to track additional views or shares.

TikTok videos could not be posted in this research. Academic papers do not allow media

inclusion, so a synopsis of each clip is included within the research. Screenshots were provided

for context. Because these accounts were set to public on TikTok's security settings, each can be

searched on the app for further research. Appendix A has all available account and analytics

information from TikTok at the time of this research.

Recommendations for Future Research

Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter dominate social media research. However, both

scholars and business leaders are working on researching TikTok. TikTok is also an evolving

app that consistently adds new features. As content creators learn to use these new features,

research needs to progress for complete understanding. In addition, scholars and business leaders

must understand how messages are sent and interpreted between content creators and their

audiences. New features on the app will shift how content creators utilize these tools that can

potentially change their communication methods. As the app continues to evolve, new

Communication studies need to emerge that have various methods organizations and provide

new knowledge.

TikTok Live

On TikTok, there are two formats for a content creator to connect with their audience.

The first is the prerecorded video which has been the focus of this research. The second format

could focus on the TikTok live function in a future study. In TikTok Live, there is no recording

of interactions, and reactions are in real-time. The content creators can go live with real-time

video and audio. The audience cannot be seen or heard by the content creator. The audience can

interact with comments, *likes*, and *emojis*. This switch to a live performance would change how

the content creator could promote social agendas and speak against cyberbullying. This live

function could further Parasocial Relationships (Horton & Wohl, 1956). Still, the creator would

have to be aware of their front-stage performance (Goffman, 1969). Breaks of character could

create confusion without using the verbal and nonverbal techniques the audience expects through

the existing relationship. A study could find if recorded video or TikTok live created more

engagements and was better at spreading the message about social issues.

Narrow Demographic

Narrowing the demographic in this study to a specific population would give the research

a more refined focus. As the study stands, there was no limit to the population being bullied. For

example, narrowing the sample to specifically military veterans or those with physical disabilities would give a refined focus to the research. It would also evaluate how a specific demographic connects with their audience on TikTok.

Comparison of the Same study on Instagram

Conducting the current study on another platform, such as Instagram, would potentially give the study a different framework. The culture of Instagram differs from TikTok. Changing platforms is changing mediums. McLuhan et al. (1967) stated, "The medium is the message." Varying mediums will change the culture, dynamics, and audience. The audience will have different expectations and will have different demographics from TikTok. Instagram also allows for the posting of pictures and longer video clips. The utilization of these features changes the capabilities of what a content creator can produce in terms of content and production value. Changing the medium could lead to different analytics and conclusions.

Mixed-Method Study

The same study could be done, and changes in framework and method could affect the outcome. Craig's (1999) semiotic framework could allow a deeper analysis of symbols and meaning. As TikTok culture shifts, language changes and shifts in meaning. A study based on symbols could dig further into the content and study how shifts in meaning could affect the messages. The performance could be analyzed with more focus using classical rhetorical theory using Aristotle's Ethos, Pathos, and Logos.

As a mixed method, additional data could come from qualitative interviews, potentially interviewing both bullies and content creators about the situations. *Cyberbystanders* could be interviewed to understand when, why, and how they choose to engage or not engage with clips. Qualitative interviews with the *cyberbystanders* would better understand what content prompts

audience engagement. The qualitative interviews could also interview the bullies leading to information about intent. Gordon (2019) explained, "Sometimes people assume that bullying victims deserve to be bullied—that they did something to cause the bullying or that they are weak. Nevertheless, these are victim-blaming statements that place the responsibility for change on the wrong person" (para. 2). A mixed-methods study would allow for a more complete and well-rounded approach to providing further understanding from the bully, the *cyberbystanders* in the audience, and the creator's perspectives. Cooperation with ByteDance may be necessary to obtain account owner contact information for the interviews.

<div align="center">**Summary**</div>

This research guided new knowledge about TikTok cyberbullying, account engagement, and creating awareness for social issues. The study can guide social advocacy groups to create content with more visibility and better engagement. The information is also informative to scholars learning about new media and its cultural impact. Both scholars and practical works can be built from using this study. This combination of academic research and practical knowledge can save TikTok content creators from using an ineffective trial and error method for making videos. As content creators learn to create visibility and engagement, these skill sets will be vital to creating awareness for cyberbullying and other social issues.

Chapter One introduced TikTok and described cyberbullying as a necessary research topic. Chapter Two recognized the importance of studying this issue with traditional Communication theories to explain the relationship between senders and receivers and how messages are interpreted. Chapter Three outlined the narrative content analysis method used to compile the 200 video data sets necessary to study this topic. Finally, chapter Four outlined the findings with a detailed breakdown of the video samples, framework themes, and rankings,

providing knowledge about content creators, cyberbullies, and the audience. Finally, Chapter

Five concluded the study by answering all three research questions, describing

limitations/delimitations, and offering ideas for future research.

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Appendix A

	Name	Code	Likes	Shares	Views	Comment	Aud Sup
1	wheezyfitness2.0	Dep	174,500	352	810,400	29,800	supp
2	theresavandamstylist	Exp	425,400	3,142	1,800,000	17,900	supp
3	mamax32020	Exp	65,900	143	567,200	308	supp
4	blue_eyed_darkness	Hum	174,800	877	1,900,000	3,896	supp
5	themcleodfamily	Emp	130,300	843	531,600	5,090	supp
6	hazyandslightlydazy	Dep	13,100	322	221,500	2,009	supp
7	michael.quintok	Pos	46,800	48	359,300	2,061	supp
8	cowphobia86	Dep	563,200	2,298	2,500,000	77,200	supp
9	tiffnicole143	Emp	2,500,000	54,000	10,200,000	87,700	supp
10	fat.girl.fit	Emp	642,000	378	425,000	8,645	supp
11	theasystem	Emp	283,300	172	1,600,000	1,208	supp
12	kyauchiha	Ang	369,100	8,204	1,100,000	9,743	supp
13	lisalute001	Dep	336,500	4,307	3,300,000	0	com off
14	prettyboi_wit_pink_socks	Ex Em	2,400,000	190,100,000	15,100,000	0	com off
15	jarrettstod	Hum	896,700	1,761	6,300,000	9,498	supp
16	sweettartesss	Exp	29,300	286	159,500,000	0	com off
17	anthonypaul359	Exp	724,100	50,200	3,600,000	44,600	supp
18	imdatmom	Ang	84,500	1,245	353,600	2,878	supp
19	Poslyalex	Pos	3,736	17	17,700	256	supp
20	my.eyes.ohara	Exp	9,003	21	47,500	339	supp
21	adaptivekate	Exp	29,600	75	430,100	921	supp
22	codyjayartistry	Exp	169	1	1,278	37	supp
23	georgestwinss	Hum	106,600	466	502,500	2,548	supp
24	alexwithabeanie	Sar	22,200	581	215,700	991	supp
25	mercurystardust	Exp	150,100	1,356	427,200	12,200	supp
26	jiaoyingsummers	Exp	476,100	5,969	1,900,000	9,453	supp
27	_odriewdlocenots_	Ang	361,400	9,580	1,800,000	22,400	supp
28	brittikitty	Pos	687,300	6,121	5,600,000	27,000	supp
29	immarollwithit	Exp	1,200,000	6,011	4,300,000	9,836	supp
30	shoelover99	Exp	58,100	183	333,700	4,749	supp
31	mathmanx	Ang	704	2	12,600	10	supp
32	baidaugh	Dep	332,800	805	1,800,000	19,300,000	supp
33	love_logan07	Sar	12,100	11	169,100	524	supp
34	renegadescienceteacher	Exp	353,400	6,183	1,100,000	5,486	supp
35	aspenessence	Exp	2,500,000	6,878	14,900,000	12,100	supp
36	ozmo1904	Sar	101	0	529	0	com off
37	johnathan.reyna	Dep	108,700	1,843	840,500	21,100	supp
38	forevermumoftwo	Dep	4,449	63	54,300	1,366	supp
39	tamponawan	Dep	31,400	204	473,200	1,781	supp
40	katehudson007	Dep	3,758	191	346,400	3758	supp

41	gabeadams	Dep	311,200	7,988	2,700,000	0	com off
42	xchechinex	Ang	508,800	2,146	2,800,000	19,900	supp
43	zacheryjosephh	Ang	18,000	491	96,600	1,881	split
44	ash.e.e	Sar	106,800	140	755,800	4,468	supp
45	raisinghonor	Pos	26,900	155	264,500	7,720	supp
46	goofball.n.company	Ang	2,000,000	15,400	9,630,000	77,600	supp
47	officer_vest	Pos	14,000	63	74,100	1,485	supp
48	veterangamerttv	Sar	19,600	74	244,700	1,936	supp
49	dj.tok	Dep	35,900	552	283,100	3,752	supp
50	themccartys	Sar	39,500	165	385,800	778	supp
51	_glitter_biscuits_	Ang	3,041	17	32,700	394	supp
52	notjamminlu21	Ex Em	654,500	8,186	5,200,000	133,300	supp
53	keeganjcurty	Ang	11,700	57	75,000	704	supp
54	swat.2422	Ang	9,353	45	79,000	1,979	supp
55	ajangham	Ex Em	20,100	341	128,600	1,333	supp
56	electic_moon_witch	Dep	20,000	268	216,600	3,026	supp
57	or_aviv	Emp	5,816	11	51,700	225	supp
58	datboiscottyy	Dep	93,000	649	429,200	15,600	supp
59	kshaye98	Pos	74,400	635	648,900	16,400	supp
60	officercortese	Dep	77,700	421	867,000	14,200	supp
61	_itslambert	Ang	26	16	70,200	635	supp
62	steffonslays	Sar	10,900	47	76,000	1,148	supp
63	twomoms.of.triplets	Sar	5,790	25	95,800	846	supp
64	farahleahheg	Pos	26,800	243	253,000	2,266	supp
65	african_hippie	Dep	13,300	32	80,300	765	supp
66	fatimadetetuan	Emp	351,900	1,562	2,000,000	10,600	supp
67	emeryreigns	Emp	11,500	54	90,400	999	supp
68	paulieepaul	Hum	121,900	321	762,900	9,361	supp
69	jasminechiswell	Dep	1,700,000	4,185	11,000,000	43,000	supp
70	hades.way	Ang	10,000	67	93,200	0	com off
71	itsa_meme_mario	Pos	34,500	251	243,800	1,378	supp
72	keenayoulittleshit	Dep	148,000	1,844	1,400,000	1,700	not supp
73	tati.the.goddess	Dep	16,500	66	177,400	1,472	supp
74	daddyy.dess	Emp	247,700	1,373	747,700	1,748	supp
75	chelseahartisme	Hum	267,000	7,322	838,500	3,333	supp
76	grandadbod	Dep	93,600	284	1,100,000	2,195	supp
77	londenandautmn	Sar	1,305	3	11,000	76	supp
78	fat_and_fit_life	Hum	3,343	12	17,000	120	supp
79	h.ennesyy	Ang	1,326	10	6,380	15	supp
80	olgaunleashed	Exp	1,341	10	25,600	61	supp
81	anthollmills	Pos	1,360	8	9,123	173	supp

82	jlopez256	Exp	1,372	5	24,100	106	supp
83	becky.lewey	Dep	1,537	15	41,900	260	supp
84	laurenjayneofficial	Ang	1,599	4	12,200	61	supp
85	nicky_pjuk	Ang	506	0	4,506	16	supp
86	dylan.price27	Exp	406	8	3,898	55	supp
87	hotmessheidi	Pos	696	4	7,111	74	supp
88	meet_desiree	Exp	1,181	3	5,912	94	supp
89	og_kim_possible	Hum	515,400	15,000	2,500,000	31,900	supp
90	bigsexy81	Hum	4,956	11	31,200	1,423	supp
91	alisonreyx	Exp	29,000	81	268,800	637	supp
92	quinpratt5	Hum	321	0	2,608	13	supp
93	crayola_killa	Sar	20,000	27	84,500	2,327	supp
94	sweetmotherofmayhem	Ang	97	3	1,302	48	supp
95	haidynshope	Exp	3,206	13	50,900	130	supp
96	theazrai	Pos	5,207	16	29,800	136	supp
97	body_Pos_bartender	Sar	1,800	6	21,300	38	supp
98	raegreen135	Exp	742,200	263	3,100,000	1,458	supp
99	kallmekris	Sar	82,200	156	466,400	572	supp
100	bstchld	Exp	62,900	1,180	476,200	916	supp
101	iamswastishukla	Emp	44,500	143	160,500	697	supp
102	lexielise	Exp	41,800	2,157	123,900	399	supp
103	thisisjessicarose	Sar	38,000	69	193,200	304	supp
104	anubhamomin	Sar	9,126	36	149,300	146	supp
105	officialconjohn	Hum	7,628	31	69,500	210	supp
106	freddquinne	Sar	6,368	24	45,300	412	supp
107	dadrealbad	Sar	5,424	53	53,700	249	supp
108	jana.rawls	Hum	4,035	19	66,200	260	supp
109	mrs.frazzled	Sar	66,500	420	283,700	2,159	split
110	corynation	Sar	58,000	1,381	345,700	2,389	supp
111	markusfrancis8	Sar	1,526	18	6,444	203	supp
112	themrsperersen	Dep	1,120	3	24,000	40	supp
113	diedrerae_	Sar	1,085	4	21,500	74	supp
114	daveauxruth	Pos	454	2	3,009	30	supp
115	curlymessybun	Exp	382	1	2,667	58	supp
116	gdancing.dina	Sar	319	0	3,900	38	supp
117	blue_j_cosplay	Sar	247	3	1,077	28	supp
118	laurendefenseforce	Sar	1,369	1	1,083	11	supp
119	iloveranch7	Hum	124	1	2,933	14	supp
120	tonymustache	Hum	124	0	1,299	5	supp
121	nativesaiyan	Pos	3,339	8	19,700	292	supp
122	nursehadley	Pos	3,037	5	57,700	38	supp

123	meganelizabeth1016	Emp	2,513	2	49,410	85	supp
124	danispeaksonit	Sar	1,959	8	26,000	187	supp
125	nnaples	Sar	1,396	4	51,600	160	supp
126	sophiaspallino	Hum	1,383	8	16,200	53	supp
127	shesjustdoingherthing	Pos	1,173	9	10,500	79	supp
128	shadowphx	Sar	1,031	4	6,478	13	supp
129	nikhua	Ang	886	3	138	138	supp
130	spookshowbabyyyy	Pos	702	0	5,534	64	supp
131	thesinginglifeguard	Exp	611	0	3,301	8	supp
132	irishgianttinman	Pos	544	2	1,958	28	supp
133	_georgiapearson	Ang	526	1	3,463	121	supp
134	scottrebom	Hum	444	3	3,041	21	supp
135	buzzingpolymers	Sar	434	15	2,388	55	supp
136	webkinny	Exp	254,900	5,665	1,200,000	18,800	supp
137	jaymb89	Exp	247	0	2,304	27	supp
138	raingay	Dep	188	1	1,112	58	supp
139	jen_nifer15	Dep	182	0	1,655	4	supp
140	justtarah	Ang	159	0	2,737	0	com off
141	kierstenondemand	Exp	534	3	15,100	43	supp
142	aysheaydin	Sar	56,100	185	810,700	1,164	supp
143	barbiespice	Ang	29,700	110	143,800	566	supp
144	tyshonlawrence	Dep	199,100	162	804,500	3,393	supp
145	camisurro	Sar	4,546	13	35,100	165	split
146	the_hoodjabi_	Pos	15,300	119	129,500	299	supp
147	cute_king22	Dep	311,500	5,008	1,500,000	131,300	supp
148	lauraallicem	Ang	252,500	205	1,300,000	1,017	split
149	thirstyonmain	Ang	201,800	358	1,500,000	15,800	supp
150	drachnik	Sar	164,900	422	531,600	2,617	supp
151	audreytrullinger	Sar	31,500	156	219,000	428	supp
152	veronicaridge	Ang	18,400	19	224,400	1,466	supp
153	angfitco	Ang	18,300	26	241,500	1,852	supp
154	dreamscapeasmr	Ang	15,600	8	154,000	1,350	supp
155	stephandscott	Hum	12,200	81	90,500	354	supp
156	toonibug	Ex Em	7,846	0	132,100	219	supp
157	evelynjuarezofficial	Dep	6,456	27	42,600	555	supp
158	laamzy5	Ang	16,500	107	60,500	780	supp
159	savyjane	Exp	1,189	11	17,400	31	supp
160	amandamariexxo	Dep	22,800	37	160,400	1,028	supp
161	scottywartooth	Hum	25,400	404	172,400	834	supp
162	withsubah	Dep	26,600	69	293,100	1,578	supp
163	alisonkay	Ang	29,600	44	324,500	1,227	supp

164	ajclementine	Dep	130,000	204	557,200	1,894	split
165	getfunkywithjanice	Dep	140,100	499	566,500	5,068	supp
166	ashlelnok	Hum	958,200	6,772	6,200,000	6,382	supp
167	visionvideoband	Exp	34,500	277	120,700	1,091	supp
168	notgracelive	Exp	22,300	2,252	56,100	912	supp
169	gelo.be.cappn	Hum	29,900	104	132,600	703	split
170	jesthejemini	Emp	266,600	1,102	1,700,000	10,800	supp
171	juliehaneline	Sar	1,349	3	15,500	64	supp
172	daestraofficial	Sar	1,491	3	5,218	46	supp
173	lunchbreak_al	Hum	1,561	3	203,300	69	supp
174	a_l_y_d	Hum	1,576	4	8,638	70	supp
175	lilith_eyelash	Dep	1,695	1	25,000	99	supp
176	voluptoraptor	Exp	1,864	33	6,370	362	supp
177	nikkinicolemathis	Ang	1,909	4	22,300	51	supp
178	kkristinwwaynick	Hum	2,035	20	45,000	85	supp
179	saleemghad	Pos	2,058	6	21,100	144	supp
180	veronicaridge	Ang	2,204	2	42,200	72	supp
181	sugeneshin_	Hum	2,498	3	12,000	54	supp
182	carlafrombankstown	Sar	2,735	29	27,000	72	supp
183	khaotickayleee	Sar	3,419	26	11,200	200	supp
184	nikk.chikk	Ang	3,420	11	15,600	29	split
185	lilsunny.og	Ang	4,512	14	15,400	14	supp
186	jordan_bekind	Ang	4,511	11	41,400	224	supp
187	chandlerbingbangbong	Sar	9,021	37	50,000	218	supp
188	emilyjeanne333	Ang	8,927	18	62,700	719	supp
189	robynpugin	Emp	8,573	8	61,400	198	supp
190	emmersenlara	Pos	16,200	46	48,300	214	supp
191	halfcasted	Hum	15,400	71	66,700	214	supp
192	venusenvydrag	Hum	13,200	117	98,600	184	supp
193	gil_bby	Ang	12,100	27	76,100	1,255	supp
194	aishuadd	Exp	11,400	21	94,500	206	supp
195	georgebrownn	Ang	2,594	2	16,900	59	supp
196	virgoflavoredjuulpod	Ang	2,538	3	27,400	90	supp
197	cupidfloofqueen	Ang	2,046	0	8,698	79	supp
198	weeb.trix	Dep	28,300	540	74,900	1,858	supp
199	misshaleymichelle	Dep	11,000	46	75,700	1,542	supp
200	rexjohnbosco	Dep	8,731	22	67,600	1,309	supp