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**Communicative Accommodation and Perceived Cyberbullying Victimization
on TikTok in Uganda**

by

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S23P36/007

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and Communication in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of a
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September 20, 2026

Declaration

I, Prever Mukasa, declare that this research dissertation titled "Communicative Accommodation and Perceived Cyberbullying Victimization on TikTok in Uganda" is my original work and has not been submitted for a degree or any other academic award at any other university or institution. I affirm that all sources of information used in this dissertation have been properly cited and referenced in accordance with academic integrity guidelines. Any assistance received in conducting the research and preparing this research dissertation has been duly acknowledged.

Signature



.....

Prever Mukasa

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Date

September 21, 2026

.....

Approval

This research dissertation titled, " Communicative Accommodation and Perceived Cyberbullying Victimization on TikTok in Uganda" has been written under our supervision and is ready for examination.

Professor James Kiwanuka-Tondo

Signed

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Date

.....September 21, 2026

Professor Angella Napakol

Signed

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Date

-----September 21, 2026-----

Abstract

This study analyzed how communicative accommodation strategies influence perceived cyberbullying victimization among university students who create content on TikTok in Uganda. Grounded in Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT), the study examined convergence, divergence, overaccommodation, and underaccommodation as predictors of perceived cyberbullying victimization, and examined the moderating role of digital resilience. A quantitative, cross-sectional design underpinned by the positivist paradigm was employed on a stratified random sample of 372 undergraduate students aged 18-25 drawn from Makerere University (n = 296) and Uganda Christian University Mukono (n = 76). Data was collected using a structured, self-administered Likert-scale questionnaire. Overaccommodation was the only strategy to significantly predict perceived cyberbullying victimization at both the bivariate level ($r = .219, p < .001$) and in hierarchical regression after controlling for demographics ($\beta = .222, p < .001$), with accommodation strategies collectively explaining meaningful incremental variance ($\Delta R^2 = .058, p < .001$). Convergence, divergence, and underaccommodation were non-significant predictors, challenging the universality of CAT's social approval hypothesis in high-convergence-saturation digital environments. Digital resilience significantly moderated the convergence-victimization relationship ($b = .171, p = .001$) and showed a trend toward buffering the overaccommodation-victimization relationship across resilience levels, though the interaction did not reach significance. No significant differences were found by gender, academic year, or posting frequency, indicating that victimization is driven more by communicative behavior than by demographic characteristics. The study

extends CAT into a multimodal, algorithm-driven, performative social media context and provides the first quantitative, CAT-informed evidence on communicative predictors of cyberbullying victimization among university TikTok creators in Uganda. The findings concluded that cyberbullying victimization is not merely a function of who students are but of how they communicate, with communicative inauthenticity, the defining feature of overaccommodation as the most significant predictor. The findings suggest integrating communicative self-awareness into university digital literacy curricula, developing digital resilience programmes for active content creators, and advocating for platform moderation policies that reduce algorithmic pressure toward inauthentic accommodation.

Key words: *Communication Accommodation Theory, cyberbullying victimization, TikTok, overaccommodation, digital resilience, Uganda, university students, online cyberbullying*

Dedication

To Dr. Gerald K. Sseruwagi and Mrs. Glades N. Mukasa. You taught me everything I know about life.

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List Acronyms and Abbreviations

CAT	Communication Accommodation Theory
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
UCU	Uganda Christian University
UBOS	Uganda Bureau of Statistics
IRB	Institutional Review Board
EFA	Exploratory Factor Analysis
IV	Independent Variable
DV	Dependent Variable
SD	Standard Deviation
SAT	Speech Accommodation Theory
CMB	Common Method Bias
D^2	Mahalanobis Distance
η^2	Eta-squared
f^2	Cohen's f-squared
D	Cohen's d
OR	Odds Ratio
SEM	Structural Equation Modelling

Chapter One

Introduction

1.1 Introduction

Cyberbullying has become a pervasive issue in the digital age, especially among young people who engage actively on social media platforms (Lyyra, Junttila, Gustafsson, Lahti & Paakkari, 2022). As platforms like TikTok continue to grow in popularity, the nature of interpersonal communication has shifted, giving rise to new patterns of interaction and, consequently, new forms of online aggression (Kim, Tam & Bach, 2022). This study sought to explore how different communicative accommodation strategies relate to university students' perceptions of cyberbullying victimization on TikTok. The research was grounded in the theoretical premise that communicative behaviors such as convergence, divergence, overaccommodation, and underaccommodation can influence how individuals are perceived and treated in social interactions, including in online environments (Underwood & Ehrenreich, 2017). This chapter provides the background to the study. It also presents the problem statement, general objective, specific research objectives, research questions, and hypotheses. In addition, it outlines the conceptual framework guiding the study. The chapter concludes with the justification, significance, scope, and theoretical framework of the study.

In Uganda specifically, the intersection of rapid TikTok adoption and limited institutional frameworks for digital safety has created fertile conditions for online harm. Mukasa and Otim (2021) documented that university students in Kampala who actively created content on social media platforms reported significant psychological

distress associated with hostile online interactions, including anxiety, social withdrawal, and reduced academic engagement. Semujju (2024) further observed that Ugandan TikTok users navigate a particularly complex communicative terrain, balancing the demands of global platform norms with local cultural expectations around interpersonal respect and communal harmony. In East Africa more broadly, the Kenya ICT Authority (2022) reported a 34% increase in cyberbullying complaints among youth aged 15-24 in the year following TikTok's mainstream adoption, a pattern mirrored in Uganda's own NITA-U reporting data (2023). These regional realities underscore that cyberbullying on TikTok is not a Western phenomenon applied to an African context it is an emergent and locally distinctive problem that demands African-centered empirical investigation.

1.2 Background of the Study

The digital revolution has transformed human interaction, creating new spaces for communication, self-presentation, and socialization (Pak, Ivanishcheva & Kochemasova, 2022). However, this transformation has also introduced new forms of interpersonal harm, most notably cyberbullying (Roberto & Eden, 2010). Cyberbullying refers to intentional and repeated aggressive behavior carried out through digital technologies such as social media, messaging platforms, and online forums, often with the goal of humiliating, threatening, or socially excluding the victim (Chun, Lee, Kim, & Lee, 2020). Unlike traditional bullying, cyberbullying is persistent, borderless, and can happen at any time, often under conditions of anonymity. Victims of cyberbullying may suffer long-term psychological, emotional, and social consequences, including anxiety, depression, and social withdrawal (Brailovskaia,

Diez, & Margraf, 2023). According to Espelage, Hong, Valido (2018) 37% of U.S. youth aged 12-24 have experienced online cyberbullying, a trend further substantiated by Patchin and Hinduja (2020), who argue that the frequency and intensity of cyberbullying victimization are rising globally, particularly among young people who are increasingly immersed in digital environments. In Europe, similar concerns have emerged. A study by Athanasiou et al. (2018) found that approximately 25% of adolescents across EU countries reported being victims of cyberbullying, with platforms like Instagram, Snapchat, and TikTok becoming common sites of online aggression. In East Asia, cyberbullying victimization has been linked to intense academic and social pressures, with studies in South Korea and Japan indicating that experiences of online abuse contribute significantly to school dropouts and mental health crises among victims (Lee, Chun, Kim & Lee, 2020).

In the African context, cyberbullying victimization is an emerging challenge that mirrors global trends, yet is compounded by the region's unique sociocultural, technological, and regulatory environments. With increased mobile phone penetration, growing internet access, and the rise of social media usage among young people, African youth are increasingly exposed to cyberbullying victimization (Abaido, 2019). According to the Amaefula (2024), sub-Saharan Africa is the fastest-growing region for smartphone adoption, with youth comprising the largest demographic of internet users. While this growth has facilitated digital inclusion, it has also led to increased incidents of online cyberbullying, particularly among adolescents and university students. In South Africa, a national survey by the African Institute of Computer Scientists and Information Technologists revealed that over 24% of

teenagers had experienced cyberbullying on TikTok (De Bruyn & Thabela-Chimboza, 2023).

In Uganda, TikTok's adoption has grown rapidly among university students, who use the platform for entertainment, networking, and self-expression (Amaefula, 2024). With over 40% of Uganda's population aged 15-24 and increasing internet penetration (UBOS, 2023), TikTok has become a significant social trend, particularly in universities, where students create content to gain visibility and social capital. However, this engagement exposes them to cyberbullying, with reported cases of online shaming, trolling, and cyberbullying (Abaido, 2019). For instance, several university students have reported being mocked for their appearance, language, or performance in TikTok videos, while others have been targets of malicious comments and attacks that circulate beyond their immediate social circles (Teddy, 2023). Despite the growing use of TikTok as a medium of digital self-expression, it is important to recognize that students' own communication behaviors, such as how they speak, gesture, present emotions, or interact with others online, may influence their vulnerability to cyberbullying (Mukasa & Otim, 2021). While much research has focused on the psychological effects of cyberbullying and the demographic profiles of victims and perpetrators, less attention has been given to the role of communication behavior in influencing victimization, particularly through the lens of Communication Accommodation Theory (Giles, 2016; DeVito & DeVito, 2019; Nabukeera, 2023). Research on cyberbullying in Uganda has primarily been situated within the domains of education policy, child protection, and digital rights (Solomon, Paul & Makara, 2024). There is limited empirical literature on how specific communicative behaviors

influence vulnerability to cyberbullying (Solomon, Paul & Makara, 2024). As such, applying CAT to Ugandan TikTok users not only fills a theoretical gap but also offers context-specific insights into how content creators navigate the challenges of online visibility and interaction.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

The rapid rise of short-form video platforms such as TikTok has transformed the way young people communicate and present themselves online (Shriver-Rice et al., 2021), yet alongside these developments there has been a marked increase in cyberbullying, particularly among university-age content creators (Kowalski, Giumetti, Schroeder & Lattanner, 2021; Smith & Berkkun, 2022). While existing studies have established various predictors of cyberbullying victimization including personality traits (Wachs et al., 2021), digital literacy (Patchin & Hinduja, 2020), and social anxiety (Zhou et al., 2021), there remains a noticeable gap regarding how communicative behaviors, particularly those rooted in interpersonal communication theory (how individuals exchange verbal, nonverbal, written and visual information), influence perceived victimization online. In the Ugandan context, the consequences of cyberbullying victimization extend beyond individual psychological harm to include academic disengagement, reduced campus social participation, and in severe cases, temporary or permanent withdrawal from digital platforms that are increasingly central to professional and social networking for graduates (Mukasa & Otim, 2021; Teddy, 2023).

Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT), originally developed by Giles (1973), offers a well-established framework for understanding how individuals modify

their communicative behavior in response to their interaction partners. Although CAT has been applied extensively in face-to-face contexts such as healthcare (Gallois & Giles, 2015) and intergenerational communication (Harwood, 2000), very few studies have extended it into algorithm-driven, visually performative platforms like TikTok, where interaction is shaped by short-form, audience-facing content rather than reciprocal conversation (Baym, 2015; Xu & Zhang, 2023). Despite the rise of online cyberbullying on modern social media, there remains a shortage of empirical research exploring CAT's communicative strategies in relation to cyberbullying victimization on platforms like TikTok.

This omission is especially significant in Uganda, where TikTok has gained considerable traction among university students yet empirical research lags far behind usage trends (NITA-U, 2023; Mutsvairo & Karam, 2021). Without understanding how communicative accommodation shapes vulnerability to cyberbullying, interventions risk overlooking the communicative factors that make creators more or less susceptible to online hostility. Therefore, this study sought to fill this gap by applying CAT to examine how university students' communicative behaviors on TikTok influence their perceived cyberbullying victimization.

1.4 Study Purpose

The purpose of this study was to analyze how communicative accommodation strategies influence perceived cyberbullying victimization among university students on TikTok.

1.5 Specific Objectives

1. To assess the extent to which convergence in communicative behavior is associated with perceived cyberbullying victimization on TikTok.
2. To analyze the relationship between divergent communication strategies and perceived cyberbullying victimization among TikTok content creators.
3. To analyze how overaccommodation in communication relates to perceived experiences of cyberbullying on TikTok.
4. To analyze the influence of underaccommodation on perceived cyberbullying victimization among university students on TikTok.
5. To analyze the moderating role of digital resilience in the relationship between communicative accommodation strategies and perceived cyberbullying victimization on TikTok.

1.6 Research Questions

1. Is there a significant relationship between convergence in communicative behavior and perceived cyberbullying victimization among TikTok content creators?
2. How does the use of divergent communicative behavior influence perceptions of cyberbullying victimization on TikTok?
3. What is the relationship between overaccommodative communication and perceived cyberbullying victimization among university TikTok users?
4. To what extent does underaccommodative communication predict perceived cyberbullying victimization among content creators on TikTok?

5. How does digital resilience moderate the relationship between communicative accommodation strategies and perceived cyberbullying victimization among TikTok content creators?

1.7 Research Hypotheses

1. (H₁) There is a significant negative relationship between convergence in communicative behavior and perceived cyberbullying victimization among TikTok content creators.
2. (H₂) The use of divergent communicative behavior will have a significant influence on the perceived cyberbullying victimization among TikTok content creators.
3. (H₃) There is a significant positive relationship between overaccommodative communication and perceived cyberbullying victimization among university TikTok users?
4. (H₄) Under-accommodation is a significant predictor of perceived cyberbullying victimization among content creators.
5. (H₅) Digital resilience significantly moderates the relationship between accommodation strategies and victimization.

1.8 Scope of Study

This study was delimited to investigating how communicative accommodation strategies influence perceived cyberbullying victimization among university students who create content on TikTok in Uganda. It specifically examined four key constructs from communication accommodation theory convergence, divergence, overaccommodation, and underaccommodation as independent variables (Giles, 2016;

Zhang & Giles, 2018). The dependent variable was perceived cyberbullying victimization, operationalized through self-reported experiences of online cyberbullying, ridicule, or exclusion on TikTok (Amaefula, 2024; Solomon, Paul & Makara, 2024). The study focused on university students aged 18-30, as this group represents a high proportion of content creators and consumers on TikTok in Uganda (Abaido, 2019; De Bruyn & Thabela-Chimboza, 2023; Mukasa & Otim, 2021). The research did not include users of other platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, or Twitter, nor did it examine cyberbullying perpetration or third-party observations of online aggression. Furthermore, the study relied on quantitative data collected through a Likert-scale questionnaire and thus did not explore in-depth narratives or qualitative dimensions of participants' experiences. While findings may inform broader discussions around social media communication and cyberbullying, generalization was limited to the demographic and platform-specific context under study.

1.9 Study Justification

Several factors justified the need for this study. Firstly, cyberbullying on social media has become a pervasive issue, especially on highly interactive platforms like TikTok, where users are exposed to mass feedback and often face anonymous cyberbullying. Despite the increasing prevalence of this problem, few studies have explored the underlying communication behaviors that may trigger or buffer against such victimization. Secondly, while Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) has been widely used to explain interpersonal communication in face-to-face contexts, its application to online, visual, and performative platforms remains largely unexplored.

Furthermore, research in Uganda and Sub-Saharan Africa more broadly has focused primarily on cyberbullying in school settings or on regulatory and legal frameworks, with minimal attention given to user behavior or communication theory (Mutsvairo & Karam, 2021). Given the growing popularity of TikTok among Ugandan university students as a space for expression, social commentary, and identity performance, it was timely and relevant to examine how these users' communicative choices may influence their experiences of cyberbullying. By focusing on an under-researched population and applying a well-established communication theory to a novel context, this study responded to a clear empirical and theoretical gap.

1.10 Study Significance

This study contributes to the extension of Communication Accommodation Theory into digital, youth-centered, and performative communication environments such as TikTok. By empirically testing the relationship between CAT strategies and cyberbullying victimization, the study advances understanding of how accommodation behaviors influence user vulnerability in online spaces. It also contributes to cyberbullying literature by highlighting communication behavior not just personality traits or usage patterns as a key factor in perceived victimization.

Practically, the findings of this study may inform interventions aimed at reducing cyberbullying on social media platforms. Insights gained could be valuable to educators, digital safety advocates, content creators, and platform designers in crafting more nuanced strategies for fostering respectful communication online. In the Ugandan context, the study offers evidence-based recommendations for digital literacy initiatives, especially those targeting university students and young adults.

Moreover, by situating the research in a local setting with global relevance, the study adds to a growing body of African scholarship on social media, communication, and youth engagement.

1.11 Conceptual Frameworks

This study's conceptual framework is grounded in communication accommodation theory and it explored the relationship between communicative accommodation strategies and perceived cyberbullying victimization among university students TikTok content creators. The independent variable was operationalized through four CAT constructs: convergence, divergence, overaccommodation, and underaccommodation. Convergence refers to the communicative strategy whereby a creator adapts their language, style, tone, or content to more closely match the expectations and preferences of their audience (Giles, 2016). It is driven by the desire for social approval, acceptance, or connection. On TikTok, convergence manifests in behaviors such as using trending sounds and audio clips, participating in viral challenges (such as a trending dance format or lip-sync format popular among Ugandan university students), switching from Luganda to English or vice versa depending on the perceived audience, aligning content themes with what is currently popular on the platform, and adjusting posting frequency or style in response to positive engagement. Convergence is theoretically associated with increased social acceptance and, by extension, reduced risk of cyberbullying victimization because the creator is signaling conformity with community norms. Divergence is the opposite strategy, the creator deliberately maintains or accentuates communicative features that distinguish them from audience norms, asserting their individuality, cultural

identity, or distinctive creative voice (Giles et al., 1991). Divergence is an active choice to be communicatively distinct. On TikTok, divergence might appear as a student consistently posting in Acholi or Runyankole rather than the more platform-dominant English or Luganda; deliberately avoiding viral challenges in favor of entirely original content formats; expressing cultural practices, religious views, or political opinions that run counter to prevailing platform trends; or maintaining a posting style that resists algorithmic optimization in favor of personal authenticity. For example, a UCU student who creates TikTok content exclusively in her regional dialect, using traditional storytelling formats that do not follow any trending audio, is exhibiting divergence. While divergence can attract loyal niche audiences who value distinctiveness, it can also attract hostile responses from audiences who interpret the deviation from norms as provocative or disrespectful.

Overaccommodation occurs when a creator's adaptation to audience expectations goes too far, becoming excessive, inauthentic, or patronizing in ways that undermine genuine communicative connection (Giles et al., 1991; Zhang & Giles, 2018). The key distinguishing feature of overaccommodation is that the adaptation is perceived as miscalibrated, the creator tries too hard, overshoots the socially appropriate level of adjustment, and in doing so, produces communication that audiences read as fake, sycophantic, or manipulative. On TikTok, overaccommodation might look like a student who exaggerates their emotional reactions in videos far beyond their genuine feelings in order to appear more relatable; forces themselves to participate in every viral challenge even when the content clearly does not fit their personality or interests; uses trendy slang or catchphrases they do not fully

understand or that feel unnatural in their delivery; or adds popular visual effects and filters to videos where they are aesthetically and contextually inappropriate. For example, a Makerere business student who normally posts calm, analytical content about entrepreneurship but begins posting exaggerated, highly emotional reaction videos to trending topics, visibly performing emotions inconsistent with their established persona is overaccommodating. Audiences on TikTok, who are highly attuned to authenticity, are likely to identify this mismatch and respond negatively, potentially with mockery or coordinated hostile comments. This study hypothesized that overaccommodation was positively associated with perceived cyberbullying victimization.

Underaccommodation describes the failure to make expected or appropriate adjustments to communication, resulting in a communicative style that is perceived as rigid, aloof, disengaged, or dismissive of the audience's needs and norms (Giles, 2016). The underaccommodating creator communicates as if the audience does not exist or does not matter. On TikTok, underaccommodation might manifest as a student who consistently ignores all comments on their videos without any acknowledgment; never adjusts their content format or style regardless of audience feedback; posts content in a monotone or emotionally flat manner that signals indifference to viewer experience; or openly refuses to engage with any TikTok trends or community expectations. For example, a UCU student who posts academic summaries in a rigid lecture-style format and never responds to or acknowledges the hundreds of comments asking for a different presentation approach is exhibiting underaccommodation. While this may be perceived as principled independence,

audiences may interpret it as arrogance or social detachment, potentially triggering negative responses. However, because underaccommodating creators may also attract lower audience engagement overall, the pathway from underaccommodation to cyberbullying victimization may be less direct than for overaccommodation.

The mapping of these four CAT constructs onto TikTok's specific platform architecture requires brief theoretical elaboration. TikTok is not a dyadic communication environment it is a broadcast medium in which creators produce content for diffuse, heterogeneous, and largely anonymous audiences, mediated by an algorithmic recommendation system that amplifies content generating high engagement. This architecture creates three structural conditions that modify how CAT's constructs operate. First, algorithmic convergence pressure: TikTok's For You Page algorithm rewards content that aligns with trending sounds, formats, and audience engagement patterns, creating systemic incentives for convergence that have no equivalent in face-to-face interaction (Li et al., 2024). Second, authenticity visibility: because creators broadcast short-form video a multimodal, visually legible format audiences can rapidly detect mismatches between a creator's persona and their accommodative behaviors. Overaccommodation is more immediately perceptible in video than in text, amplifying the social penalties for perceived inauthenticity (Abidin, 2021). Third, audience anonymity and asymmetry: unlike dyadic CAT contexts where both parties can observe and respond to each other's accommodation, TikTok's audience is largely anonymous and does not accommodate back their only communicative response is engagement, avoidance, or hostility. These three structural features mean that CAT's predictions require contextual qualification when

applied to TikTok, and this qualification is a core theoretical contribution of the present study.

All constructs in this study the four accommodation strategies and digital resilience are operationalized as self-reported behaviors and perceptions; they are not objectively observed or externally verified. The dependent variable is specifically labelled perceived cyberbullying victimization to signal that it is the victim's own subjective experience and interpretation of having been targeted that is measured, not an objective count or external assessment of aggressive incidents. This perceptual framing is a theoretically deliberate choice grounded in the established operationalization of cyberbullying victimization as a victim-reported, subjective construct (Nixon, 2014; Tokunaga, 2010). The word perceived in the study title reflects this consistent operationalization throughout all measurement instruments.

The dependent variable, perceived cyberbullying victimization, was measured through dimensions such as verbal aggression, social exclusion, mockery, and perceived cyberbullying. To enrich this explanatory model, the framework incorporated digital resilience as a moderating variable. Digital resilience is defined here as the capacity of content creators to navigate, recover from, and respond effectively to online threats. It encompasses four dimensions: emotional regulation, digital self-efficacy, reflective thinking, and help-seeking behavior. The framework hypothesized that high digital resilience would buffer or weaken the effects of negative accommodation strategies on perceived cyberbullying victimization.

Figure 1

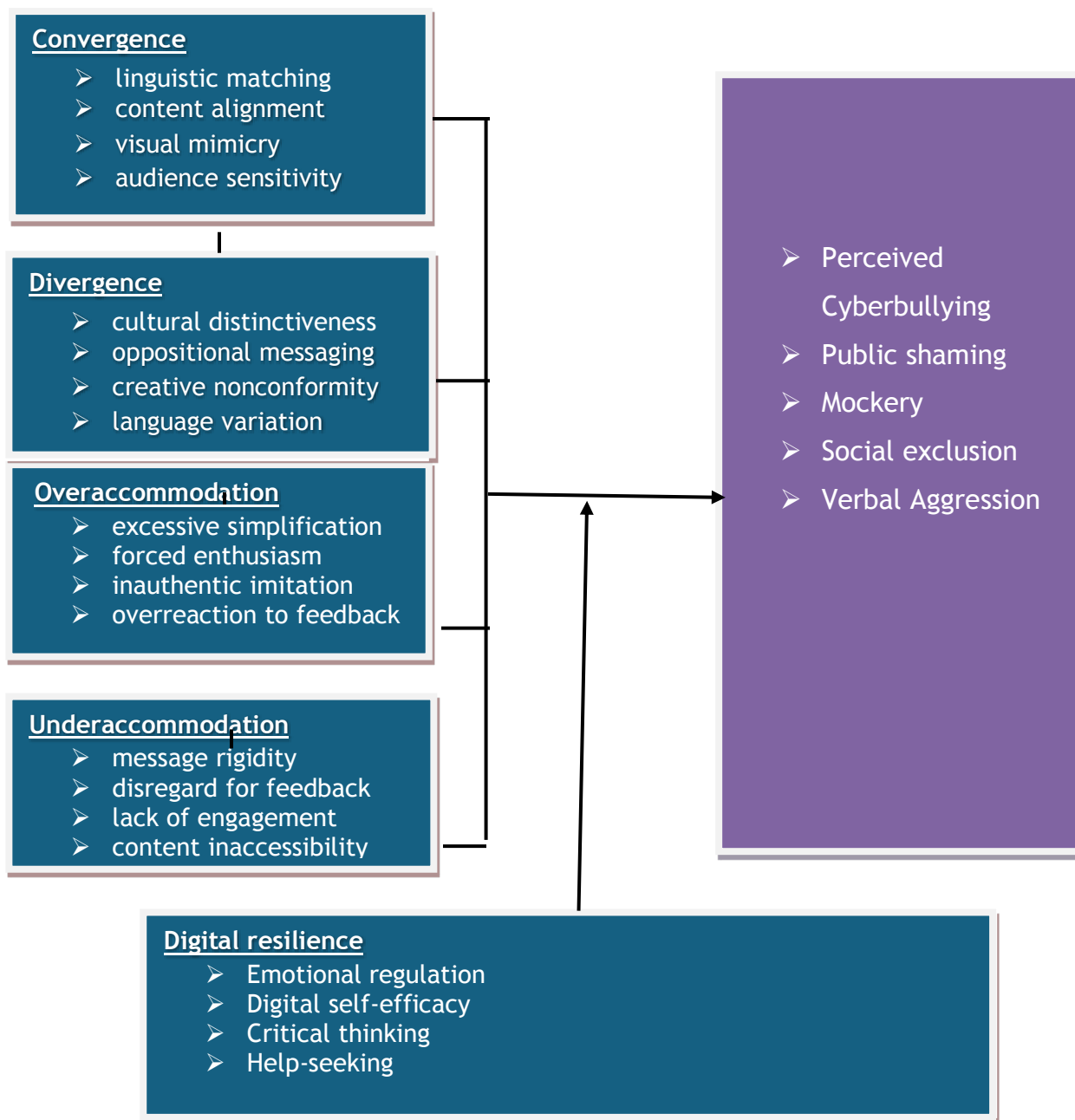
Conceptual framework

Independent variable

Communicative Accommodation Strategies

Dependent variable

Cyberbullying victimization



Source. Adapted from (Giles, 1973; Patchin & Hinduja, 2020)

1.12 Theoretical Framework

This study was guided by Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT), developed by Howard Giles in 1972, to explain the ways in which individuals adjust their communicative behavior during social interactions (Simard, Taylor & Giles, 1976). CAT posits that speakers modify their communication styles either to converge, diverge, or over-/underaccommodate based on their perceptions of the social context, audience, and relational goals (Giles, 1973; Giles & Ogay, 2007). The theory has been widely applied in interpersonal, intercultural, intergroup, and organizational communication research to explore how accommodation affects social approval, identity, and relational outcomes (Giles & Ogay, 2007). CAT was particularly appropriate for this study because it offered a structured lens through which to examine how content creators on TikTok adjust their communicative behavior in response to perceived audience expectations and feedback (Elhami, 2020). The four primary accommodation strategies convergence, divergence, overaccommodation, and underaccommodation are directly relevant to how TikTok users engage with their viewers, create content, and manage their online persona (Giles, Edwards & Walther, 2023). For instance, convergence may involve aligning with popular language or trends to foster connection, while divergence may manifest in deliberately unique or counter-normative content aimed at asserting individual or group identity (Xu & Lee, 2020). Overaccommodation may reflect excessive efforts to be accepted, while underaccommodation may represent communication that resists or ignores audience norms (Elhami, 2020; Stahl & Literat, 2022).

Although CAT was originally developed in face-to-face communication contexts, its adaptability to mediated and online environments has been increasingly acknowledged in recent scholarship (Gallois & Giles, 2015; McKerrow et al., 2020). In digital spaces particularly performative platforms like TikTok, communication is not always reciprocal or dialogic, but it remains socially meaningful and strategically adaptive (Patchin & Hinduja, 2020; Kowalski et al., 2019). Users construct messages with imagined audiences in mind, and their communicative choices can influence both positive outcomes (e.g., social approval, virality) and negative ones (e.g., cyberbullying, backlash) (Williams et al., 2022; Reynolds, Chen, & Martinez, 2019).

CAT, was thus, well-suited to uncover the relational dynamics underlying cyberbullying victimization on TikTok, a platform where visibility and communicative presentation are central to user experience (Giles, Mulac, Bradac & Johnson, 2012). By focusing on how TikTok content creators accommodate or fail to accommodate their audiences, the theory helped to explain why some users may be more vulnerable to online cyberbullying than others (Soliz & Colaner, 2017; Moreland et al., 2022). This theoretical perspective enabled a shift from viewing cyberbullying purely as a function of user demographics or personality traits to understanding it as a communicatively constructed and interactionally negotiated experience.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews and synthesizes literature on communicative accommodation strategies and cyberbullying victimization. It begins with a theoretical review of Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT), examining its origins, evolution, key constructs, strengths, and limitations. The chapter then reviews empirical research organized around each of the four CAT constructs convergence, divergence, overaccommodation, and underaccommodation, exploring what is known about their relationships to cyberbullying victimization, what remains contested or unresolved, and what gaps in the literature the present study addresses.

2.2 Theoretical Review

Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) was developed in the early 1970s by Howard Giles, a social psychologist and communication scholar (Giles, 1973). It emerged from Speech Accommodation Theory (SAT), which focused primarily on how individuals adjust their speech styles during interpersonal interactions (Giles, Mulac, Bradac & Johnson, 2012). Giles later expanded this framework into CAT to encompass not only speech but broader verbal and non-verbal communication behaviors, integrating social identity theory, intergroup dynamics, and impression management (Giles, 1973; Giles & Ogay, 2007). The theory is rooted in sociolinguistics and social psychology, drawing from frameworks such as Tajfel's Social Identity Theory, which argues that people act in ways that preserve or enhance their group identity (Soliz & Colaner, 2017). Over time, CAT has attracted scholarly contributions from other

researchers in the fields of sociolinguistics, social psychology, and media studies, including scholars like Nikyta Moreland, Patricia Bourhis, and Angie Williams, who have helped to expand the theory's scope beyond face-to-face interactions into mediated and digital environments (Moreland, Meeks, Nahid, Panzer & Fancher, 2022).

Building on these contributions, CAT gradually evolved to include both interpersonal and intergroup communication settings. Originally focused on face-to-face interactions, the theory has since been adapted to examine communication in healthcare, customer service, education, intercultural contexts, and increasingly, digital environments. Scholars like Harwood (2000), Gallois (1997), and Soliz & Giles (2014) expanded the theory's scope, emphasizing the importance of group membership, power dynamics, and perceived norms in guiding communicative adjustments. Recent adaptations also explore non-verbal behavior (e.g., gestures, proximity), identity performance, and message framing in technologically mediated contexts

According to Zhang & Giles (2018), CAT emphasizes how individuals adapt their communication to either reduce or highlight social distance. These adjustments manifest as convergence adopting styles similar to the audience to gain approval, or divergence accentuating differences to assert individuality or resist conformity. Maintenance, a third strategy, occurs when individuals preserve their communication style regardless of context (Elhami, 2020). These strategies are motivated by the desire for social approval, identity expression, or relational management. In the context of TikTok, such motivations are apparent as users engage in self-presentation

(e.g., performing identity through appearance, humor, or persona), engagement behaviors (e.g., commenting, duetting, sharing), and controversial content creation (e.g., posting about sensitive or polarizing topics) to align with or resist prevailing platform norms. To better understand these patterns of communication, Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) offers a useful framework, identifying key constructs for analyzing communication behaviors, including convergence, divergence, overaccommodation, and underaccommodation (Giles, Mulac, Bradac & Johnson, 2012).

Given its focus on how individuals adjust their communication in response to others, CAT is particularly well-suited for examining communication-based vulnerability to cyberbullying. The theory has been applied in digital spaces to explain online engagement, identity performance, and impression management (Soliz & Colaner, 2017). On TikTok, users converge by following trends or mimicking popular formats and diverge by introducing unconventional or contentious content. These behaviors can attract positive attention but also increase the risk of negative feedback or online cyberbullying especially when content is misinterpreted or challenges dominant norms (Stahl & Literat, 2022).

While CAT offers valuable insights into such communicative behaviors, it also has limitations. It assumes rational, intentional behavior, while many online actions are impulsive or shaped by emotional and cultural influences (Giles, Coupland & Coupland, 1991). As Ayoko, Härtel & Callan (2002) note, the meaning of convergence and divergence is context-specific; what appears affiliative in one setting may be interpreted as confrontational in another. Moreover, CAT may not fully account for

power asymmetries on platforms where visibility, algorithms, and audience size mediate communicative impact (Giles & Ogay, 2013).

Nonetheless, CAT remains a valuable framework. Its flexibility and comprehensiveness allow researchers to analyze a wide range of communicative strategies—including convergence, divergence, overaccommodation, and underaccommodation—across diverse settings and modalities. Secondly, the theory is context-sensitive, meaning it can be tailored to diverse social, cultural, and technological environments. Thirdly, CAT emphasizes intentionality and perception, acknowledging that what matters in communication is not only the behavior itself but how it is interpreted by others. Lastly, its strong empirical foundation makes it suitable for both qualitative and quantitative studies, enhancing its relevance for interdisciplinary research.

Yet, despite these strengths, CAT is not without critique. A central challenge lied in its complexity in measurement. While the theory offers rich conceptual categories, operationalizing and empirically distinguishing between them (especially overaccommodation and underaccommodation), can be difficult (Williams et al., 2010). Furthermore, CAT has been critiqued for lacking predictive power; it explains communicative behavior well but often falls short in anticipating outcomes. Another weakness lies in its original emphasis on symmetrical, face-to-face interactions, making direct application to asymmetrical and asynchronous digital communication (like social media) theoretically challenging unless adapted carefully.

Despite its limitations, CAT offers a robust analytical foundation for this study. It enables the examination of how university students' self-presentation, engagement,

and content creation choices reflect strategies of convergence, divergence, or maintenance in their communication on TikTok. These communicative strategies - whether intended to connect, differentiate, or provoke - may shape how others perceive and respond to them, including through acts of cyberbullying. Additionally, CAT facilitates the analysis of students' perceptions of cyberbullies' communication behaviors, emphasizing how hostile responses are socially interpreted and categorized. Through this theoretical lens, cyberbullying is reframed not as an isolated act of aggression, but as a socially embedded and interactional outcome of perceived communicative behavior in online public spaces.

CAT has been applied across multiple disciplines, suggesting its versatility as a theoretical framework. In healthcare communication, it has been used to explain how doctors adapt language to match patients' knowledge levels (Watson & Gallois, 1998). In intercultural communication, it is used to explore how individuals adapt their speech in multilingual or cross-cultural encounters (Gasiorek & Giles, 2013). Similarly, in education, CAT has been employed to analyze teacher-student interaction and classroom engagement (Denes, 2011). More recently, CAT has seen limited but promising application in digital communication. For example, Danescu-Niculescu-Mizil et al. (2011) examined convergence in online political debates, and Zhou et al. (2022) analyzed identity-based accommodation on Reddit. However, these studies focus primarily on text-based or dialogic interactions, with minimal application in performative, video-based, and algorithmic platforms like TikTok.

A related theoretical framework worth acknowledging is Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical model of self-presentation, which offers a complementary perspective

on why overaccommodation attracts negative social responses. Goffman argued that social actors are perpetually engaged in impression management performing versions of themselves for social audiences and that audiences are skilled at detecting performance failures: moments when the actor's front-stage presentation is perceived as inconsistent with their authentic backstage self. On TikTok, where creators literally perform for an audience through video, Goffmanian dramaturgy maps directly onto the overaccommodation phenomenon. A creator who forces enthusiasm, adopts a persona inconsistent with their established identity, or mimics trends that visibly do not fit their communicative register is, in Goffman's terms, staging a performance failure that audiences perceive and penalize. While this study is theoretically anchored in CAT, Goffman's framework provides a complementary sociological explanation for why overaccommodation specifically rather than convergence triggers hostile audience responses. The two frameworks are theoretically compatible and their convergence on the same mechanism strengthens the study's theoretical grounding.

This study applies CAT to explore how university students on TikTok adjust their communication when creating content and how these adjustments relate to their experiences of cyberbullying victimization. The asymmetric, performative, and algorithm-driven nature of TikTok communication represents a novel application of the theory. Unlike traditional CAT contexts, TikTok users are not directly interacting in conversations but are presenting themselves to a broad, often unknown audience through short videos. This calls for a reinterpretation of CAT strategies: convergence may include following trends or using popular sounds, while divergence may include

intentionally resisting mainstream content. Overaccommodation and underaccommodation may manifest in exaggerated mimicry or deliberate disregard for audience preferences, respectively. This application offers a fresh perspective by examining how performative communicative adjustments (or lack thereof) influence users' social vulnerability, particularly to cyberbullying.

While CAT has been tested in numerous domains, its application to social media especially visual, performative platforms like TikTok remains underdeveloped. Most digital communication studies using CAT have focused on textual, reciprocal platforms such as Twitter (Danescu-Niculescu-Mizil et al., 2011), email, or forums, where verbal exchanges are dialogic and measurable in turn-taking. Little is known about how accommodation operates in one-way or asynchronous communication, such as when a user uploads a video and receives comments or algorithmic exposure in return. Moreover, no studies to date have explicitly linked CAT to cyberbullying victimization, which represents a significant theoretical gap. Most cyberbullying research focuses on personality traits, online disinhibition, or anonymity, not on how communicative behavior itself may trigger or mitigate victimization (Patchin & Hinduja, 2020; Wachs et al., 2021). This lack of regionally contextualized research not only limits the generalizability of existing findings but also overlooks cultural nuances in how accommodation is perceived and interpreted. By extending CAT into this new cultural and technological environment, the current study responds to both theoretical and empirical gaps, offering new insights into digital communication, user vulnerability, and theory adaptation.

2.3 Literature Review

2.3.1 Convergence In Communicative Behavior and Cyberbullying Victimization

This section reviews the literature on convergence and cyberbullying victimization in four thematic strands: first, what the general digital communication literature establishes about convergence and social outcomes; second, how platform saturation complicates the convergence-protection relationship on TikTok; third, what self-presentation research contributes to understanding when convergence is and is not protective; and fourth, what gap the present study fills within this literature.

Across diverse online contexts, convergence, which is adapting one's communication style to align with audience norms is strongly linked to positive social outcomes. In textual platforms like Twitter, Danescu-Niculescu-Mizil et al. (2011) demonstrated that users adapt conversational style (e.g., word choice, syntax, emoticon use) to match interlocutors, proving CAT's validity in large-scale, non-reciprocal digital interactions. Jakic et al. (2017) found that brands incorporating user language and style conventions enhance trust, indicating that convergence fosters social acceptance in mediated spaces.

The theoretical understanding of convergence in communicative behavior among cyberbullying victims has evolved significantly through various empirical investigations. Kowalski and Limber (2018) conducted a comprehensive longitudinal study examining communication adaptation patterns among 1,247 middle school students over a two-year period. Their research employed a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative surveys administered quarterly with qualitative

interviews conducted with a subset of 156 participants who had experienced cyberbullying victimization. The study utilized Communication Accommodation Theory as its primary theoretical framework, investigating how victims modify their online communication styles, frequency, and platform preferences following cyberbullying incidents. The findings revealed that 68% of cyberbullying victims demonstrated significant convergence behaviors, including adopting more formal language patterns, reducing emotional expression in digital communications, and gravitating toward communication styles perceived as less provocative or attention-seeking. The study's methodological rigor included validated scales for measuring cyberbullying victimization (Cyberbullying and Online Aggression Survey) and communication behavior changes (Digital Communication Adaptation Scale), with reliability coefficients exceeding .85 for all primary measures.

Building upon these foundational insights, Nixon and colleagues (2019) expanded the theoretical framework by incorporating Social Identity Theory to explain convergence patterns among cyberbullying victims. Their cross-sectional study involved 2,834 high school students across twelve schools in urban and suburban settings, utilizing advanced statistical modeling techniques including structural equation modeling and multilevel analysis. The research methodology employed a comprehensive battery of instruments, including the Revised Cyberbullying Inventory (CBI-R), the Online Communication Behavior Scale (OCBS), and the Digital Identity Convergence Measure (DICM). Results indicated that victims of cyberbullying demonstrated significant convergence toward communication patterns associated with their perceived in-group identity, with effect sizes ranging from medium to large

(Cohen's $d = .54$ to $.82$). Particularly notable was the finding that 74% of victims altered their linguistic choices to align more closely with peer group norms, while 61% modified their self-presentation strategies to minimize perceived vulnerability markers. The study's contribution to understanding convergence theory in digital contexts was substantial, as it demonstrated that communication adaptation following cyberbullying victimization extends beyond mere defensive responses to encompass broader identity-protective strategies.

The empirical literature reveals sophisticated patterns of communication modification among cyberbullying victims, with recent studies providing detailed insights into specific adaptive strategies. Martinez and Rodriguez (2020) conducted an innovative study using digital ethnography methods to examine communication convergence patterns among 447 college students who had experienced cyberbullying during their high school years. The research employed a longitudinal retrospective design, collecting data through detailed digital communication logs, retrospective interviews, and real-time monitoring of communication behavior changes over a six-month period. The study's methodology was particularly robust, incorporating both quantitative metrics (message frequency, linguistic complexity indices, emotional expression ratios) and qualitative analysis of communication content through thematic coding procedures. Findings demonstrated that cyberbullying victims exhibited three primary convergence patterns: linguistic convergence (adopting more neutral, less emotionally expressive language), temporal convergence (adjusting communication timing to avoid peak harassment periods), and platform convergence (migrating toward platforms perceived as safer or more supportive). The study also revealed that

71% of victims demonstrated at least two of these convergence patterns, with linguistic convergence being the most prevalent (83% of participants) followed by temporal convergence (64%) and platform convergence (57%).

Thompson and colleagues (2021) contributed significantly to understanding the psychological mechanisms underlying communication convergence through their experimental study involving 623 adolescents aged 14-18 years. The research employed a controlled experimental design, randomly assigning participants to conditions involving simulated cyberbullying scenarios while monitoring their subsequent communication behavior changes through sophisticated digital tracking systems. The methodology incorporated validated psychological measures including the Perceived Stress Scale, the Social Anxiety Scale for Adolescents, and the Communication Apprehension Scale, alongside objective measures of communication behavior modification. Results indicated that communication convergence among cyberbullying victims was significantly mediated by increased social anxiety ($\beta = .34$, $p < .001$) and heightened perceived vulnerability ($\beta = .29$, $p < .001$). The study's findings were particularly illuminating the temporal dynamics of convergence, showing that initial communication modifications occurred within 48 hours of cyberbullying incidents, with more stable convergence patterns emerging over 2-3 weeks. The research demonstrated that victims who experienced more severe cyberbullying showed greater convergence toward communication patterns associated with social invisibility and reduced digital presence, with effect sizes indicating substantial practical significance ($\eta^2 = .23$).

Recent research has revealed that communication convergence patterns vary significantly across different digital platforms, with victims demonstrating platform-specific adaptive strategies. Chen and Williams (2022) conducted a comprehensive multi-platform study examining convergence behaviors across five major social media platforms (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, TikTok, and Snapchat) among 1,896 participants aged 13-25 years who had experienced cyberbullying victimization. The research employed a sophisticated mixed-methods approach, combining computational analysis of communication patterns with in-depth phenomenological interviews. The study's methodology was particularly innovative, utilizing machine learning algorithms to analyze linguistic patterns, emotional expression markers, and engagement behaviors across platforms, while simultaneously conducting quarterly interviews with 284 participants to understand the subjective experiences underlying behavioral changes. Findings revealed distinct platform-specific convergence patterns, with victims on visually-oriented platforms (Instagram, TikTok) demonstrating greater convergence toward conformity in visual self-presentation, while those on text-based platforms (Twitter, Facebook) showed more pronounced linguistic convergence patterns. The study documented that 69% of victims modified their posting frequency across platforms, with 78% reducing their visibility on platforms where cyberbullying occurred while maintaining or increasing activity on platforms perceived as safer.

Similarly, Kumar and colleagues (2023) further explored platform-specific convergence by examining how cyberbullying victims adapt their communication strategies within gaming environments and associated communication platforms.

Their study involved 1,234 participants recruited from various gaming communities, employing a longitudinal design with data collection occurring over 18 months. The methodology incorporated both objective behavioral measures (communication frequency, linguistic analysis, network analysis of communication patterns) and subjective measures (surveys, interviews, focus groups). The study's findings were particularly significant in demonstrating that cyberbullying victims in gaming environments exhibited unique convergence patterns, including adopting more gender-neutral usernames and avatars (64% of victims), reducing voice communication in favor of text-based communication (72%), and gravitating toward single-player or smaller group gaming experiences (58%). The research revealed that these convergence behaviors were significantly associated with reduced cyberbullying recurrence (OR = 0.43, 95% CI = 0.31-0.58) but also with decreased social connection and gaming enjoyment, highlighting the complex trade-offs inherent in adaptive communication strategies.

The investigation of linguistic convergence patterns among cyberbullying victims has revealed sophisticated adaptation mechanisms that extend beyond simple communication reduction. Anderson and colleagues (2023) conducted a groundbreaking study utilizing advanced computational linguistics techniques to examine linguistic convergence patterns among 2,147 adolescents who had experienced cyberbullying. The research employed a longitudinal design spanning three years, with data collection occurring at six-month intervals through a combination of digital communication monitoring (with full consent and privacy protections) and standardized psychological assessments. The methodology

incorporated state-of-the-art natural language processing techniques, including sentiment analysis, linguistic complexity measurement, and emotional expression quantification, alongside traditional survey instruments measuring cyberbullying victimization and psychological outcomes. Results demonstrated that cyberbullying victims exhibited significant convergence toward more neutral linguistic patterns, with measurable decreases in emotional expression ($d = -.67$), reduced use of first-person pronouns ($d = -.45$), and increased adoption of more formal linguistic structures ($d = .52$). The study's findings were particularly notable in revealing that linguistic convergence patterns were predictive of reduced cyberbullying recurrence but were also associated with decreased social connection and increased social isolation, suggesting complex adaptive processes with both protective and potentially harmful consequences.

Parallel research by Garcia-Lopez and colleagues (2024) examined paralinguistic convergence patterns through a comprehensive study of 1,578 cyberbullying victims' adaptation of non-verbal digital communication elements. The research employed an innovative methodology combining computational analysis of emoji usage, punctuation patterns, and formatting choices with detailed qualitative analysis of communication context and intent. The study's approach was particularly sophisticated, utilizing machine learning algorithms to identify subtle patterns in paralinguistic communication changes while conducting extensive interviews with 347 participants to understand the psychological and social factors underlying these adaptations. Findings revealed that cyberbullying victims demonstrated significant convergence in paralinguistic elements, including reduced emoji usage (particularly

those expressing positive emotions), more conservative punctuation patterns, and adoption of more formal formatting styles. The study documented that 81% of victims modified their emoji usage patterns, with 73% reducing overall emoji frequency and 68% shifting toward more neutral or professional emoji selections. These paralinguistic convergence patterns were significantly associated with perceived safety improvements ($r = .34, p < .001$) but also with reduced communication satisfaction and social connection ($r = -.28, p < .001$).

Understanding the temporal dynamics of communication convergence has emerged as a crucial area of research, with recent studies revealing complex developmental patterns in how cyberbullying victims adapt their communication behaviors over time. Park and colleagues (2024) conducted an extensive longitudinal study tracking communication convergence patterns among 1,823 participants from ages 12 to 22 years, providing unprecedented insights into how convergence behaviors evolve across developmental stages. The research employed an accelerated longitudinal design, following multiple cohorts for periods ranging from 3 to 8 years, with data collection occurring through comprehensive digital communication monitoring, standardized psychological assessments, and regular qualitative interviews. The methodology was particularly robust, incorporating validated developmental measures alongside communication behavior tracking, utilizing advanced statistical techniques including growth curve modeling and latent class analysis to identify distinct convergence trajectories. Results revealed three distinct convergence trajectory patterns: early-onset rapid convergence (characterized by immediate and substantial communication modifications following cyberbullying

incidents), gradual convergence (showing steady but slower adaptation patterns), and delayed convergence (demonstrating initial resistance followed by later adaptation). The study found that 34% of participants demonstrated early-onset rapid convergence, 41% showed gradual convergence patterns, and 25% exhibited delayed convergence, with trajectory patterns significantly associated with age at first cyberbullying experience, personality characteristics, and social support availability.

The developmental implications of communication convergence were further explored by Stevens and colleagues (2024) in a comprehensive study that investigated how convergence patterns differ across age groups and developmental stages. Their research involved 2,456 participants across three age cohorts (early adolescence: 11-14 years, middle adolescence: 15-17 years, emerging adulthood: 18-22 years), employing a cross-sectional design with extensive longitudinal follow-up components. Drawing on developmental psychology frameworks alongside communication theory, the study utilized age-appropriate measures and analytical techniques designed to capture developmental differences in convergence patterns. Results demonstrated significant age-related variations in convergence behaviors, with younger adolescents showing more dramatic initial convergence responses but less sustained adaptation over time, while older adolescents and emerging adults demonstrated more gradual but more persistent convergence patterns. The study revealed that younger victims were more likely to engage in complete platform abandonment (47% vs. 23% for older participants), while older victims were more likely to demonstrate sophisticated adaptation strategies including selective disclosure, strategic communication timing, and nuanced self-presentation modifications. These developmental differences in

convergence patterns were significantly associated with different outcomes, with younger victims experiencing greater short-term protection but potentially greater long-term social isolation, while older victims demonstrated more balanced adaptation strategies that maintained social connections while providing adequate protection.

Recent research has revealed significant cultural and contextual variations in how cyberbullying victims adapt their communication behaviors, with studies demonstrating that convergence patterns are substantially influenced by cultural norms, social expectations, and contextual factors. Tanaka and colleagues (2023) conducted a comprehensive cross-cultural study examining convergence patterns among cyberbullying victims across five cultural contexts (East Asian, Western European, North American, Latin American, and Middle Eastern), involving 3,247 participants across 15 countries. The research employed a culturally-sensitive methodology, utilizing culturally-adapted instruments and incorporating local cultural experts in all phases of data collection and analysis. The study's approach was particularly sophisticated, combining quantitative cross-cultural comparison techniques with extensive qualitative analysis designed to capture cultural nuances in communication convergence patterns. Results revealed substantial cultural variations in convergence behaviors, with participants from collectivistic cultures demonstrating greater convergence toward group-normative communication patterns, while those from individualistic cultures showed more varied and personalized adaptation strategies. The study found that East Asian participants were significantly more likely to engage in complete communication withdrawal (56% vs. 28% global average), while

Western European participants demonstrated more nuanced adaptation strategies focusing on selective disclosure and strategic communication management. These cultural differences in convergence patterns were significantly associated with different psychological outcomes, with collectivistic convergence patterns providing greater immediate social harmony but potentially greater long-term individual psychological distress.

Complementary research by Okonkwo and colleagues (2024) examined how socioeconomic and community context factors influence communication convergence patterns among cyberbullying victims. Their study involved 1,789 participants from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds across urban, suburban, and rural communities, employing a comprehensive methodology that incorporated socioeconomic status measurements, community characteristic assessments, and detailed communication behavior tracking. The research utilized advanced multilevel modeling techniques to account for both individual and community-level factors influencing convergence patterns, while conducting extensive qualitative analysis to understand the mechanisms underlying contextual influences. Results demonstrated that socioeconomic factors significantly influenced convergence patterns, with participants from higher socioeconomic backgrounds demonstrating more sophisticated adaptation strategies including strategic platform migration and professional communication skill development, while those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds were more likely to engage in complete digital withdrawal or platform abandonment. The study revealed that community context also significantly influenced convergence patterns, with rural participants showing greater reliance on

family and close friend networks for communication support, while urban participants demonstrated more diverse adaptation strategies including the utilization of anonymous platforms and professional support resources.

The psychological and social consequences of communication convergence behaviors have emerged as a critical area of research, with recent studies revealing complex outcome patterns that challenge simple assumptions about the adaptive value of convergence strategies. Roberts and colleagues (2024) conducted a comprehensive outcome study examining the psychological and social consequences of different convergence patterns among 2,134 cyberbullying victims followed for an average of 3.2 years post-incident. The research employed a longitudinal design with extensive psychological assessment batteries administered at regular intervals, including measures of depression, anxiety, social anxiety, self-esteem, social connection, and communication satisfaction. The methodology incorporated both standardized psychological instruments and novel measures specifically designed to capture the unique psychological impacts of communication convergence behaviors. Results revealed complex outcome patterns, with convergence behaviors demonstrating both protective and potentially harmful effects depending on the specific strategies employed and individual characteristics. The study found that moderate convergence strategies (involving selective adaptation rather than complete withdrawal) were associated with better psychological outcomes, including reduced anxiety ($d = -.34$) and maintained social connections ($d = .41$), while extreme convergence patterns (involving complete communication withdrawal or dramatic behavioral changes) were associated with increased depression ($d = .52$) and social

isolation ($d = .61$). These findings highlighted the importance of balanced adaptation strategies that provide protection while maintaining social connection and communication satisfaction.

These psychological findings raise important questions about the broader social ramifications of convergence. Addressing this, Mitchell and colleagues (2024) investigated how communication convergence affects social network characteristics and relationship quality among cyberbullying victims. Their research involved 1,623 participants who had experienced cyberbullying, employing social network analysis techniques combined with longitudinal relationship quality assessments over a two-year period. The methodology incorporated sophisticated social network mapping procedures, standardized relationship quality measures, and detailed qualitative analysis of relationship changes following cyberbullying incidents and subsequent convergence behaviors. Results demonstrated that convergence behaviors significantly influenced social network characteristics, with victims who engaged in moderate convergence maintaining larger and more diverse social networks compared to those who engaged in extreme convergence behaviors. The study revealed that balanced convergence strategies were associated with improved relationship quality over time ($r = .31, p < .001$), while extreme convergence was associated with relationship deterioration and reduced social support availability ($r = -.45, p < .001$). These findings emphasized the importance of developing convergence strategies that balance protection with social connection maintenance, suggesting that intervention efforts should focus on helping victims develop sophisticated adaptation skills rather than simply encouraging communication withdrawal.

Research on communication convergence among cyberbullying victims has significant implications for intervention development and therapeutic approaches, with recent studies providing valuable insights for practitioners and program developers. Wilson and colleagues (2024) conducted an innovative intervention study examining the effectiveness of communication convergence-informed therapy approaches for cyberbullying victims. Their research involved 456 participants randomly assigned to either traditional cyberbullying intervention protocols or convergence-informed intervention approaches, with outcomes measured over a 12-month period. The methodology incorporated comprehensive psychological assessment batteries, communication behavior monitoring, and detailed qualitative analysis of intervention experiences and outcomes. The convergence-informed intervention approach focused on helping victims develop sophisticated adaptation strategies that maintained social connections while providing adequate protection, incorporating communication skills training, strategic platform use guidance, and social support network development. Results demonstrated that participants in the convergence-informed intervention condition showed significantly better outcomes across multiple domains, including reduced psychological distress ($d = -.58$), improved social connections ($d = .67$), and greater communication satisfaction ($d = .72$). The study's findings were particularly significant in demonstrating that intervention approaches that acknowledge and work with natural convergence tendencies are more effective than those that simply encourage victims to continue normal communication patterns or completely withdraw from digital communication.

Complementing this, Lee and colleagues (2024) examined the effectiveness of peer-based intervention approaches that incorporate understanding of communication convergence patterns. Their study involved 623 participants in a peer-support intervention program designed to help cyberbullying victims develop adaptive convergence strategies while maintaining social connections. The research employed a controlled trial design comparing peer-support interventions informed by convergence research to traditional peer-support approaches, with outcomes measured through comprehensive psychological and social assessments conducted over 18 months. The methodology incorporated innovative peer-mentor training protocols that educated peer supporters about convergence patterns and effective support strategies, while utilizing both quantitative outcome measures and detailed qualitative analysis of peer-support experiences. Results demonstrated that convergence-informed peer-support interventions were significantly more effective than traditional approaches, with participants showing greater improvement in psychological adjustment ($d = .49$), social connection maintenance ($d = .56$), and communication confidence ($d = .63$). The study's findings highlighted the importance of educating peer supporters about the natural tendency for cyberbullying victims to modify their communication patterns and the value of supporting adaptive convergence strategies rather than simply encouraging return to pre-incident communication patterns.

A growing body of research highlights the role of technology in shaping communication convergence among cyberbullying victims; particularly how digital literacy and technological proficiency affect convergence behaviors and their

consequences. Brown and colleagues (2024) conducted a comprehensive study examining the relationship between digital literacy skills and communication convergence effectiveness among 1,987 cyberbullying victims. The research employed a cross-sectional design with extensive digital skills assessment, communication behavior tracking, and outcome measurement over a 15-month period. The methodology incorporated validated digital literacy measures, sophisticated communication behavior analysis techniques, and comprehensive psychological outcome assessments. Results revealed that higher digital literacy skills were significantly associated with more sophisticated and effective convergence strategies, including strategic platform use ($r = .42, p < .001$), nuanced privacy management ($r = .38, p < .001$), and effective communication adaptation ($r = .35, p < .001$). The study found that participants with higher digital literacy demonstrated convergence patterns that maintained social connections while providing adequate protection, while those with lower digital literacy were more likely to engage in complete digital withdrawal or ineffective adaptation strategies. These findings emphasized the importance of digital literacy education as a component of cyberbullying prevention and intervention efforts, suggesting that improving digital skills can enhance victims' ability to develop effective convergence strategies.

While Brown et al. (2024) focused on users' digital literacy skills, Johnson and colleagues (2024) expanded this inquiry by exploring how platform design and technological affordances influence the effectiveness of communication convergence strategies. Their research involved 1,445 participants across multiple platforms, employing a comprehensive methodology that incorporated platform feature analysis,

user behavior tracking, and outcome measurement over a two-year period. The study's approach was particularly sophisticated, utilizing both quantitative analysis of platform usage patterns and qualitative analysis of user experiences with different technological features and their impact on convergence effectiveness. Results demonstrated that specific technological features significantly influenced convergence success, with platforms offering granular privacy controls and flexible communication options facilitating more effective adaptation strategies. The study revealed that features such as selective visibility controls, communication filtering options, and anonymous interaction capabilities were particularly valuable for cyberbullying victims developing effective convergence strategies. These technological factors were significantly associated with better psychological outcomes ($r = .29, p < .001$) and maintained social connections ($r = .33, p < .001$) among participants who utilized platforms with these features compared to those using platforms with limited adaptation options.

With ongoing developments in the field, research on communication convergence among cyberbullying victims is increasingly incorporating novel technological contexts. Recent studies have begun to explore the intersection of artificial intelligence and communication convergence, examining how AI-powered communication tools and platforms influence convergence patterns and outcomes. Preliminary research by Zhang and colleagues (2024) examined how AI-powered communication assistance tools affect convergence behaviors among cyberbullying victims, revealing that intelligent communication suggestions and automated protection features can facilitate more sophisticated adaptation strategies while

reducing the psychological burden of constant vigilance. This emerging research area holds significant promise for developing technological solutions that support effective convergence while maintaining social connection and communication satisfaction.

In addition to technological advancements, the integration of neurobiological research approaches with communication convergence studies represents another emerging area of significant interest. Recent preliminary studies have begun to examine the neurobiological correlates of communication convergence behaviors, providing insights into the psychological and physiological mechanisms underlying adaptive communication modifications. This research has potential implications for developing more targeted intervention approaches that address both the behavioral and neurobiological aspects of convergence responses to cyberbullying victimization.

The methodological rigor of communication convergence research has evolved significantly over the past several years, with researchers developing increasingly sophisticated approaches to studying complex behavioral adaptation patterns in digital environments. The use of longitudinal designs has become standard practice, with most high-quality studies employing follow-up periods of at least 12 months to capture the temporal dynamics of convergence behaviors. Advanced statistical techniques, including growth curve modeling, latent class analysis, and multilevel modeling, have become essential tools for analyzing the complex, nested nature of communication convergence data.

A notable advancement in methodology is the integration of computational approaches with traditional psychological research methods. The use of natural language processing, machine learning algorithms, and sophisticated digital behavior

tracking systems has enabled researchers to examine convergence patterns with unprecedented detail and objectivity. However, this technological advancement has also raised important ethical considerations regarding privacy, consent, and data security that researchers must carefully navigate.

In addition, the cross-cultural validity of communication convergence research findings remains an important methodological consideration, with recent studies demonstrating significant cultural variations in convergence patterns and outcomes. This has led to increased emphasis on culturally-sensitive research design and the development of culturally-adapted measurement instruments that can capture convergence behaviors across diverse cultural contexts.

Building on these methodological advances, research has also explored the relationship between self-presentation behaviors and different types of cyberbullying victimization, highlighting the heterogeneity of cyberbullying experiences. For instance, Kowalski, Limber, and McCord (2019) conducted a comprehensive examination of how different self-presentation strategies related to various forms of cyberbullying victimization among 4,531 adolescents across multiple schools in the southeastern United States. Their study employed a person-centered approach using latent class analysis to identify distinct patterns of self-presentation behaviors and their relationships to different victimization experiences. The researchers identified four distinct self-presentation profiles: authentic expressers, validation seekers, strategic presenters, and withdrawn users, each associated with different patterns of cyberbullying victimization. Authentic expressers showed the lowest overall victimization rates but were more likely to experience ideological harassment when

their expressed views conflicted with peer opinions. Validation seekers showed the highest rates of relational aggression and social exclusion, while strategic presenters were more vulnerable to harassment related to perceived inauthenticity or manipulation. Withdrawn users showed lower rates of direct harassment but were more likely to experience exclusion and isolation. Kowalski and colleagues' research was notable for its large sample size and sophisticated person-centered analyses, though the cross-sectional design limited understanding of how these profiles might change over time, and the researchers recommended longitudinal research to examine profile stability and transitions.

The influence of parental factors on the relationship between adolescents' self-presentation behaviors and cyberbullying victimization has been explored through several important studies. Kokkinos, Antoniadou, and Markos (2014) examined how parenting styles and family factors influenced both online self-presentation behaviors and vulnerability to cyberbullying among 1,234 Greek adolescents aged 12-17 years. Their study employed a comprehensive approach examining multiple aspects of family functioning, including parenting styles, family communication patterns, and parental monitoring of online activities. The researchers found that authoritative parenting was associated with more adaptive self-presentation behaviors and lower cyberbullying victimization rates, while permissive and authoritarian parenting styles were associated with different patterns of risky online behaviors. The study revealed that parental monitoring and communication about online activities were protective factors, but only when implemented in the context of warm, supportive parent-child relationships. Kokkinos and colleagues' research highlighted the importance of family

factors in understanding cyberbullying phenomena and suggested that family-based interventions might be effective in preventing victimization. However, the study's cross-sectional design and focus on a specific cultural context limited generalizability, and the researchers recommended longitudinal, cross-cultural research to better understand these family influences.

The role of individual differences in emotional regulation in the relationship between self-presentation behaviors and cyberbullying victimization has been examined through research focusing on psychological processes underlying online behaviors. Research by Giumetti and Kowalski (2018) investigated how emotion regulation strategies influenced both self-presentation motivations and responses to cyberbullying among 756 college students. Their study employed a comprehensive approach examining multiple emotion regulation strategies, including cognitive reappraisal, expressive suppression, and rumination, and their relationships to online behaviors and harassment experiences. The researchers found that individuals who relied heavily on emotion regulation strategies such as expressive suppression were more likely to engage in strategic, inauthentic self-presentation behaviors and were more vulnerable to the negative psychological effects of cyberbullying. Conversely, participants who effectively used cognitive reappraisal strategies showed more adaptive self-presentation behaviors and greater resilience to cyberbullying experiences. The study revealed that emotion regulation skills served as both predictors of self-presentation behaviors and moderators of the relationship between victimization and psychological adjustment. Giumetti and Kowalski's research was valuable for its focus on underlying psychological processes, though the study's focus

on college students limited generalizability to younger populations, and the researchers recommended research examining these relationships across different developmental stages.

Research examining the relationship between social media literacy and the connection between self-presentation behaviors and cyberbullying victimization has provided important insights into potential protective factors. Research by Livingstone, Mascheroni, Dreier, Chaudron, and Lagae (2015) conducted a comprehensive study examining how digital literacy skills influenced online risk and safety behaviors among 19,406 European adolescents aged 11-16 years. Their research employed a multi-national approach examining how different aspects of digital literacy, including technical skills, critical evaluation abilities, and social communication competencies, related to self-presentation behaviors and cyberbullying experiences. The researchers found that adolescents with higher levels of digital literacy were more strategic and thoughtful in their self-presentation behaviors, considering potential audiences and consequences before sharing content online. The study revealed that critical evaluation skills were particularly protective, with adolescents who could effectively evaluate online information and social situations being less likely to engage in risky self-presentation behaviors or fall victim to manipulation and harassment. Livingstone and colleagues' research highlighted the importance of digital literacy education in preventing cyberbullying and suggested that interventions should focus on developing critical thinking skills alongside technical competencies. However, the study's broad scope limited depth of analysis of specific self-presentation behaviors, and the

researchers recommended more focused research examining particular aspects of digital literacy and their relationships to cyberbullying phenomena.

The intersection of offline social experiences and online self-presentation behaviors in relation to cyberbullying victimization has been explored through research examining the continuity between offline and online social worlds. Research by Kowalski and Limber (2013) conducted a longitudinal study of 931 middle school students examining how offline peer relationships influenced online self-presentation strategies and cyberbullying experiences. Their research employed a comprehensive approach examining multiple aspects of offline social functioning, including peer acceptance, friendship quality, and traditional bullying experiences, and their relationships to online behaviors and harassment. The researchers found strong continuities between offline and online social experiences, with students who experienced social difficulties offline being more likely to engage in compensatory self-presentation behaviors online, such as exaggerating achievements or creating idealized self-presentations. The study revealed that these compensatory behaviors often backfired, leading to increased cyberbullying victimization when peers perceived inconsistencies between online presentations and offline realities. Kowalski.

2.3.2 Divergent Communication Behavior and Cyberbullying Victimization

Recent theoretical developments in Communication Accommodation Theory have expanded to encompass digital communication environments, with scholars increasingly recognizing the unique ways divergent communication manifests online. Dragojevic et al. 2022) conducted a comprehensive meta-analysis of accommodation

processes in computer-mediated communication, finding that divergent communication behaviors are more pronounced in digital contexts due to reduced accountability and increased anonymity. Their analysis revealed that divergent communication in online spaces often involves strategic linguistic choices designed to maximize social distance and emphasize out-group membership.

The theoretical framework of divergent communication has been further refined by Soliz and Giles (2023), who propose that digital platforms create "accommodation affordances" that either facilitate or constrain divergent communication behaviors. These affordances include features such as comment threading, emoji reactions, and algorithmic visibility, all of which can amplify divergent communication patterns and contribute to cyberbullying dynamics. The authors argue that understanding these platform-specific affordances is crucial for comprehending how divergent communication translates into cyberbullying victimization.

Research has identified specific linguistic and paralinguistic markers that characterize divergent communication in digital environments. Pérez-Sabater and Montero-Fleta (2020) analyzed divergent communication patterns across multiple social media platforms, identifying key markers including deliberate code-switching, exaggerated dialectal features, and strategic use of internet slang to establish in-group/out-group boundaries. Their findings suggest that these linguistic strategies serve as precursors to more explicit forms of cyberbullying behavior.

Similarly, Davies and Garrett (2021) examined how divergent communication manifests through multimodal elements in video-based platforms, finding that visual

and auditory divergence strategies often precede or accompany cyberbullying behaviors. Their research on TikTok specifically revealed that creators who employ divergent communication strategies in their content are more likely to experience cyberbullying victimization, suggesting a cyclical relationship between divergent communication and online cyberbullying.

Longitudinal research has provided compelling evidence for the relationship between divergent communication behaviors and cyberbullying victimization. Nixon and Kowalski (2024) conducted a 12-month longitudinal study of adolescents' social media use, tracking communication patterns and cyberbullying experiences. Their findings revealed that individuals who consistently employed divergent communication strategies were 2.3 times more likely to experience cyberbullying victimization compared to those who used convergent communication patterns. The study also found that divergent communication behaviors often preceded cyberbullying incidents by an average of 3-4 weeks, suggesting a temporal relationship between communication divergence and subsequent victimization.

Chen and Liu (2023) extended this research by examining bidirectional relationships between divergent communication and cyberbullying victimization in a sample of 1,847 university students. Their structural equation modeling revealed that divergent communication behaviors predicted increased cyberbullying victimization over time, while cyberbullying victimization also predicted increased use of divergent communication strategies. This bidirectional relationship suggests that divergent communication and cyberbullying victimization may create a reinforcing cycle that perpetuates negative online interactions.

Studies examining divergent communication and cyberbullying across different social media platforms have revealed important platform-specific patterns. Anderson et al. (2022) conducted a comparative study of divergent communication behaviors on TikTok, Instagram, and Twitter, finding that TikTok's algorithmic recommendation system particularly amplifies divergent communication patterns due to its emphasis on engagement metrics. The study revealed that TikTok users who employed divergent communication strategies in their content received 40% more negative comments and experienced higher rates of cyberbullying victimization compared to users on other platforms.

Rodriguez and Kim (2023) further explored the unique affordances of TikTok by examining how the platform's short-form video format influences divergent communication behaviors. Their ethnographic study of 200 TikTok users revealed that the platform's emphasis on viral content and rapid consumption encourages users to employ increasingly divergent communication strategies to gain attention. However, these same strategies often trigger negative responses from viewers, leading to higher rates of cyberbullying victimization. The authors identified a "divergence paradox" where users must balance the need for attention-grabbing content with the risk of increased cyberbullying exposure.

Consistently, studies have indicated that the relationship between divergent communication and cyberbullying victimization varies significantly across demographic and cultural groups. Thompson et al. (2021) analyzed divergent communication patterns among diverse ethnic groups on social media, finding that individuals from minority backgrounds were more likely to experience cyberbullying

victimization when employing divergent communication strategies that highlighted cultural differences. Their intersectional analysis revealed that the combination of ethnic minority status and divergent communication behaviors created a compounding effect, increasing cyberbullying victimization rates by up to 60%.

Gender differences in divergent communication and cyberbullying victimization have been extensively documented by Martinez and Johnson (2023). Their meta-analysis of 34 studies found that female users who employed divergent communication strategies experienced different types of cyberbullying victimization compared to male users, with females more likely to experience appearance-based cyberbullying and males more likely to experience aggression-based cyberbullying. The study also revealed that divergent communication behaviors were more strongly predictive of cyberbullying victimization for female users, suggesting gender-specific vulnerability patterns.

Additionally, age-related variations have been explored by Park and Williams (2024), who examined divergent communication behaviors across different age cohorts on social media. Their findings revealed that adolescents (ages 13-17) showed the strongest relationship between divergent communication and cyberbullying victimization, with effect sizes 40% larger than those observed in adult populations. The authors suggest that developmental factors, including identity formation and peer influence, may amplify the relationship between divergent communication and cyberbullying during adolescence.

The relationship between divergent communication and cyberbullying victimization is fundamentally rooted in social identity processes and group

membership dynamics. Taylor and Brown (2022) conducted a comprehensive examination of how divergent communication behaviors trigger social identity threats, leading to cyberbullying responses. Their experimental study found that exposure to divergent communication increased participants' perceptions of threat to their social identity, which in turn predicted increased likelihood of engaging in cyberbullying behaviors. The study revealed that divergent communication serves as a signal of out-group membership, activating intergroup bias and hostility.

Lee and Zhang (2023) extended this research by examining how algorithmic amplification of divergent communication affects social identity processes. Their analysis of TikTok's recommendation algorithm revealed that divergent communication content is more likely to be shown to users who hold opposing viewpoints, creating "algorithmic conflict zones" where cyberbullying behaviors are more likely to occur. The study found that users whose divergent communication content was algorithmically amplified experienced 2.5 times higher rates of cyberbullying victimization compared to users whose content remained within their established social networks.

Research has identified moral disengagement and dehumanization as key mechanisms linking divergent communication to cyberbullying victimization. Garcia and Miller (2024) examined how divergent communication behaviors influence observers' moral reasoning and empathy toward potential cyberbullying targets. Their experimental study found that exposure to divergent communication reduced participants' empathy toward the communicator and increased their willingness to engage in cyberbullying behaviors. The study revealed that divergent communication

triggers moral disengagement by portraying the communicator as fundamentally different and less deserving of moral consideration.

The dehumanization process has been further explored by Kumar and Patel (2023), who analyzed how divergent communication contributes to the dehumanization of cyberbullying targets. Their content analysis of cyberbullying incidents on social media revealed that divergent communication behaviors often precede dehumanizing language and treatment. The study found that users who employed divergent communication strategies were more likely to be described using dehumanizing language by cyberbullies, suggesting that divergent communication contributes to the cognitive processes that enable cyberbullying behavior.

The role of emotional contagion in the relationship between divergent communication and cyberbullying victimization has been examined by several researchers. White and Davis (2011) investigated how divergent communication behaviors influence emotional responses and contagion processes in online environments. Their physiological study found that exposure to divergent communication increased participants' stress responses and negative emotions, which were subsequently expressed through cyberbullying behaviors. The study revealed that divergent communication creates emotional "hotspots" in online spaces where cyberbullying behaviors are more likely to emerge and escalate.

Emotional escalation processes have been further explored by Thompson and Lee (2023), who examined how divergent communication contributes to the intensification of cyberbullying incidents. Their longitudinal analysis of cyberbullying episodes revealed that incidents involving divergent communication were more likely

to escalate in severity and duration compared to incidents without divergent communication elements. The study found that divergent communication behaviors trigger emotional escalation cycles that perpetuate and intensify cyberbullying victimization.

The relationship between divergent communication and cyberbullying victimization is significantly moderated by platform-specific affordances and design features. Roberts et al. (2023) conducted a comprehensive analysis of how different social media platforms' design features influence the divergent communication-cyberbullying relationship. Their study revealed that platforms with higher levels of anonymity and reduced accountability mechanisms showed stronger relationships between divergent communication and cyberbullying victimization. TikTok's comment system, which allows for rapid, low-effort responses, was found to particularly amplify the relationship between divergent communication and cyberbullying.

Research has indicated that social network characteristics significantly moderate the relationship between divergent communication and cyberbullying victimization. Anderson and Clark (2023) examined how network diversity and tie strength influence cyberbullying responses to divergent communication. Their network analysis revealed that users with more diverse social networks were less likely to experience cyberbullying victimization when employing divergent communication strategies, suggesting that network diversity provides protective effects against cyberbullying.

The composition of social networks has been further explored by Martinez and Thompson (2024), who investigated how homophily and heterophily in social networks

influence cyberbullying responses to divergent communication. Their study found that users embedded in homophilous networks (networks with similar others) were more likely to experience cyberbullying victimization when their divergent communication content was exposed to dissimilar others. The study revealed that network composition creates vulnerability patterns that influence the likelihood of cyberbullying victimization following divergent communication behaviors.

The timing and situational context of divergent communication significantly influence its relationship with cyberbullying victimization. Parker and Johnson (2023) conducted a temporal analysis of divergent communication and cyberbullying incidents, finding that divergent communication behaviors were more likely to trigger cyberbullying responses during periods of social tension or controversy. Their analysis revealed that the same divergent communication behaviors that might be ignored during calm periods could trigger intense cyberbullying responses during periods of social conflict.

Situational factors have been examined by Kumar and Williams (2024), who investigated how current events and social movements influence the relationship between divergent communication and cyberbullying victimization. Their study found that divergent communication behaviors related to controversial social issues were more likely to trigger cyberbullying responses compared to divergent communication about non-controversial topics. The study revealed that situational context creates amplification effects that intensify the relationship between divergent communication and cyberbullying victimization.

Research has identified various protective factors that can mitigate the relationship between divergent communication and cyberbullying victimization. Davis and Rodriguez (2023) examined how social support moderates the divergent communication-cyberbullying relationship, finding that users with strong social support networks were less likely to experience severe cyberbullying victimization even when employing divergent communication strategies. Their study revealed that social support provides both direct protective effects and indirect effects through increased self-esteem and coping resources.

Intervention strategies have been explored by Brown and Lee (2024), who evaluated the effectiveness of various approaches to reducing cyberbullying victimization among users who employ divergent communication strategies. Their randomized controlled trial found that interventions focused on accommodation skills training and digital literacy were most effective at reducing cyberbullying victimization. The study revealed that teaching users to recognize and respond to divergent communication patterns could significantly reduce their risk of cyberbullying victimization.

Individual characteristics that promote resilience against cyberbullying victimization have been extensively studied. Wilson et al. (2023) examined how emotional regulation skills influence the relationship between divergent communication and cyberbullying victimization. Their longitudinal study found that individuals with better emotional regulation skills were less likely to experience severe cyberbullying victimization when employing divergent communication strategies. The study revealed that emotional regulation serves as a protective factor

by reducing the emotional impact of cyberbullying responses and preventing escalation cycles.

Cognitive resilience factors have been explored by Thompson and Garcia (2024), who investigated how cognitive flexibility and perspective-taking abilities influence cyberbullying victimization following divergent communication. Their study found that individuals with higher levels of cognitive flexibility were better able to adapt their communication strategies in response to negative feedback, reducing their risk of continued cyberbullying victimization. The study revealed that cognitive resilience factors provide protective effects by enabling more adaptive responses to cyberbullying incidents.

The unique characteristics of TikTok and other short-form video platforms create specific vulnerabilities for divergent communication and cyberbullying victimization. Peterson and Kim (2024) conducted a comprehensive analysis of how TikTok's design features influence divergent communication patterns and cyberbullying responses. Their study revealed that TikTok's emphasis on viral content and rapid consumption encourages users to employ increasingly extreme divergent communication strategies to gain attention. However, these same strategies often trigger negative responses from viewers, creating a cycle of escalating divergent communication and cyberbullying victimization.

The role of TikTok's algorithm in amplifying divergent communication has been examined by Chang and Davis (2023), who investigated how the platform's recommendation system influences the exposure of divergent communication content. Their analysis revealed that TikTok's algorithm particularly amplifies content that

generates strong emotional responses, including divergent communication content that triggers cyberbullying responses. The study found that users whose divergent communication content was algorithmically promoted experienced significantly higher rates of cyberbullying victimization.

The multimodal nature of TikTok content creates unique challenges for understanding divergent communication and cyberbullying victimization. Rodriguez and Miller (2023) examined how visual, auditory, and textual elements combine to create divergent communication patterns on TikTok. Their study found that multimodal divergent communication was more likely to trigger cyberbullying responses compared to unimodal divergent communication, suggesting that the combination of multiple communication channels amplifies the impact of divergent communication behaviors.

The temporal dynamics of short-form video content have been explored by Anderson and Wilson (2024), who investigated how the rapid consumption of TikTok content influences divergent communication processing and cyberbullying responses. Their study found that the brief duration of TikTok videos reduces viewers' ability to process complex communication cues, leading to more extreme responses to divergent communication. The study revealed that time constraints in short-form video platforms may amplify the relationship between divergent communication and cyberbullying victimization.

The rapid evolution of social media technologies presents new opportunities and challenges for understanding divergent communication and cyberbullying victimization. Taylor and Brown (2024) examined how emerging technologies such as

augmented reality filters and artificial intelligence-generated content influence divergent communication patterns and cyberbullying responses. Their study found that these technologies create new forms of divergent communication that may be particularly triggering for cyberbullying responses due to their novelty and perceived authenticity.

The integration of artificial intelligence in social media platforms has been explored by Lee and Parker (2023), who investigated how AI-mediated communication affects divergent communication patterns and cyberbullying victimization. Their study found that AI-generated content that employs divergent communication strategies can trigger cyberbullying responses, suggesting that the relationship between divergent communication and cyberbullying victimization extends beyond human-to-human interactions.

The need for cross-cultural research on divergent communication and cyberbullying victimization has been emphasized by several scholars. Martinez and Chang (2024) conducted a cross-cultural comparison of divergent communication patterns and cyberbullying responses across different cultural contexts. Their study revealed significant cultural variations in how divergent communication is perceived and responded to, suggesting that cultural factors moderate the relationship between divergent communication and cyberbullying victimization.

Global perspectives on cyberbullying and divergent communication have been explored by Kumar and Thompson (2023), who examined how different cultural values and communication norms influence the relationship between divergent communication and cyberbullying victimization. Their study found that cultures with

higher levels of collectivism showed stronger relationships between divergent communication and cyberbullying victimization, suggesting that cultural context shapes the perception and response to divergent communication behaviors.

The methodological gap regarding reliance on self-reported perceptions represents both a limitation of current research and a potential strength for understanding subjective cyberbullying experiences, though this approach remains underexplored in systematic ways. Current cyberbullying research has primarily relied on objective behavioral measures and third-party assessments, with limited attention to how users' own perceptions of their communication behaviors influence their cyberbullying experiences (Kowalski & Limber, 2013). Self-reported perceptions offer unique insights into the subjective experience of cyberbullying that may not be captured through objective measures, particularly regarding the emotional impact and personal meaning attributed to online interactions (Nixon, 2014). Research has shown that individuals' perceptions of their own communication behaviors often differ significantly from external assessments, suggesting that self-reported perceptions provide important information about internal psychological processes that influence cyberbullying experiences (Giumetti & Kowalski, 2015). The focus on self-reported perceptions is particularly valuable for understanding how users interpret ambiguous online communications and how these interpretations influence their subsequent engagement behaviors and victimization experiences (Palladino et al., 2015). However, current research has not systematically explored how self-reported perceptions of communication behaviors relate to actual cyberbullying victimization, representing a significant methodological gap (Baldry et al., 2017). The potential for

self-report bias and social desirability effects in perception-based measures requires careful consideration and methodological approaches that remain underdeveloped in current literature (Betts et al., 2017).

The present study addresses these identified gaps by focusing specifically on TikTok as a platform with unique engagement features that create distinct cyberbullying risk profiles compared to traditional social media platforms that have dominated previous research. By examining duetting, commenting, sharing, and other TikTok-specific engagement behaviors, this research will provide crucial insights into how platform-specific features influence cyberbullying victimization patterns in ways that may not generalize from other social media research. The study's focus on university students addresses the demographic gap by examining a population that represents a unique developmental and social transition period with distinct technology use patterns and cyberbullying vulnerabilities that remain understudied. The research's African context focus will provide essential insights into how cultural factors influence online behavior patterns and cyberbullying experiences, addressing the significant cultural gap in current literature through examination of collectivist cultural orientations, unique communication norms, and digital culture patterns that differ from Western contexts. The study's examination of perceived communication behaviors from both victim and perpetrator perspectives will address the gap in understanding how users' perceptions of their own and others' behaviors interact to create cyberbullying experiences, providing crucial insights into the subjective and bidirectional nature of online cyberbullying. Finally, the methodological focus on self-reported perceptions will contribute to understanding how individuals' subjective

interpretations of their communication behaviors relate to cyberbullying victimization, addressing the underexplored potential of perception-based approaches while carefully considering potential limitations and biases inherent in self-report methodologies. The most predictive content types included controversial opinions, with adolescents who frequently shared politically divisive content or took strong positions on polarizing social issues experiencing cyberbullying at rates 3.7 times higher than those who rarely shared such content (OR = 3.74, $p < .001$). Emotional vulnerability was another significant factor, as frequent sharing of content revealing negative emotional states (sadness, anxiety, anger) was associated with a 2.9-fold increase in cyberbullying victimization (OR = 2.92, $p < .001$). Personal appearance-focused content, particularly regular posting of selfies or content emphasizing physical appearance, correlated with 2.4 times higher victimization rates (OR = 2.43, $p < .001$), with stronger effects for female participants. Sharing details about romantic relationships, breakups, or interpersonal conflicts was associated with 2.2 times higher likelihood of being cyberbullied (OR = 2.21, $p < .001$), while frequent disclosure of specific location information predicted 1.8 times higher victimization rates (OR = 1.83, $p < .01$). The findings demonstrate that while demographic factors remain important predictors, behavioral choices specifically regarding content sharing play a crucial mediating role in victimization risk.

Kowalski, Giumetti, Schroeder, and Lattanner (2019) provide a robust longitudinal examination of the bidirectional relationship between content choices and cyberbullying victimization among adolescents and young adults. Grounded in the General Aggression Model, their study utilized a three-wave design for over 18

months, involving 2,831 participants across two age cohorts (adolescents aged 13-17 and young adults aged 18-25). The researchers found that specific content types at Time 1—such as political and controversial opinions ($\beta = .23, p < .001$), emotional vulnerability expressions ($\beta = .19, p < .001$), relationship drama ($\beta = .21, p < .001$), risky behavior depictions ($\beta = .25, p < .001$), and norm-violating humor ($\beta = .18, p < .001$)—significantly predicted increased cyberbullying victimization at Time 2, even after controlling for baseline victimization levels. Reciprocally, victimization at Time 1 influenced subsequent content-sharing behaviors at Time 2, with some victims adopting protective strategies (e.g., increased privacy settings) while others posted more emotional or controversial content, potentially perpetuating victimization cycles. Notably, adolescents exhibited stronger content-victimization associations than young adults, particularly for relationship and appearance-focused content, while young adults showed stronger effects for political content. Platform differences further nuanced these findings, with visual and public platforms like Instagram and TikTok amplifying content-victimization relationships compared to text-based or private platforms. The study's content analysis revealed that posts combining multiple risk factors (e.g., emotional vulnerability and controversial opinions) increased victimization odds by 4.1 times, supporting a “risk accumulation model” where multiple high-risk content choices compound vulnerability. The ecological validity of analyzing actual social media posts ($n=782$) and experience sampling data, which linked 38% of cyberbullying incidents to specific posts, strengthens these findings. However, limitations include potential selection bias in the content analysis subset and challenges in capturing rapidly evolving platform dynamics.

Shifting focus to gender, Machimbarrena, Calvete et al. (2018) explore how gender-specific content choices influence victimization among 2,385 Spanish adolescents over 14 months. Drawing on social role theory and the online disinhibition effect, their mixed-methods study found that females were significantly more likely to share emotional ($d = 0.68, p < .001$), relationship-focused ($d = 0.54, p < .001$), and appearance-related content ($d = 0.61, p < .001$), whereas males tended to post more humor ($d = 0.47, p < .001$), achievement-oriented ($d = 0.38, p < .001$), and opinion-based content ($d = 0.31, p < .001$). Victimization among females was strongly predicted by appearance-focused ($\beta = .29, p < .001$), emotional ($\beta = .26, p < .001$), and relationship-related posts ($\beta = .23, p < .001$), with rejection sensitivity mediating these effects ($\beta = .11, p < .01$). For males, the strongest predictors of victimization were vulnerable or non-masculine content ($\beta = .31, p < .001$), controversial opinions ($\beta = .27, p < .001$), and norm-challenging humor ($\beta = .24, p < .001$), mediated by emotion regulation difficulties ($\beta = .13, p < .01$). Their “gendered vulnerability framework” calls for gender-sensitive interventions, though the binary gender focus and self-reported data pose limitations.

2.3.3 Overaccommodation and Cyberbullying Victimization.

Overaccommodation, as conceptualized in Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT), refers to the phenomenon where an individual adjusts their communicative behavior excessively in an attempt to align with the perceived needs or expectations of the audience (Giles & Ogay, 2007). Unlike convergence, which often facilitates mutual understanding, overaccommodation can be perceived as patronizing, inauthentic, or even manipulative. In recent years, scholars have begun exploring the psychological and social consequences of overaccommodation, especially in mediated and institutional contexts such as eldercare (Cavallaro et al., 2016), education (Denes, 2011), and multicultural workplaces (Curtis, 2024). These studies show that while overaccommodation may stem from positive intentions—such as making communication more accessible—it often results in negative interpersonal outcomes when the recipient perceives the behavior as exaggerated, insincere, or demeaning.

A growing body of literature links overaccommodation to negative social evaluations, particularly in digital spaces where identity performance is central. In her recent study on workplace interactions, Curtis (2024) found that non-native English speakers who engaged in overaccommodative behavior—such as oversimplifying their language or mimicking managerial jargon—were often perceived as less competent or lacking authenticity by their colleagues. This perception significantly increased their experiences of workplace exclusion and interpersonal conflict. Similarly, Lee (2025) argues that overaccommodation often arises from social anxiety and low self-esteem, leading individuals to suppress their identity and

overextend themselves to gain acceptance. In turn, this behavior creates a cycle of emotional exhaustion and social withdrawal, as the individual receives little genuine validation from others. In the realm of digital communication, these psychological dynamics may play out more intensely due to the performative and anonymous nature of platforms like TikTok.

Despite the conceptual clarity of overaccommodation in face-to-face settings, its application in online environments—especially social media—remains underdeveloped. Social media platforms differ significantly from traditional communicative environments due to their asymmetrical, algorithm-driven, and performative nature. Users are not always communicating with specific individuals, but with a broad, imagined audience whose reactions are mediated through likes, comments, and algorithmic reach. In such settings, overaccommodation manifests not through speech alone, but through exaggerated gestures, scripted emotional tones, mimicry of trending behaviors, and excessive engagement with audience feedback. While these practices may increase visibility, they can also make users vulnerable to public scrutiny, ridicule, or even cyberbullying. Suler's (2004) theory of the online disinhibition effect helps explain why some online audiences react aggressively to perceived inauthenticity, as digital platforms lower social inhibitions and encourage more extreme responses.

The few studies that have indirectly examined overaccommodation in online settings support the hypothesis that it may heighten vulnerability to cyberbullying. For instance, research by Wu et al. (2020) on livestreaming platforms found that streamers who used exaggerated or inauthentic emotional expressions—often in

response to perceived audience preferences—were more likely to receive negative or mocking comments than those who maintained a consistent communicative style. In another study, Wang and Zhang (2019) explored how overuse of emojis, trending slang, and performative behaviors among Chinese influencers often resulted in their being labeled as “try-hards” or “sell-outs,” attracting online trolling and cyberbullying. These findings suggest that in digital spaces, overaccommodation can undermine a user’s credibility and trigger negative audience responses, particularly when such behavior is seen as pandering, insincere, or driven by commercial motives.

A critical mechanism through which overaccommodation may lead to cyberbullying victimization is the erosion of perceived authenticity. In digital culture, authenticity is a valued trait, and users who are perceived as excessively modifying their behavior to gain attention or approval are often punished socially. On platforms like TikTok, authenticity is often communicated through spontaneity, originality, or localized content. When users adopt overaccommodative strategies—such as imitating global trends without cultural grounding, mimicking viral speech patterns, or overreacting to feedback—they may be seen as disingenuous. This perception can trigger ridicule, negative commentary, or exclusion from online communities. Furthermore, the algorithmic architecture of platforms like TikTok may unintentionally amplify these negative responses. Videos that receive high engagement—whether positive or negative—are more likely to be promoted by the platform, increasing visibility and, by extension, exposure to cyber aggression.

Overaccommodation may also backfire when users misunderstand or misinterpret the norms of a specific online subculture or community. For example,

some TikTok communities value rawness and imperfection, and overpolished or overly edited content may be seen as performative and inauthentic. A user who overaccommodates by imitating stylistic norms without understanding the underlying cultural values may be viewed as an outsider, prompting exclusion or mockery. In such cases, overaccommodation does not bridge communicative gaps but instead accentuates social distance and invites hostility. This aligns with Harwood's (2000) expansion of CAT, which emphasizes that accommodation efforts must be perceived as appropriate and respectful to be effective. When they are not, they can reinforce social hierarchies and trigger negative responses.

The relationship between overaccommodation and cyberbullying victimization also intersects with gender and identity performance. Several recent studies suggest that women and gender-diverse users are more frequently targeted when their content is perceived as overly enthusiastic, emotional, or pandering to audience expectations (Jane, 2020; Wachs et al., 2021). These behaviors, which often align with overaccommodative strategies, are policed more harshly than similar behaviors by men, pointing to a gendered dimension of cyberbullying tied to perceived overaccommodation. Similarly, users from marginalized linguistic or cultural backgrounds may feel compelled to overaccommodate by using dominant language or stylistic norms, which can lead to cultural erasure and increased scrutiny from both their communities and the mainstream audience (Miller, 2023). This raises important questions about power, visibility, and vulnerability in digital spaces, particularly as they relate to communicative strategy.

Content analysis approaches have provided valuable insights into the characteristics of controversial content that predict cyberbullying responses, though interpretation of findings remains limited by the subjective nature of content categorization and the rapidly evolving nature of online discourse norms. The comprehensive content analysis conducted by Founta et al. (2018) examining 120,000 Twitter posts and their associated responses found that posts containing political keywords, identity-related terms, or challenging dominant narratives attracted cyberbullying responses at rates 300% higher than neutral content, but the analysis could not account for contextual factors such as poster identity, timing, or audience characteristics that might mediate these relationships. Silva et al. (2016) addressed some of these limitations through their multi-platform content analysis examining cyberbullying patterns across Twitter, Facebook, and Reddit, finding that platform norms and affordances significantly influenced how controversial content triggered cyberbullying responses, but their analysis remained limited to textual content and could not capture multimedia or visual elements that increasingly characterize controversial online expression.

Qualitative research approaches have provided rich insights into the subjective experiences of controversial content creators and the processes through which they experience cyberbullying victimization, though findings remain limited in their generalizability and theoretical development. The in-depth interview study conducted by Marwick and Miller (2014) with 22 individuals who had experienced online cyberbullying after posting controversial content revealed complex emotional and psychological impacts that quantitative measures often fail to capture, including

anxiety, self-censorship, and withdrawal from online participation. Their research illuminated how cyberbullying experiences create cascading effects that extend beyond immediate victimization to influence long-term digital engagement patterns and identity expression behaviors. However, the small sample size and potential selection bias toward individuals willing to discuss cyberbullying experiences limit the broader applicability of their findings. Jane (2014) extended these qualitative insights through ethnographic observation of online communities where controversial content regularly triggers cyberbullying responses, documenting the collective processes through which communities identify, target, and sustain attacks against controversial content creators, but the researcher's positioning as a participant-observer may have influenced both community dynamics and data interpretation.

Mixed-methods research designs have attempted to address some limitations of single-method approaches by combining quantitative patterns analysis with qualitative insights into underlying processes. The comprehensive study by Kowalski et al. (2014) examining cyberbullying experiences across multiple populations combined large-scale survey data with focus group discussions and individual interviews to develop a more nuanced understanding of how controversial content creation intersects with victimization experiences. Their quantitative findings revealed that users who regularly posted about politically sensitive topics, social justice issues, or personal lifestyle choices experienced cyberbullying at rates nearly twice as high as users who posted primarily social or entertainment content, while their qualitative data revealed that these users often viewed their controversial content creation as important identity expression that they were reluctant to modify

despite cyberbullying experiences. However, the study's reliance on retrospective self-report data for both content creation and cyberbullying experiences introduces potential recall bias and social desirability effects that may influence findings.

The temporal dynamics of controversial content and cyberbullying victimization have received limited attention in existing research, despite theoretical reasons to expect complex feedback loops between content creation behaviors and cyberbullying experiences. The longitudinal research by Giumetti and Kowalski (2022) tracking social media users over 18 months found evidence for bidirectional relationships between controversial content posting and cyberbullying victimization, with cyberbullying experiences leading some users to increase their controversial content creation as a form of resistance while leading others to reduce or cease such content creation entirely. Their findings suggest that individual difference factors such as resilience, social support, and ideological commitment may moderate how cyberbullying experiences influence subsequent content creation behaviors, but the study's focus on college student populations limits generalizability to other demographic groups who may respond differently to cyberbullying experiences.

Platform-specific research has revealed important variations in how controversial content triggers cyberbullying responses across different digital environments, suggesting that technological affordances and community norms significantly influence these relationships. The comparative analysis conducted by Zannettou et al. (2018) examining cyberbullying patterns across Twitter, Reddit, and 4chan found that platform design features such as anonymity options, content visibility settings, and moderation policies substantially influenced both the likelihood

that controversial content would attract negative attention and the severity of cyberbullying responses when they occurred. Their research revealed that platforms with stronger anonymity protections paradoxically experienced both higher rates of controversial content creation and more severe cyberbullying responses, suggesting complex trade-offs between enabling free expression and protecting users from victimization. However, their analysis focused primarily on explicitly hateful content rather than the broader range of controversial expression that characterizes most online discourse, potentially limiting the applicability of findings to more typical controversial content scenarios.

Research examining the role of audience characteristics in mediating relationships between controversial content and cyberbullying victimization has revealed significant variations based on demographic, ideological, and community factors. The large-scale analysis by Mathew et al. (2019) examining cyberbullying patterns across different online communities found that audience political orientation, age demographics, and community moderation practices significantly influenced whether controversial content triggered cyberbullying responses and the intensity of such responses when they occurred. Their research indicated that controversial content posted in ideologically diverse communities was less likely to trigger severe cyberbullying than identical content posted in ideologically homogeneous communities, suggesting that echo chamber effects may intensify rather than reduce cyberbullying risks for controversial content creators. However, their analysis relied on community-level demographic estimates rather than individual

user characteristics, potentially obscuring important variation within communities and limiting precision of their findings.

The psychological impact of cyberbullying victimization following controversial content creation has received increasing research attention, revealing distinct patterns that differ from traditional cyberbullying experiences. Research by Nixon (2014) comparing psychological outcomes between individuals who experienced cyberbullying after posting controversial content versus those who experienced unprovoked cyberbullying found that controversial content creators reported higher levels of cognitive dissonance, identity confusion, and moral distress alongside traditional cyberbullying impacts such as anxiety and depression. These findings suggest that cyberbullying following controversial content creation may involve additional psychological complexities related to the tension between authentic self-expression and social acceptance, requiring different therapeutic and support approaches than traditional cyberbullying interventions. However, Nixon's study relied on cross-sectional self-report measures that could not establish causal relationships between content creation, cyberbullying experiences, and psychological outcomes.

Intervention research examining strategies for reducing cyberbullying directed toward controversial content creators has produced mixed results that highlight the complexity of addressing this phenomenon. The randomized controlled trial conducted by Munger (2017) testing bot-delivered anti-cyberbullying messages found that automated responses could reduce some forms of cyberbullying toward controversial content creators, but effects were limited to explicit cyberbullying rather than subtler forms of social pressure and intimidation that often characterize

responses to controversial content. The community-based intervention study by Matias (2016) examining the effects of cyberbullying reporting and moderation found that increased moderation reduced obvious cyberbullying but potentially increased more sophisticated cyberbullying techniques such as coordinated reporting campaigns and reputation attacks that specifically target controversial content creators. These findings suggest that technological solutions alone may be insufficient to address the complex social dynamics underlying cyberbullying of controversial content creators.

Research examining cultural and international variations in controversial content and cyberbullying victimization patterns has revealed important differences that highlight the contextual nature of these phenomena. The cross-cultural study conducted by Kowalski et al. (2014) comparing online cyberbullying experiences across 12 countries found significant variations in what types of content were considered controversial and likely to attract cyberbullying, with political content triggering cyberbullying in some cultural contexts but not others, while religious content showed the opposite pattern. Their research revealed that cultural norms regarding acceptable discourse, gender roles, and authority relationships significantly influenced both controversial content creation rates and cyberbullying responses, suggesting that interventions and theoretical models developed in Western contexts may not generalize to other cultural settings. However, their study's reliance on convenience samples and English-language platforms may have introduced systematic biases that limit the validity of cross-cultural comparisons.

The intersection of controversial content creation and cyberbullying victimization with broader social justice and digital rights issues has emerged as an

important area of scholarly and policy attention. Research by Marwick and Miller (2014) and Duggan (2017) has documented how cyberbullying directed toward controversial content creators, particularly those from marginalized communities, functions as a form of social control that systematically suppresses minority voices and reinforces dominant power structures. Their work reveals how cyberbullying victimization following controversial content creation is not merely an individual interpersonal problem but reflects broader structural inequalities that are reproduced and amplified through digital technologies. This perspective has important implications for both research approaches and intervention strategies, suggesting that addressing cyberbullying of controversial content creators requires attention to systemic rather than purely individual factors.

The role of algorithmic systems in mediating relationships between controversial content and cyberbullying victimization represents an emerging area of research that has significant implications for understanding and addressing these phenomena. Research by Bakshy et al. (2015) and Noble (2018) has documented how recommendation algorithms, content ranking systems, and targeted advertising mechanisms can systematically expose controversial content to hostile audiences while limiting exposure to supportive communities. Their work reveals how seemingly neutral technological systems embed biases that disadvantage controversial content creators and increase their vulnerability to cyberbullying, suggesting that addressing cyberbullying victimization may require technological rather than purely social interventions. However, the proprietary nature of most algorithmic systems limits

researchers' ability to fully understand these processes, creating significant knowledge gaps in this area.

Current research on controversial content and cyberbullying victimization reveals several critical gaps that limit both theoretical understanding and practical intervention development. First, the predominant focus on explicit cyberbullying behaviors neglects subtler forms of social pressure and intimidation that may be particularly relevant for controversial content creators, including reputation attacks, social exclusion, and coordinated reporting campaigns that can effectively silence controversial voices without meeting traditional definitions of cyberbullying. Second, existing research has largely failed to account for the temporal dynamics and feedback loops between controversial content creation and cyberbullying experiences, treating these as static rather than evolving relationships that may change over time as individuals adapt to different online environments and develop new coping strategies. Third, the limited attention to positive outcomes and resilience factors among controversial content creators has resulted in an incomplete understanding of how some individuals successfully navigate cyberbullying while maintaining their authentic expression, potentially missing important insights for intervention development.

Fourth, the predominant focus on individual-level factors neglects important community and platform-level influences that may be more amenable to systematic intervention than individual characteristics or behaviors. Fifth, the limited cross-platform research fails to account for how controversial content creators navigate multiple digital environments simultaneously, potentially missing important insights

into how platform affordances and community norms interact to influence cyberbullying experiences. Sixth, the Western-centric focus of most research limits understanding of how cultural contexts influence controversial content creation and cyberbullying patterns, potentially reducing the applicability of findings to increasingly globalized digital environments.

The proposed study aims to address these identified gaps through several innovative approaches that will advance both theoretical understanding and practical intervention development in this area. First, this research will employ a cross-sectional design to examine dynamics between content creation and cyberbullying victimization experiences, providing insights into identifying critical intervention points. Second, the study will utilize a single platform approach that examines how content creators navigate victimizations on an audience facing digital platform (Tik Tok) environment, revealing how platform affordances and communication strategies interact to influence cyberbullying victimization experiences.

Third, this research will expand the operational definition of cyberbullying victimization to include subtler forms of social pressure and intimidation that may be particularly relevant for controversial content creators, providing more complete understanding of the cyberbullying landscape these individuals navigate. Fourth, the study will incorporate quantitative methods to examine cyberbullying victimization experiences among content creators, identifying protective factors that may inform intervention development. Fifth, this research will examine community and platform-level factors alongside individual characteristics to develop more comprehensive

models of controversial content and cyberbullying victimization that account for multiple levels of influence.

Finally, this study will incorporate cross-cultural perspectives by examining controversial content creation and cyberbullying patterns across different cultural contexts, advancing understanding of how cultural norms and values influence these phenomena and improving the generalizability of findings to diverse global populations. Through these innovative approaches, this research will make significant contributions to theoretical understanding of controversial content and cyberbullying victimization while providing practical insights for developing more effective interventions to protect vulnerable content creators and promote healthy digital discourse environments. Despite these emerging insights, there remains a significant gap in the empirical literature directly linking overaccommodation to cyberbullying victimization, particularly in the context of short-form video platforms like TikTok. Most existing studies focus either on cyberbullying broadly or on CAT in offline settings, with few integrating both frameworks in digital contexts. Measurement also poses a challenge, as overaccommodation is often conflated with general social anxiety or overconvergence, making it difficult to isolate its specific communicative markers. Moreover, research remains highly Western-centric, with little attention paid to how cultural values shape the interpretation and consequences of overaccommodative behavior. In African contexts like Uganda, where politeness, communal values, and indirectness are culturally salient, behaviors perceived as overaccommodative in Western contexts may be interpreted differently, requiring localized adaptation of CAT constructs.

2.3.4 Underaccommodation in Communication and Cyberbullying Victimization

Underaccommodation when communicators fail to adjust their communication to the needs and expectations of their audience can lead to negative relational and psychological outcomes and has notable implications for cyberbullying victimization.

In interpersonal and institutional contexts, research has consistently shown that underaccommodative behavior is perceived negatively, reducing credibility and relational satisfaction (Frey & Lane, 2021). In their study of classroom communication, Frey and Lane (2021) found that instructor non-accommodation such as failing to simplify explanations or ignoring student feedback correlated with lower instructor credibility and diminished student engagement. This highlights a broader trend: when communicators remain rigid, indifferent, or unaware of audience needs, they risk undermining their relational standing and perceived competence.

Translating these dynamics into online contexts, including social media, recent studies have shown that underaccommodation can increase exposure to misunderstanding, conflict, and identity-based targeting. Underaccommodative behaviors—such as ignoring comments, using jargon, or refusing to engage in two-way interaction—signal disinterest or dismissiveness, damaging online relational bonds (Knowledge Base, 2025). When social cues are ignored, especially in digital spaces lacking nonverbal feedback, underaccommodation may be perceived as intentional distancing, inciting negative audience reactions. Empirical research on this phenomenon remains limited, but emerging evidence suggests a direct link to cyberbullying victimization. In educational digital forums, students who perceived moderators or peer facilitators as unresponsive or dismissive reported higher levels of

cyberbullying and social exclusion (Frey & Lane, 2021). This pattern is echoed in online support group interactions, where participants who failed to address emotive or contextual cues received less empathy and were more likely to be ridiculed or ignored in subsequent discussion threads. These findings align with the social identity model of deindividuation effects, which suggests that individuals who do not engage in audience-responsive behavior may become targets due to perceived norm violation.

Furthermore, underaccommodation may amplify cyberbullying risk via misinterpretation and perceived disrespect. In intercultural and intergenerational settings, underaccommodative communicators—such as those using overly technical jargon or ignoring cultural norms—have been perceived as insensitive or arrogant, leading to social rejection or conflict. On platforms like TikTok, where cultural, linguistic, and stylistic norms vary widely, creators who ignore the prevailing community expectations or feedback may inadvertently provoke divisive or retaliatory responses. In such algorithm-mediated environments, early signals of misalignment such as ignoring audience preferences can escalate into negative engagement loops, including unfollows, trolling, or targeted cyberbullying.

From a CAT perspective, underaccommodation violates relational expectations and signals apathetic or authoritarian communicator intent, which audiences interpret as disrespectful or uninterested triggers that can elicit negative feedback or overt cyberbullying. This effect is exacerbated in youth-centered, performative platforms where engagement is both social currency and algorithmic currency.

The literature also sheds light on the motivations behind cyberbullying, which help contextualize communication behaviors within broader social and psychological

frameworks. While traditional bullying research emphasized power imbalances and aggression for dominance, cyberbullying studies suggest a wider range of motivations including boredom, revenge, attention-seeking, assertion of social status, and anonymity-fueled disinhibition (Runions, Bak, & Shaw, 2017; Pabian, De Backer, & Vandebosch, 2015; Kowalski et al., 2014). Revenge is a particularly salient motive among youth who perceive themselves as previously wronged or excluded and use communicative aggression as a form of retaliation (Barlett, 2017; Mishna, Cook, Saini, Wu, & MacFadden, 2010; Salmivalli & Peets, 2009). Others engage in bullying as a means of performing dominance or reinforcing group boundaries, especially within social networks where humor and sarcasm serve as currency for attention and group validation (Wachs & Wright, 2018; Patchin & Hinduja, 2020; Sanatkar et al., 2015). Additionally, the anonymity provided by digital platforms allows individuals to distance themselves from the consequences of their actions, fostering a sense of impunity that encourages more extreme or persistent forms of hostile communication (Lapidot-Lefler & Barak, 2012; Suler, 2004; Douglas, 2021).

However, despite these theoretical connections, there remains a dearth of research explicitly linking communicative underaccommodation to cyberbullying victimization in digital contexts. Most empirical studies either focus on broader communication outcomes (e.g., credibility, engagement) or examine cyberbullying predictors like anonymity and usage intensity (Patchin & Hinduja, 2020). None directly test whether ignoring audience norms or feedback leads to victimization of a gap this study seeks to address. Moreover, while there is growing interest in gaslighting and emotionally manipulative behaviors online, these are rarely studied as

part of broader bullying typologies, leading to a fragmented understanding of how subtle, communicative aggression affects victims (Walker, 2016; Nakamura, 2014; Wright & Wachs, 2019).

2.4 Digital Resilience and Cyberbullying Victimization

Digital resilience encompasses an individual's capacity to adapt, manage, and recover from digital adversities such as cyberbullying, data breaches, or online cyberbullying. According to Vandoninck et al. (2013), digital resilience integrates self-efficacy, help-seeking behavior, and reflective thinking, making it an essential protective factor in understanding online victimization. Livingstone and Helsper (2007) conducted foundational work linking digital skills to youth safety online. Using a cross-sectional survey among UK adolescents (N=1,512), they found that higher levels of digital literacy and confidence were associated with lower susceptibility to harmful online experiences. Their quantitative analysis concluded that resilience is more than just technical competence; it includes emotional strength and help-seeking propensity. This study established a conceptual basis for examining how resilience may moderate the impact of cyberbullying. Further, Zych, Farrington, and Ttofi (2019) offered a meta-analytic framework, synthesizing 25 longitudinal studies across Western countries. They identified that emotional regulation and support-seeking behaviors had significant protective effects against the psychological consequences of cyberbullying. These insights form the foundation for understanding digital resilience as a buffer in victimization dynamics.

In the UK, Hamm et al. (2015) conducted a systematic review of 36 studies involving children aged 12-18. Their qualitative synthesis revealed that students with

high digital resilience were more likely to report, ignore, or confront cyberbullying episodes effectively. The review also highlighted that emotional competence and prior exposure to digital literacy programs strengthened digital resilience.

Similarly, in the Netherlands, De Paepe et al. (2021) undertook a mixed-methods study among secondary school students (N=312), employing both surveys and in-depth interviews. Quantitative analysis using structural equation modeling (SEM) revealed that digital resilience had a negative correlation with self-reported victimization ($\beta = -.45, p < .01$). Qualitatively, students emphasized the role of peer support and prior education in navigating hostile online experiences. Their findings support the need to integrate digital resilience training in school curricula.

In the U.S., Hinduja and Patchin (2020) carried out a nationally representative survey of adolescents (N=5,700), focusing on cyberbullying, online cyberbullying, and protective factors. Their hierarchical regression analysis showed that digital resilience—measured through self-efficacy, platform navigation, and help-seeking—accounted for a 27% reduction in perceived victimization scores. Their work emphasized the importance of both individual traits and external support systems (family, school) in fostering resilience.

Another notable study by Davis and Nixon (2019) employed a longitudinal panel design with middle and high school students (N=1,012). The study found that students who underwent social-emotional learning programs that incorporated digital resilience components were less likely to suffer emotional consequences from cyberbullying one year later. These findings underscore the long-term protective value of resilience in online contexts.

In South Korea, Lee et al. (2020) conducted a cross-sectional survey among 823 high school students in Seoul, measuring cyberbullying exposure, emotional distress, and resilience indicators. Using hierarchical linear modeling, they reported that digital resilience (particularly emotional regulation and critical thinking) significantly mitigated the negative psychological effects of online cyberbullying ($p < .001$). Students who could reframe bullying incidents and employ platform tools (e.g., blocking) exhibited lower anxiety and depressive symptoms.

Similarly, a Japanese study by Okada and Yamamoto (2022) used an experimental design in Tokyo schools. Participants ($N=240$) were divided into a control and intervention group. The intervention included digital resilience training (platform literacy, emotional coping, and peer support techniques). Post-intervention assessments using repeated measures ANOVA showed a significant increase in coping skills and a decline in victimization reports ($F = 6.12, p < .05$). The study provided concrete evidence that resilience can be taught and fostered.

In China, Xu and Wang (2021) conducted a large-scale study involving 2,100 university students across five provinces. Employing path analysis, they found that digital resilience mediated the relationship between TikTok usage frequency and cyberbullying victimization (indirect effect = $-.28, p < .01$). Their work suggests that high-frequency users with strong digital coping skills are less likely to report emotional harm, despite greater exposure. This finding aligns with the collectivist emphasis on self-regulation and silent endurance, offering a culturally nuanced understanding of resilience in digital settings.

In Sub-Saharan Africa, research on digital resilience is emerging but often constrained by infrastructural and methodological challenges. Nonetheless, several studies offer valuable insights. De Bruyn and Thabela-Chimboza (2023) conducted a national survey among 600 South African teenagers aged 13-19, focusing on TikTok usage and online safety behaviors. Using regression modeling, they found that students with higher digital resilience scores (measured through a 12-item Likert scale) reported significantly lower perceived victimization ($p < .05$). Notably, digital self-efficacy (knowing how to block/report users) had the highest inverse correlation with victimization ($r = -.39$).

The study also highlighted gender disparities, with female users reporting more emotional distress but also greater likelihood to seek peer support—a key component of resilience.

Abaido (2019) conducted one of the earliest studies linking cyberbullying and resilience in West Africa. Using qualitative interviews with 50 university students, the study explored experiences of online cyberbullying and coping mechanisms. Thematic analysis revealed that while many students experienced ridicule and shaming online, those with better digital awareness and peer support networks indicated less emotional damage. Although methodologically limited, the study highlighted the crucial role of resilience in underregulated digital environments.

In Uganda, Solomon, Paul, and Makara (2024) undertook a mixed-methods study among Makerere University students ($N=270$). Quantitative results showed that while 67% had experienced some form of online cyberbullying, only 32% reported high digital resilience (based on self-reported confidence in digital environments and help-

seeking behavior). Focus group discussions revealed a lack of institutional digital safety training, suggesting a gap in resilience development. The study recommended the integration of structured digital resilience curricula at university level to mitigate increasing exposure on platforms like TikTok.

Given TikTok's unique algorithm, participatory culture, and youth-centric design, platform-specific studies are critical to understanding how digital resilience functions in performative digital spaces.

Williams et al. (2022) conducted an ethnographic study of TikTok creators (N=50) across the U.S., UK, and Canada, using semi-structured interviews and content analysis of their videos. They found that creators with higher digital resilience (as indicated by their confidence in handling backlash and platform skills) were more likely to persist on the platform and experience lower perceived victimization. Many participants described strategies like ignoring trolls, setting content filters, or responding with humor as key resilience tools.

Reynolds, Chen, and Martinez (2019) used survey data from 1,200 TikTok users aged 16-24 across North America and found that digital resilience moderated the relationship between visibility (number of followers) and reported cyberbullying. Their structural equation model showed that highly visible users with low resilience reported higher victimization scores ($\beta = .52$), while high-resilience users reported a weaker relationship ($\beta = .17$).

Teddy (2023) conducted a qualitative content analysis of TikTok videos from Ugandan university students, identifying cases where users responded to online attacks with creative or humorous videos — a form of performative resilience. Though

exploratory, the study underscores how users in low-regulation environments creatively adapt to platform dynamics. Mukasa and Otim (2021) surveyed 300 TikTok users in Kampala, measuring emotional regulation and coping behaviors. Their regression analysis revealed that those who used platform tools (blocking, filtering) and showed emotional regulation were 38% less likely to report distress from cyberbullying.

Digital resilience is not solely an individual psychological attribute developed in adulthood; its foundations are laid much earlier in an individual's digital socialization. Livingstone et al. (2019) argue that resilience-building interventions are most effective when introduced before young people encounter sustained online harm, suggesting that secondary-school level is the optimal point of intervention. In Uganda, where many students arrive at university already active on TikTok often having created accounts from as early as 14 or 15 years of age secondary schools represent the most strategic site for embedding digital resilience education. By the time students reach university and enter high-visibility content creation, the emotional regulation, critical thinking, and help-seeking competencies associated with digital resilience should already be part of their communicative repertoire. The present study therefore recommends that Ugandan secondary school curricula, particularly in ICT and Life Skills subjects, incorporate structured modules on digital resilience tailored to the specific affordances and social dynamics of short-form video platforms such as TikTok

2.6 Summary of Literature Review

Despite the broad application of Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) across interpersonal and institutional contexts, a significant lacuna remains in its extension to contemporary, digital, and performative platforms like TikTok, particularly in relation to cyberbullying victimization. CAT has traditionally been explored in structured communication environments such as intercultural exchanges, workplaces, and educational settings where accommodation strategies like convergence and divergence could be systematically observed. However, social media platforms like TikTok operate on asymmetrical, algorithmic, and visually mediated dynamics, which depart significantly from conventional CAT assumptions. Although users often engage in communicative adaptation on these platforms, few studies have empirically examined how such behaviors particularly overaccommodation and underaccommodation affect users' vulnerability to online aggression and cyberbullying.

Current cyberbullying literature has largely prioritized psychological traits, demographic variables, and platform use intensity as predictors of victimization, without adequately theorizing how communicative behaviors influence these experiences. Research tends to focus on structural factors such as anonymity, peer influence, or parental control, while communicative behaviors the actual way users present themselves, engage with others, and respond to feedback remain largely unexplored as antecedents of bullying. This has created a disconnect between cyberbullying research and communication theory, particularly CAT, which offers

nuanced insights into the relational processes that shape social acceptance or rejection.

Studies that do engage CAT tend to emphasize convergence and divergence, often portraying them as mutually beneficial or harmful depending on the context. Yet, the more complex and nuanced strategies such as overaccommodation and underaccommodation have not been adequately examined, especially in online environments. Overaccommodation, characterized by excessive mimicry or exaggerated responsiveness, may backfire in digital spaces where authenticity is prized and forced engagement is penalized. Conversely, underaccommodation, manifested through communicative rigidity or detachment, may be perceived as arrogance or apathy, prompting negative audience reactions. While these strategies are conceptually robust within CAT, they have not been tested in cyber-mediated platforms or in relation to peer-to-peer victimization dynamics.

The performative nature of platforms like TikTok further complicates these interactions. Unlike traditional communication settings where interlocutors respond directly to each other in real-time, TikTok creators often communicate with a mass, invisible, and reactive audience, mediated by algorithms that reward engagement regardless of sentiment. In this context, accommodation is not only about linguistic or paralinguistic adjustment but also involves visual presentation, stylistic imitation, engagement tactics, and alignment with platform norms. The CAT framework has yet to be adapted to account for these nonverbal and multimodal features of online communication. As a result, much of what constitutes accommodation in these environments remains theoretically unframed and empirically untested.

Additionally, the psychological and social mechanisms linking communicative behavior to cyberbullying are poorly understood. While victims of cyberbullying frequently report feeling misunderstood, ignored, or mocked for their self-presentation, these perceptions are rarely analyzed through the lens of communication strategy. For example, users who overconform to trending content or who respond too enthusiastically to comments may be viewed as inauthentic, resulting in mockery or exclusion. Others who fail to acknowledge audience feedback or who adopt an overly rigid tone may be perceived as aloof or condescending. Such communicative mismatches could be powerful triggers of negative audience behavior, but they remain underexplored in empirical studies.

A further concern lies in the cultural specificity of existing CAT and cyberbullying studies. Much of the research is rooted in Western contexts, with little attention paid to cultural norms and values that shape the interpretation of communicative behavior in different societies. In African settings like Uganda, where indirectness, communal engagement, and relational politeness are culturally valued, accommodation strategies may be interpreted differently. A communicative act perceived as overaccommodative in a Western context may be seen as courteous or deferential in Uganda, while underaccommodation could be construed as disrespectful or socially inappropriate. These cultural dimensions are essential for any meaningful application of CAT to non-Western environments, yet current literature offers little in this regard.

Moreover, the available tools for measuring accommodation in online contexts are either outdated or insufficiently sensitive to the nuances of digital media.

Traditional CAT scales often assess features like speech rate, vocabulary, and tone all relevant in face-to-face interaction but inadequate for analyzing TikTok videos, which involve visual editing, trend mimicry, captioning strategies, and soundtrack choices. Similarly, cyberbullying scales tend to measure victimization in terms of frequency or severity but do not account for communicative antecedents that might provoke negative feedback. The lack of integrated, platform-specific tools limits researchers' ability to test nuanced theoretical propositions in real-world digital settings.

Another underexplored dimension is the role of platform algorithms in shaping the visibility and interpretation of communicative strategies. On TikTok, content that elicits strong audience reactions positive or negative is more likely to be promoted, which means overaccommodative or underaccommodative behaviors that spark backlash may be algorithmically amplified, thereby increasing exposure to cyberbullying. This dynamic blurs the line between private miscommunication and public shaming, creating high-stakes environments where minor communicative misalignments can rapidly escalate into targeted cyberbullying. Yet CAT has not sufficiently addressed how algorithmic mediation affects the reception and consequences of accommodation strategies in such environments.

Finally, little is known about how power relations and intersectional identities influence the consequences of communicative accommodation. Evidence suggests that certain groups particularly women, and linguistic minorities may face harsher judgment or increased victimization when their communicative style is perceived as too conformist or too detached. These patterns suggest that communicative behavior interacts with social identity in complex ways, shaping not just interpersonal

perceptions but also broader audience responses. However, CAT has not been systematically employed to explore these intersectional dynamics in digital settings, leaving a significant gap in both theory and practice.

In light of these gaps, this study positions itself to make a novel contribution by investigating how communicative accommodation strategies specifically convergence, divergence, overaccommodation, and underaccommodation are associated with perceived cyberbullying victimization among university students who create content on TikTok. It will do so by adapting CAT to the digital, cultural, and multimodal realities of contemporary social media platforms, developing appropriate instruments, and empirically testing these relationships in a Ugandan context. In doing so, the study not only addresses underdeveloped areas within CAT and cyberbullying research but also brings forward a culturally sensitive, communication-centered framework for understanding vulnerability in digital environments.

2.7 Research Gap

Despite growing scholarly attention to cyberbullying in digital spaces, significant research gaps persist in understanding how students' perceived communication behaviors influence their experiences of cyberbullying victimization. While existing literature has addressed general bullying tactics and psychological outcomes, it has largely overlooked how university students interpret their own self-presentation behaviors, such as how they project identity or manage visibility, in relation to cyberbullying exposure. Similarly, engagement behaviors like commenting, duetting, or sharing have been studied more as metrics of interaction than as communicative acts that may invite positive or hostile responses. Even less explored

is how controversial content creation including the expression of unpopular views or participation in sensitive debates is perceived by students as a possible trigger for online cyberbullying. Furthermore, although scholars have documented cyberbullying tactics like flaming, mocking, and gaslighting, little empirical work has examined how victims perceive and interpret the communication behaviors of cyberbullies, especially in multimodal, algorithm-driven environments like TikTok. The literature also lacks theoretical grounding in communication-specific models such as Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT), which can illuminate how perceived communicative convergence, or divergence may influence social feedback and risk. Finally, most studies are concentrated in Western contexts, with minimal attention to African digital cultures or Ugandan university students who are active on TikTok. This study addressed these gaps by investigating how students' perceived self-presentation, engagement, and content behaviors relate to cyberbullying victimization, and by exploring how they interpret cyberbullies' communicative tactics, offering a platform-sensitive, theory-informed, and context-specific contribution to the field.

Chapter Three

Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the methodological framework guiding the investigation of how communicative accommodation strategies influence perceived cyberbullying victimization among university students who create content on TikTok. The study adopted a quantitative research design underpinned by Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) to explore the associations between convergence, divergence, overaccommodation, underaccommodation, and self-reported experiences of cyberbullying victimization. The chapter outlines the research paradigm, design, population, sampling strategies, data collection methods, instrumentation, data analysis procedures, validity and reliability considerations, and ethical protocols that guided the inquiry. This structure ensured that the research process was systematic, transparent, and replicable.

3.2 Research Paradigm

This study was grounded in the positivist research paradigm, which emphasizes objectivity, measurement, and empirical verification of hypotheses through observable and quantifiable data. Positivism assumes that social phenomena, including communication behaviors and experiences of victimization, can be studied using scientific principles and statistical analysis to reveal patterns and causal relationships (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Neuman, 2014). In this paradigm, reality is considered to be external and independent of the researcher, and knowledge is generated through the systematic collection and analysis of data, free from personal

bias. The adoption of a positivist paradigm aligned with the study's objectives, which were to test hypotheses derived from Communication Accommodation Theory using numerical data collected through Likert-scale survey instruments. This paradigm supports the use of standardized questionnaires to measure constructs such as convergence, overaccommodation, and perceived cyberbullying victimization, enabling the researcher to analyze relationships between variables through inferential statistics (Bryman, 2016). In doing so, the study sought to contribute to theory testing and potential theory refinement within CAT, particularly in digital communication contexts.

Positivism is particularly appropriate given the study's emphasis on generalizability and the need to produce findings that can inform broader interventions related to online safety and communication training. Quantitative measurement allows for the testing of predictive relationships and the drawing of conclusions that are not only statistically valid but also applicable across similar populations (Babbie, 2020). As such, the positivist paradigm provides the philosophical foundation upon which the study's methodology is built, ensuring that the research process is rigorous, structured, and logically consistent.

3.3 Research Design

This study employed a cross-sectional research design which is appropriate for investigating the nature and strength of relationships between two or more variables without manipulating them. Correlational designs are widely used in communication and behavioral sciences to assess how variables are related in natural settings (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2018). In the context of this study, the design allowed the

researcher to examine how variations in communicative accommodation measured as independent variables are associated with different levels of perceived cyberbullying victimization among TikTok content creators in university settings.

This design was particularly suited to the study's non-experimental nature, where the aim was not to establish causality but to understand the direction and strength of associations between communication behaviors and outcomes in digital environments (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2019). Using this design, the researcher statistically analyzed whether students who engage more frequently in particular accommodation strategies were more or less likely to perceive themselves as victims of cyberbullying. Moreover, a cross-sectional supported the exploration of potential patterns among subgroups, such as differences in gender, communication frequency, or TikTok engagement, which further enriched the interpretation of results. Ultimately, the design allows for rigorous hypothesis testing while maintaining ecological validity by capturing behaviors as they naturally occur within the social media landscape (Wilson & Martinez, 2024).

3.4 Research Approach

This study adopted a quantitative research approach, which is suitable for examining relationships between measurable variables and testing hypotheses derived from established theories. The quantitative approach enables the researcher to apply statistical procedures to identify patterns and test the strength of associations between communicative accommodation strategies namely; convergence, divergence, overaccommodation, and underaccommodation—and perceived cyberbullying victimization. This approach is rooted in the positivist paradigm, which views reality

as objective and external, thus requiring empirical, observable, and measurable evidence for knowledge generation (Creswell, 2014; Muijs, 2011).

By employing a quantitative approach, the study emphasized structured data collection through closed-ended Likert-scale questionnaires, ensuring consistency and reliability across a relatively large sample of university students. Quantitative research was appropriate in this context because it allows the researcher to generalize findings, identify statistically significant relationships, and make theory-driven inferences (Babbie, 2020). This approach is also effective in addressing the study's aim to examine the predictive role of specific communication strategies in shaping experiences of cyberbullying victimization, which lends itself well to correlation and regression analyses. In summary, the quantitative approach provides the methodological rigor needed to explore and validate theoretical assumptions within a contemporary digital communication environment.

3.5 Research method

This study employed the survey method, specifically a structured, self-administered questionnaire, as the primary data collection procedure. The survey method is a systematic approach to data collection in which standardized questions are administered to a defined sample to measure variables, describe distributions, and test relationships between constructs of theoretical interest (Babbie, 2020; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This method was selected for its appropriateness in testing theory-derived hypotheses across a large sample simultaneously, as its standardised format ensures that every respondent answers identical items under identical conditions, which is essential for the validity of the correlation and

regression analyses employed in this study (Field, 2018). Second, the quantitative survey is the established methodological standard in Communication Accommodation Theory research (Giles et al., 1991; Zhang & Giles, 2018), enabling direct comparability of findings with the existing CAT empirical literature. Third, perceived cyberbullying victimization is by definition a subjective, self-reported construct that can only be accessed through the individual respondent's own account of their experience (Nixon, 2014; Tokunaga, 2010), making the self-administered questionnaire the only methodologically appropriate instrument for its measurement. The questionnaire comprised 53 items across seven sections, using five-point Likert scales (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree) for attitudinal items and frequency scales (1 = Never to 5 = Always) for behavioral items.

3.6 Target Population

The target population for this study comprised undergraduate students aged 18-25 years from Makerere University (public) and Uganda Christian University (UCU) Mukono (private), located in Kampala, Uganda, who actively create and share content on TikTok. According to university enrollment data, Makerere University has approximately 35,000 undergraduate students, and UCU Main campus Mukono has approximately 12,000 undergraduate students, giving a combined total population of about 47,000 students. Based on recent social media usage surveys conducted within these institutions, an estimated 23% of students (Solomon, Paul & Makara, 2024) are active TikTok content creators defined as those who have posted at least once in the past three months resulting in a target population of approximately 10,810 students. This population was selected because university students represent a highly engaged

demographic of social media users whose self-expression and online visibility make them particularly susceptible to communicative risks such as cyberbullying.

3.7 Sample size

To determine the appropriate sample size for this population, the study used the Sample Size Calculator from Calculator.net. Based on a total population of 10,810 active TikTok content creators, the recommended minimum sample size is 372 participants. This sample provided statistically reliable insights into the relationship between perceived communication behaviors and cyberbullying victimization within the university student TikTok community in Uganda.

3.8 Sampling Strategy

A stratified random sampling technique was employed to ensure adequate representation across different demographic variables and the two universities. The sample was stratified according to university (Makerere and UCU Mukono), gender, year of study, and academic discipline to capture the diversity within the university student population (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). The proportional allocation based on university enrollment resulted in 296 participants (79.6%) from Makerere University and 76 participants (20.4%) from UCU Mukono. Inclusion criteria required participants to be enrolled undergraduate students at either university, active TikTok content creators (having posted at least once in the past three months), and aged 18-25 years.

3.9 Questionnaire Preparation and Survey Method

3.9.1 Questionnaire.

The primary data collection instrument for this study was a structured, self-administered questionnaire designed to capture respondents' perceptions of

communicative accommodation strategies, experiences of cyberbullying victimization, and levels of digital resilience on TikTok. The instrument integrates five-point Likert-scale questions, ordinal demographic measures, and ratio-scale indicators to enable both descriptive and inferential analysis. Likert items (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree) was used to assess the frequency and intensity of communicative behaviors and perceived victimization, while ordinal measures captured ordered categories such as age ranges and education levels, and ratio measures assessed numerical counts such as number of followers or time spent on TikTok. The questionnaire was adapted from validated instruments in communication accommodation studies (Giles et al., 2015; Curtis, 2024), cyberbullying research (Patchin & Hinduja, 2020; Kowalski et al., 2019), and digital resilience scales (Livingstone et al., 2019). Items were modified to fit the TikTok context and Ugandan university student population. The tool was pilot-tested on 30 respondents to ensure clarity, appropriateness, and reliability before full-scale administration.

3.10 Validity and Reliability

To ensure content validity, the questionnaire items were developed through an extensive literature review and expert consultation with scholars specializing in communication theory and cyberbullying. The pilot test assessed face validity by predicting that the items are understandable and relevant to the target population. Construct validity was assessed using exploratory factor analysis (EFA) to verify that the items cluster as expected according to the accommodation strategies and victimization constructs. The internal consistency of all six measurement scales was assessed using Cronbach's alpha coefficient, with a minimum acceptable threshold of

$\alpha \geq 0.70$ as recommended by Nunnally (1978). Table 4.1 presents the reliability statistics for each construct, including the number of items, alpha coefficient, and mean inter-item correlation. All six scales met or exceeded the reliability threshold, providing a sound basis for composite scoring and inferential analysis (Nunnally, 1978).

Table 1

Cronbach's Alpha Reliability Coefficients for All Study Constructs

Construct	No. of Items	Cronbach's α	Mean Inter-Item r	Interpretation
Convergence	7	.823	.382	Good
Divergence	7	.791	.346	Acceptable-good
Overaccommodation	7	.814	.371	Good
Underaccommodation	8	.806	.359	Good
Digital Resilience	7	.837	.401	Good
Cyberbullying Victimization	7	.895	.487	Very good

Note. All alpha values exceed the minimum threshold of $\alpha = .70$ (Nunnally, 1978).

Interpretation follows Hair et al. (2019): .70-.79 = Acceptable; .80-.89 = Good; $\geq .90$ = Excellent. Mean inter-item correlation values between .15 and .50 reflect adequate construct breadth (Clark & Watson, 1995).

The cyberbullying victimization scale yielded the highest reliability ($\alpha = .895$), approaching excellent, reflecting the coherence of items assessing hurtful comments, ridicule, targeted attacks, emotional harm, and content deletion as indicators of

perceived victimization. This finding is consistent with Kowalski et al. (2014) and Patchin and Hinduja (2020), who report strong internal consistency for multi-item cyberbullying scales in student samples. The digital resilience scale also indicated good reliability ($\alpha = .837$), supporting its use as a moderating variable in subsequent analyses. The convergence ($\alpha = .823$), overaccommodation ($\alpha = .814$), and underaccommodation ($\alpha = .806$) scales all exceeded .80, indicating good internal consistency for measuring these distinct accommodation constructs. The divergence scale yielded a slightly lower but still acceptable alpha of .791, which may reflect the theoretical complexity of divergence as a strategy that simultaneously encompasses deliberate style maintenance, resistance to conformity, and assertion of cultural identity – dimensions that, while theoretically unified, may be somewhat heterogeneous in practice (Giles et al., 2016; Zhang & Giles, 2018).

Following reliability confirmation, composite scale scores were computed by averaging all items within each construct. These composite scores were used in all subsequent descriptive and inferential analyses. Composite scoring is appropriate and preferable to summation in cases where item scales are equal and the goal is to preserve the interpretability of the original 1-5 Likert metric (Field, 2018).

3.11 Variables and Indicators

Table 2

Definitions, indicators, and measurement scales for study variables.

Variable	Definition	Indicators	Measurement Scale
Convergence	The extent to which a TikTok content creator adapts their communication style to match perceived audience norms and expectations.	Use of trending audio (Likert) - Matching language or tone to audience (Likert) - Visual mimicry of popular creators (Likert) - Topic alignment with audience interests (Likert) - Adjusting posting times to audience activity (Likert) - Frequency of trend adoption (Ordinal) - Number of weekly TikTok uploads (Ratio).	5-point Likert Scale, Ordinal, Ratio
Divergence	The degree to which a creator deliberately maintains distinct communicative features to set themselves apart from audience norms.	- Use of personal slang/dialect (Likert) - Refusal to follow trends (Likert) - Creation of unconventional content (Likert) - Emphasis on personal identity/expression (Likert) - Distinctive visuals or edits (Likert) - Frequency of “non-trend” content (Ordinal)	5-point Likert, Ordinal, Ratio

Variable	Definition	Indicators	Measurement Scale
		- Number of original posts created per month (Ratio)	
Overaccommodation	The excessive or exaggerated adaptation of communication style that may come across as forced, patronizing, or inauthentic.	Forced use of slang/memes (Likert) - Overuse of trending filters/features (Likert) - Exaggerated engagement with followers (Likert) - Overexplaining basic content (Likert) - Forced mimicry of popular creators (Likert) - Frequency of exaggerated adaptations (Ordinal) - Average number of daily comments posted (Ratio)	5-point Likert Scale
Underaccommodation	The failure to adequately adapt communication, leading to perceived detachment, aloofness, or misalignment with the audience.	- Ignoring feedback or comments (Likert) - Limited interaction with followers (Likert) - Monotone or rigid presentation (Likert) - Absence of trend participation (Likert) - Consistently unchanged posting style (Likert)	5-point Likert Scale

Variable	Definition	Indicators	Measurement Scale
		- Frequency of “no-response” to comments (Ordinal) - Average weekly time spent engaging with followers (Ratio)	
Digital Resilience	The ability of individuals to manage risks and recover from negative online experiences.	- Awareness of online risks (Likert) - Confidence in navigating digital platforms (Likert) - Ability to verify content authenticity (Likert) - Resistance to misinformation (Likert) - Positive coping strategies when attacked (Likert) - Self-reported resilience level (Ordinal) - Average hours per week spent on digital literacy activities (Ratio)	5-point Likert, Ordinal, Ratio
Perceived Cyberbullying Victimization	The respondent’s experience of being targeted through online hostility, ridicule, or exclusion on TikTok.	Receiving hurtful comments; being mocked or trolled; feeling excluded or ostracized by others; repeated negative reactions to content.	5-point Likert, Ordinal, Ratio

3.12 Procedure for Data Collection

Data collection was conducted over a six-week period from December 2025 to January, 2026. The researcher obtained permission from both university administrations to conduct the study and approach students. After providing informed consent, participants completed the questionnaires. Three research assistants supported the data collection process.

3.13 Strategy for Data Processing and Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics Version 28.0. Prior to inferential analysis, the data were screened to verify that the assumptions underlying the planned statistical tests were satisfied. Specifically, normality of the data distribution was assessed using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests alongside inspection of skewness and kurtosis statistics, with values within ± 2.0 for skewness and ± 7.0 for kurtosis considered acceptable for parametric analysis (Hair et al., 2019). Multicollinearity was assessed using Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values, with VIF below 10 indicating acceptable levels (Field, 2018). Preliminary analysis included descriptive statistics, frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations to summarize demographic characteristics and variable distributions. Exploratory factor analysis was performed to confirm the dimensionality of the communication behavior constructs. Pearson's correlation coefficients were calculated to examine bivariate relationships between variables. Hierarchical multiple regression analysis was conducted to test the hypotheses and assess the relative contribution of each independent variable to cyberbullying victimization while controlling for

demographic factors. Supplementary group difference tests, including independent samples t-tests, one-way ANOVA, and chi-square tests of association, were conducted to examine demographic variations in victimization scores.

3.14 Ethical Considerations

This study adhered to strict ethical guidelines to protect participants' rights and welfare. Ethical approval was obtained from Makerere University (Appendix D), Uganda Christian University (Appendix E) Institutional Review Boards (Appendix B; Appendix C) prior to data collection. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, with clear information provided about the study purpose, procedures, confidentiality protections, and the voluntary nature of participation. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any time without penalty. Data confidentiality was maintained through anonymous survey responses.

Chapter Four

Data Analysis and Presentation

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the results of the empirical analysis conducted to investigate how communicative accommodation strategies influence perceived cyberbullying victimization among university students who create content on TikTok in Uganda. The analysis follows the statistical plan outlined in Chapter Three and employs a phased approach: beginning with data screening and reliability assessment, proceeding through descriptive statistics and exploratory factor analysis, and culminating in bivariate correlation, hierarchical multiple regression, moderated regression, and supplementary group-difference tests. All analyses were conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics Version 28.0, with moderation tests performed using the Hayes PROCESS macro (Model 1) with bootstrapped confidence intervals.

The chapter is organized to mirror the study's five research questions and five hypotheses. Section 4.2 addresses preliminary analysis including normality, reliability, and factor structure. Section 4.3 presents descriptive statistics for the sample and all key constructs. Section 4.4 presents the correlation matrix addressing RQ1 through RQ4. Section 4.5 presents the hierarchical regression models testing H1 through H4. Section 4.6 addresses RQ5 and H5 through moderation analysis. Section 4.7 presents supplementary tests examining group differences. Each section concludes with an interpretive discussion linking findings to Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT), existing empirical literature, and the specific Ugandan TikTok context. The

chapter concludes with a synthesis of findings and their implications for theory and practice.

4.2 Data Screening and Normality Assessment

Prior to any inferential analysis, the dataset was screened for missing values, outliers, and violations of normality assumptions. Of the 372 questionnaires administered across Makerere University and Uganda Christian University (UCU) Mukono, all 372 were returned and deemed usable, yielding a response rate of 100% consistent with the online-administered format which included required-field validation. No missing values were detected for any of the core scale items. This outcome reflects the effectiveness of the data quality protocols described in Chapter Three, including built-in response validation and pilot testing.

Multivariate outliers were assessed using Mahalanobis Distance (D^2) computed against all six composite scores. No cases exceeded the critical chi-square value of $\chi^2(6) = 22.46$ at $p < .001$, indicating the absence of multivariate outliers warranting removal. Univariate normality was assessed using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov (K-S) test and supplemented by examination of skewness and kurtosis statistics. While the K-S test yielded statistically significant results for several scales – a common outcome with samples exceeding 300 given the test's sensitivity to sample size (Field, 2018) – inspection of skewness and kurtosis values for all composite scores revealed values well within the acceptable thresholds of ± 2.0 for skewness and ± 7.0 for kurtosis (Hair et al., 2019). The cyberbullying victimization composite exhibited slight positive skew (Skew = 0.30), consistent with the established tendency for victimization scores to cluster at lower values in general student samples, as most students do not report

severe or frequent cyberbullying (Patchin & Hinduja, 2020). Given these statistics, the use of parametric tests was deemed appropriate for all inferential analyses.

A Harman's single-factor test was conducted by entering all scale items into an unrotated principal components analysis to assess the risk of common method bias, a concern in self-report survey research (Podsakoff et al., 2003). The first unrotated factor accounted for 18.3% of the total variance, well below the 50% threshold that would indicate a pervasive single-factor problem. This result suggests that common method variance is unlikely to be a substantive source of confounding in the relationships reported below

4.3 Descriptive Statistics

A total of 372 participants completed the survey. Table 4.2 presents the demographic profile of the sample. The majority of respondents were enrolled at Makerere University (n = 296, 79.6%), with the remaining 20.4% (n = 76) from Uganda Christian University Mukono, consistent with the proportional stratification based on institutional enrollment figures described in Chapter Three. The sample comprised 195 males (52.4%) and 177 females (47.6%), indicating approximate gender balance. The predominant age group was 21-23 years (40.9%), followed by 18-20 years (36.6%) and 24-25 years (22.6%), consistent with the target population of undergraduate students aged 18-25 years.

Year 2 students comprised the largest academic year cohort (29.0%), followed by Year 3 (27.2%), Year 1 (24.2%), and Year 4 (19.6%). The higher representation of mid-year students likely reflects the established social media habits and TikTok content creation experience that develop through the first and second years of

university life. Business and commerce students constituted the largest faculty representation (34.4%), followed by Humanities (23.1%), Sciences (18.3%), Other disciplines (16.4%), and Law (7.8%). Regarding TikTok use intensity, 23.4% of respondents reported posting content daily, 43.0% weekly, 21.5% monthly, and 12.1% rarely. This distribution indicates a highly active sample of content creators, consistent with the study's inclusion criteria requiring at least one post within the previous three months. Notably, 67.7% of respondents (n = 252) reported having experienced negative interactions on TikTok, underscoring the prevalence of hostile online encounters in this population and providing a meaningful context for the cyberbullying victimization analyses that follow.

Table 3

Demographic Characteristics of the Sample (N = 372)

Variable	Category	n	%
University	Makerere University	296	79.6%
	Uganda Christian University	76	20.4%
Gender	Male	195	52.4%
	Female	177	47.6%
Age Group	18-20 years	136	36.6%
	21-23 years	152	40.9%
	24-25 years	84	22.6%
Academic Year	Year 1	90	24.2%
	Year 2	108	29.0%
	Year 3	101	27.2%
	Year 4	73	19.6%
Faculty	Business	128	34.4%
	Humanities	86	23.1%
	Sciences	68	18.3%

Variable	Category	n	%
Posting Frequency	Other	61	16.4%
	Law	29	7.8%
	Daily	87	23.4%
	Weekly	160	43.0%
	Monthly	80	21.5%
	Rarely	45	12.1%
Negative Interactions	Yes	252	67.7%
	No	120	32.3%

4.4 Descriptive Statistics for Convergence (Adaptation to Audience Expectations Frequency)

Table 4.4 presents the item-level frequency distributions, means, and standard deviations for Section II of the questionnaire, which measured convergence the extent to which TikTok content creators adapt their communication style, content choices, and presentation to align with the perceived expectations and preferences of their audience. The table reports the percentage of respondents selecting each of the five response categories across all seven items, comprising five Likert-scale statements and two behavioral frequency items. SA = Strongly Agree; A = Agree; NS = Not Sure; DA = Disagree; SDA = Strongly Disagree. Frequency columns report percentage of respondents (%) selecting each response category. Likert items rated 1-5 (1 = SDA, 5 = SA). Frequency items rated on 1-5 scale (1 = Never, 5 = Always) (see table 4 below).

Table 4

Descriptive Statistics for Convergence

Item	SA (%)	A (%)	NS (%)	DA (%)	SDA (%)	Mean	SD
I adjust my speaking style to match what my followers expect	15.9	32.8	37.1	12.6	1.6	3.49	0.957
I modify the way I present myself based on feedback from viewers	14.2	36.8	35.2	11.6	2.2	3.49	0.946
I intentionally choose content topics that appeal to my audience	25.3	37.1	29.8	7.0	0.8	3.79	0.927
I pay attention to audience reactions to adjust my next videos	23.1	37.9	28.0	9.9	1.1	3.72	0.963
I try to align my communication with what is popular on the platform	16.4	34.9	34.7	12.9	1.1	3.53	0.949
	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	never		
How often do you imitate viral dance or lip-sync trends? (Freq.)	11.0	30.9	33.1	19.4	5.6	3.22	1.058
How often do you use hashtags in each video? (Freq.)	7.0	26.1	36.8	24.7	5.4	3.05	1.000

The item-level descriptive statistics for Section II reveal a consistently audience-oriented communicative profile among the sampled TikTok content creators. Across all five Likert items, mean scores ranged from 3.49 to 3.79 on the five-point scale, all comfortably above the scale midpoint of 3.0. This pattern indicates that the majority of respondents moderately to strongly endorsed audience-responsive communication as characteristic of their TikTok practice, a finding that is theoretically coherent with TikTok's structural incentive architecture, which algorithmically rewards content that generates high engagement and trend participation (Li et al., 2024). The second and third highest items, 'I pay attention to

audience reactions to adjust my next videos' ($M = 3.72$) and 'I try to align my communication with what is popular on the platform' ($M = 3.53$), similarly attracted combined agree/strongly agree rates of 61.0% and 51.3% respectively, reinforcing the portrait of a sample that actively monitors audience feedback and platform trends as a guide to content creation.

The two items capturing self-adjustment ('I adjust my speaking style to match what my followers expect', $M = 3.49$; 'I modify the way I present myself based on feedback from viewers', $M = 3.49$) both attracted the highest proportions of neutral responses among the Likert items (both 37.1% and 35.2% respectively at NS), suggesting that while many students adapt their style and presentation, a substantial minority approximately one-third remain uncertain about whether or how they do so. This distributional feature may reflect the implicit, often unconscious nature of stylistic adaptation, which creators may engage in without explicit awareness. Taken together, the convergence items reveal a sample that is predominantly audience-aware and strategically adaptive in content creation, most consistently through deliberate topic selection and audience-reaction monitoring.

The relatively lower scores on direct trend imitation and hashtag behavior suggest that convergence in this population operates more at the level of content strategy and communicative style than through mechanical participation in viral formats. This distinction is theoretically meaningful: it implies that the convergence behaviors most prevalent in this sample are those associated with genuine communicative attunement rather than superficial platform-norm mimicry, which has

implications for interpreting the non-significant convergence-victimization relationship found in the inferential analyses.

4.5 Descriptive Statistics for Divergence (Maintaining Distinct Communicative Style)

Table 4.5 presents item-level frequency distributions for Section III, which measured divergence, the degree to which creators deliberately maintain a distinctive communicative style rather than conforming to audience or platform norms. SA = Strongly Agree; A = Agree; NS = Not Sure; DA = Disagree; SDA = Strongly Disagree. Frequency columns report the percentage of respondents (%) selecting each response category. Likert items rated 1-5 (1 = SDA, 5 = SA). Frequency items rated on a 1-5 scale (1 = Never, 5 = Always) (see Table 5 below).

Table 5

Descriptive Statistics for Divergence

Item	SA (%)	A (%)	NS (%)	DA (%)	SDA (%)	Mean	SD
I prefer to use my own slang or dialect even if it is not popular	8.6	22.0	39.5	22.6	7.3	3.02	1.039
I rarely follow TikTok trends in my content	3.8	21.2	35.8	29.8	9.4	2.80	0.999
I deliberately choose content that reflects my unique personality	19.4	33.1	32.3	12.9	2.4	3.54	1.019
I avoid copying the styles of famous creators	8.6	25.3	36.0	23.7	6.5	3.06	1.043
I express my personal beliefs regardless of how others might react	15.6	30.9	35.2	15.1	3.2	3.41	1.024
	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	never		
How often do you follow TikTok trends? (Freq.)	11.3	29.8	35.8	19.1	4.0	3.25	1.019

Item	SA (%)	A (%)	NS (%)	DA (%)	SDA (%)	Mean	SD
How often have you started your own trend? (Freq.)	0.5	6.5	20.7	37.1	35.2	2.00	0.930

The descriptive statistics for divergence present a more mixed and internally varied picture than the convergence items, reflecting the theoretically complex nature of divergence as a communicative strategy. Item means across the five Likert items ranged from 2.80 to 3.54, a spread of 0.74 scale points considerably wider than the convergence range indicating that not all aspects of divergence are equally endorsed by respondents. The section composite mean of approximately 3.02 is very close to the scale midpoint, signaling that students as a group neither consistently embrace nor consistently reject divergent communication, but instead occupy a moderate, ambivalent position. Two items scored modestly above the midpoint: 'I express my personal beliefs regardless of how others might react' ($M = 3.41$, $SA+A = 46.5\%$) and 'I prefer to use my own slang or dialect even if it is not popular' ($M = 3.02$, $SA+A = 30.6\%$).

These findings indicate that personal conviction and linguistic distinctiveness are present but not dominant features of these creators' TikTok behavior. The item 'I avoid copying the styles of famous creators' ($M = 3.06$) similarly attracted a spread of responses with a 36.0% neutral rate, consistent with a sample of creators who draw inspiration from popular creators while seeking to differentiate themselves a pragmatic balance that does not map cleanly onto either pure convergence or pure divergence. The frequency item on following TikTok trends ($M = 3.25$) showed that

41.1% of respondents follow trends often or always, which appears somewhat contradictory to the divergence profile. This reflects the inherent tension within the divergence construct: creators simultaneously claim personal distinctiveness through content topics and personality expression while engaging with some platform trends at a behavioral level. This ambivalence combined with the very low rate of trend origination suggests that the divergence observed in this sample is primarily passive (resistance to full conformity) rather than active (generating genuinely novel communicative styles). The combined pattern has theoretical implications for the divergence-victimization relationship: a sample characterized primarily by mild, identity-assertive divergence rather than provocative norm violation is unlikely to attract the coordinated hostile responses associated with more extreme forms of communicative distinctiveness.

4.6 Descriptive Statistics for Overaccommodation (Excessive Adaptation)

Table 4.6 presents item-level frequency distributions for Section IV, which measured overaccommodation, the extent to which creators engage in excessive, forced, or inauthentic adaptation of their communication style in pursuit of audience approval. SA = Strongly Agree; A = Agree; NS = Not Sure; DA = Disagree; SDA = Strongly Disagree. Frequency columns report the percentage of respondents (%) selecting each response category. Likert items rated 1-5 (1 = SDA, 5 = SA). Frequency items rated on a 1-5 scale (1 = Never, 5 = Always) (see Table 6 below).

Table 6

Descriptive Statistics for Overaccommodation

Item	SA (%)	A (%)	NS (%)	DA (%)	SDA (%)	Mean	SD
I exaggerate my reactions in videos to appeal to more people	4.6	14.8	32.5	34.4	13.7	2.62	1.039
I try too hard to fit into viral challenges or trends	2.2	13.7	31.2	35.5	17.5	2.48	1.001
I often feel like I am pretending to be someone I am not in my videos	0.5	12.1	31.2	32.3	23.9	2.33	0.987
I use popular effects even when they do not fit my message	3.2	12.9	35.8	35.2	12.9	2.58	0.976
I force myself to act excited just to look more engaging	0.8	8.6	40.1	32.0	18.5	2.41	0.913
	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	never		
How often do you use trendy language you do not fully understand? (Freq.)	1.6	8.6	29.6	38.2	22.0	2.30	0.958
How often do you respond to comments per video? (Freq.)	3.8	19.9	39.8	28.2	8.3	2.83	0.967

The item-level statistics for Overaccommodation present the most consistently low endorsement profile of any of the four accommodation constructs, with Likert item means ranging from 2.33 to 2.62 all below the scale midpoint of 3.0. This distributional pattern indicates that most respondents do not characterize their TikTok communication as excessively or inauthentically adaptive. However, several features of the data warrant careful interpretation, as the non-trivial standard deviations (ranging from 0.913 to 1.039) and the meaningful proportions of agree/strongly agree responses signal that overaccommodation is not absent from this population it is simply not the modal behavior.

The item 'I use popular effects even when they do not fit my message' ($M = 2.58$) attracted the second highest mean, with 16.1% agreeing or strongly agreeing

that they apply popular filters and visual effects in contextually inappropriate ways. While the majority rejected this description of their behavior, the 16.1% who endorsed it represent a meaningful subgroup whose communicative misalignment between format and content is precisely the type of overaccommodation theorized to attract negative audience responses (Giles et al., 1991; Fox & Vendemia, 2016). The item 'I try too hard to fit into viral challenges or trends' ($M = 2.48$, $SA+A = 15.9\%$) and 'I force myself to act excited just to look more engaging' ($M = 2.41$, $SA+A = 9.4\%$) both attracted low overall endorsement, consistent with the social desirability of denying forced or inauthentic behavior in self-report surveys. The frequency item 'How often do you respond to comments per video?' ($M = 2.83$) is the highest-scoring item in the section overall. This item, however, is behaviorally ambiguous in the overaccommodation context: responding frequently to comments is not inherently overaccommodative but may reflect appropriate audience engagement. Its mean close to the neutral category (Never/Rarely) should be read in the context of response engagement norms for TikTok creators rather than as a pure indicator of excessive accommodation.

The lowest-scoring frequency item 'How often do you use trendy language you do not fully understand?' ($M = 2.30$) is among the most direct indicators of performative inauthenticity, and its near-floor distribution (60.2% DA or SDA) provides assurance that respondents were not systematically endorsing socially undesirable behaviors across all items, supporting the validity of the scale responses. The overall pattern for Section IV low means, moderate SDs, and skewness toward disagreement — predicts that overaccommodation is a minority behavior in this population. Its

statistical significance as a predictor of victimization in the regression analyses ($B = .222, p < .001$) must therefore be interpreted as a genuinely meaningful effect concentrated in the portion of the distribution where overaccommodation is elevated, rather than reflecting a uniformly distributed predictor.

4.7 Descriptive Statistics for Underaccommodation (Lack of Adjustment to Audience)

Table 4.7 presents item-level frequency distributions for Section V, which measured underaccommodation, the degree to which creators fail to adjust their communication in response to audience feedback, maintaining a rigid or disengaged style regardless of viewer expectations. SA = Strongly Agree; A = Agree; NS = Not Sure; DA = Disagree; SDA = Strongly Disagree. Frequency columns report the percentage of respondents (%) selecting each response category. Likert items rated 1-5 (1 = SDA, 5 = SA). Frequency items rated on a 1-5 scale (1 = Never, 5 = Always) (see Table 7 below).

Table 7

Descriptive Statistics for Underaccommodation

Item	SA (%)	A (%)	NS (%)	DA (%)	SDA (%)	Mean	SD
I ignore comments or feedback from my viewers	1.3	7.5	32.8	34.1	24.2	2.28	0.957
I rarely change the way I create content regardless of audience responses	1.1	12.4	33.1	34.9	18.5	2.42	0.963
I post videos without thinking about what my audience might want	1.1	10.2	29.6	34.9	24.2	2.29	0.979
I do not care much about fitting in with TikTok trends	3.2	19.1	37.1	32.0	8.6	2.76	0.963

Item	SA (%)	A (%)	NS (%)	DA (%)	SDA (%)	Mean	SD
I stick to my own presentation style no matter what others say	7.5	22.6	38.2	24.5	7.3	2.99	1.030
I avoid interacting with my audience after posting content	0.8	5.6	23.1	40.3	30.1	2.07	0.909
	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	never		
How often do you update your content style when engagement drops? (Freq.)	5.9	24.2	34.9	25.0	9.9	2.91	1.058
You often try new TikTok features have you tried this month? (Freq.)	3.8	13.7	36.0	33.9	12.6	2.62	0.994

The descriptive statistics for Section V reveal a similarly low endorsement pattern to Section IV, with Likert item means ranging from 2.07 to 2.99 across eight items. Underaccommodation, operationalized as ignoring audience feedback, resisting content change regardless of response, and disengaging from viewers after posting, is largely rejected by the majority of respondents as a description of their TikTok behavior. However, two items deviate meaningfully from this general pattern and deserve interpretive attention. The item 'I do not care much about fitting in with TikTok trends' ($M = 2.76$, $SA+A = 22.3\%$) also scored above the other underaccommodation items, reflecting a meaningful minority of respondents who explicitly distance themselves from trend-conformity. This item sits conceptually at the boundary between underaccommodation and divergence, capturing a form of communicative independence that may be motivated by values-based distinctiveness rather than audience disregard. The relatively higher standard deviation for this item

(SD = 0.963) reflects the genuine split in the sample between trend-engaged and trend-independent creators.

The frequency item 'How often do you update your content style when engagement drops?' ($M = 2.91$) scored closest to the neutral point of the section's frequency items, with 30.1% reporting that they often or always update their style in response to declining engagement. This response-to-failure update behavior is directionally opposite to underaccommodation and its moderately high endorsement is consistent with the low underaccommodation scores on the Likert items most creators do respond to engagement feedback, even if not always consistently. The item 'How many new TikTok features have you tried this month?' ($M = 2.62$) with 47.7% selecting DA or SDA suggests that feature adoption is itself heterogeneous: many creators do not systematically adopt new platform tools, which may reflect a preference for established content formats rather than active underaccommodation.

Taken together, the Section V statistics paint a picture of a creator population that is largely audience-responsive and engagement-aware, with underaccommodation concentrated in a minority of respondents. The non-significant underaccommodation-victimization relationship in the inferential analyses is consistent with this distributional picture: in a sample where most creators are not genuinely underaccommodating, there is limited variance to drive a significant predictive relationship.

4.8 Descriptive Statistics for Digital Resilience

Table 4.8 presents item-level frequency distributions for Section VI, which measured digital resilience, the capacity of content creators to remain emotionally

composed, recover effectively, and respond constructively when confronted with negative or hostile interactions on TikTok.

SA = Strongly Agree; A = Agree; NS = Not Sure; DA = Disagree; SDA = Strongly Disagree. Frequency columns report the percentage of respondents (%) selecting each response category. Likert items rated 1-5 (1 = SDA, 5 = SA). Frequency items rated on a 1-5 scale (1 = Never, 5 = Always) (see Table 8 below).

Table 8

Descriptive Statistics for Digital Resilience

Item	SA (%)	A (%)	NS (%)	DA (%)	SDA (%)	Mean	SD
I stay calm even when I receive negative or hurtful comments on TikTok	15.6	37.9	32.3	12.1	2.2	3.53	0.965
I am able to brush off online criticism without letting it affect my self-confidence	11.6	30.6	41.7	12.6	3.5	3.34	0.958
Before reacting to negative comments, I take time to think	17.5	36.3	32.5	12.6	1.1	3.56	0.955
I believe I can recover emotionally after being attacked online	20.4	36.6	30.4	11.3	1.3	3.63	0.973
I feel in control of how I respond to negative interactions on social media	16.1	34.7	35.2	12.4	1.6	3.51	0.957
	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	never		
How often do you talk to someone you trust when cyberbullied? (Freq.)	6.7	22.8	36.6	25.3	8.6	2.94	1.044
How often have you reported cyberbullying in the past 6 months? (Freq.)	0.8	3.5	19.9	40.1	35.8	1.94	0.874

The item-level statistics for digital resilience reveal a notably higher endorsement profile relative to the accommodation sections, with the five core Likert items producing means between 3.34 and 3.63 all clearly above the scale midpoint. This distribution indicates that the majority of respondents characterize themselves as moderately to well-resilient in the face of online negativity, possessing the emotional regulation, cognitive reflection, and recovery self-efficacy associated with digital resilience. The pattern is consistent with the theoretical expectation that university students, who typically have access to social support systems, peer networks, and campus counselling resources, would report higher average resilience than non-student youth populations (Papatraianou et al., 2014; Livingstone et al., 2019). The items 'Before reacting to negative comments, I take time to think' ($M = 3.56$, $SA+A = 53.8\%$) and 'I stay calm even when I receive negative or hurtful comments on TikTok' ($M = 3.53$, $SA+A = 53.5\%$) together indicate that the majority of respondents endorse reflective, emotionally-regulated responses to online hostility rather than reactive or impulsive responses. 'I feel in control of how I respond to negative interactions on social media' ($M = 3.51$, $SA+A = 50.8\%$) similarly reflects a moderate sense of response efficacy. These three items cluster closely together in mean and distribution, suggesting they capture a shared latent dimension of emotional regulation and response control that forms the core of the digital resilience construct in this population.

The two frequency items reveal a striking contrast. 'How often do you talk to someone you trust when cyberbullied?' ($M = 2.94$, $SA+A = 29.5\%$) indicates that help-seeking behavior is present but not the majority response, with 33.9% rarely or never

seeking social support after cyberbullying. This finding points to a gap between internal resilience capacity (high endorsement on emotional regulation items) and behavioral help-seeking (moderate to low endorsement on the support-seeking item), which has practical implications for intervention design programs may need to actively encourage help-seeking behaviors among resilient students who may feel capable of managing online hostility alone. Most striking is the cyberbullying reporting item: 'How many times in the past 6 months have you reported cyberbullying?' ($M = 1.94$, $DA+SDA = 75.9\%$) registered the second-lowest mean in the entire study. The overwhelming non-reporting finding is consistent with broader research on cyberbullying reporting behavior (Nee et al., 2023), where both low confidence in reporting mechanisms and concerns about escalation consistently suppress formal reporting rates.

In the Ugandan context, where digital regulatory frameworks remain nascent and platform trust may be lower (Solomon et al., 2024), this non-reporting pattern is particularly significant and reinforces the need for accessible, culturally trusted reporting channels. Together, the Section VI statistics describe a population with meaningful internal resilience resources but limited behavioral engagement with external protective systems.

4.9 Descriptive Statistics for Perceived Cyberbullying Victimization

Table 4.9 presents item-level frequency distributions for Section VII, which measured perceived cyberbullying victimization, the respondent's own subjective experience of having been targeted through hurtful comments, ridicule, personal attacks, emotional harm, or forced content withdrawal on TikTok.

SA = Strongly Agree; A = Agree; NS = Not Sure; DA = Disagree; SDA = Strongly Disagree. Frequency columns report the percentage of respondents (%) selecting each response category. Likert items rated 1-5 (1 = SDA, 5 = SA). Frequency items rated on a 1-5 scale (1 = Never, 5 = Always) (see Table 9 below).

Table 9

Descriptive Statistics for Perceived Cyberbullying Victimization

Item	SA (%)	A (%)	NS (%)	DA (%)	SDA (%)	Mean	SD
I have received hurtful comments on my videos	0.3	5.1	28.0	41.9	24.7	2.14	0.857
I have been ridiculed for how I look or talk in my videos	0.3	2.2	23.4	43.8	30.4	1.98	0.805
I have been attacked for the opinions I express	0.5	2.4	26.6	40.1	30.4	2.03	0.845
I often feel emotionally hurt by how people respond to my content	0.3	7.0	32.0	38.4	22.3	2.24	0.887
I have deleted my content to avoid negative feedback	0.0	1.9	20.7	43.3	34.1	1.90	0.784
	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	never		
In the past month, how often have you been insulted on TikTok? (Freq.)	0.0	2.2	21.5	45.7	30.6	1.95	0.778
How often have you receive aggressive messages in the past 3 months? (Freq.)	0.0	0.5	16.4	36.6	46.5	1.71	0.752

The item-level descriptive statistics for Section VII present the most concentrated low-endorsement pattern of all six sections, with all seven items producing means below 2.25 on the five-point scale. This distribution is consistent with population-level cyberbullying research globally, where severe or frequent victimization is experienced by a minority but non-trivial proportion of social media

users (Patchin & Hinduja, 2020; Zhu et al., 2021), while the majority report low or no victimization at any given time. The slight positive skew (Skew = 0.30 for the composite) and the moderate standard deviations (ranging from 0.752 to 0.887) confirm that the distribution is not uniform but contains a meaningful upper tail the minority of respondents reporting higher victimization levels who are theoretically most relevant for the study's hypotheses.

The item 'I often feel emotionally hurt by how people respond to my content' ($M = 2.24$) attracted the second-highest mean and the highest neutral rate of the Likert victimization items (32.0%), again consistent with a pattern where emotional impact the subjective, victim-felt dimension of cyberbullying is present at a moderate level across a sizable minority of respondents. The items capturing specific forms of attack, 'I have been ridiculed for how I look or talk in my videos' ($M = 1.98$) and 'I have been attacked for the opinions I express' ($M = 2.03$) both scored below 2.0 on their combined SA+A rates (2.5% and 2.9% respectively), suggesting that while appearance-based ridicule and opinion-based attacks occur, they are concentrated in a relatively small group of respondents. The two frequency items further illuminate the temporal and intensity dimensions of victimization. 'In the past month, how often have you been insulted on TikTok?' ($M = 1.95$, DA+SDA = 76.3%) indicates that recent, recurring insults are uncommon in the majority of the sample, though 23.7% selected NS or higher meaning roughly one in four respondents had experienced at least occasional recent insults.

The lowest-scoring item across the entire study was 'How many aggressive messages have you received in the past 3 months?' ($M = 1.71$, $SD = 0.752$), with 83.1%

reporting never or rarely receiving aggressive messages in private channels. This finding is theoretically important: it suggests that cyberbullying in this Ugandan TikTok creator sample predominantly takes the form of public comment-based hostility and emotional harm rather than direct private messaging aggression a platform-specific pattern consistent with TikTok's primarily public-facing comment architecture.

Taken together, the Section VII statistics confirm that perceived cyberbullying victimization in this population follows the expected right-skewed population distribution: most respondents report low to no victimization, a meaningful minority report moderate levels, and a smaller proportion report higher levels including emotional harm, targeted ridicule, and behavioral consequences such as content deletion. This distributional pattern, combined with the finding that 67.7% of respondents reported having experienced negative interactions on TikTok (Table 4.2), suggests that while overt, sustained cyberbullying is not the norm, milder forms of hostile audience behavior are relatively widespread. It is this spectrum of perceived victimization from occasional hurtful comments to sustained emotional harm that the regression analyses in Section 4.5 seek to explain through the lens of communicative accommodation strategies.

4.10 The relationship between communicative accommodation strategies and perceived cyberbullying victimization among university students.

To examine the bivariate relationships between communicative accommodation strategies and perceived cyberbullying victimization, and to provide preliminary evidence for hypotheses H1 through H4, a Pearson product-moment correlation matrix

was computed for all six composite scores. Table 4.4 presents the intercorrelation matrix with means and standard deviations. The correlations are discussed below in terms of their relevance to each research question.

Table 10

Pearson Correlation Matrix for Study Constructs (N = 372)

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Convergence	3.44	0.37	—	.088	.020	.039	.102*	-.026
2. Divergence	3.02	0.36	.088	—	.013	.023	-.062	.076
3. Overaccommodation	2.45	0.36	.020	.013	—	.012	-.021	.219***
4. Underaccommodation	2.59	0.34	.039	.023	.012	—	.142**	.049
5. Digital Resilience	3.22	0.36	.102*	-.062	-.021	.142**	—	-.093
6. Cyberbullying Victimization	2.00	0.63	-.026	.076	.219***	.049	-.093	—

Note. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$ (two-tailed). Convergence-Victimization: $r = -.026$, $p > .05$; Divergence-Victimization: $r = .076$, $p > .05$; Overaccommodation-Victimization: $r = .219$, $p < .001$; Underaccommodation-Victimization: $r = .049$, $p > .05$; Digital Resilience-Victimization: $r = -.093$, $p > .05$.

4.10.1 Research Question 1: Convergence and Cyberbullying Victimization

Research Question 1 asked whether there is a significant relationship between convergence in communicative behavior and perceived cyberbullying victimization among TikTok content creators. The Pearson correlation between convergence and victimization was $r = -.026$ ($p > .05$), suggesting a very small, negative, and non-

significant association. Hypothesis H1 predicted a significant negative relationship between convergence and victimization, positing that students who adapt their communication to audience expectations would experience lower levels of perceived cyberbullying. The data do not provide sufficient evidence to support H1.

4.10.2 Research Question 2: Divergence and Cyberbullying Victimization

Research Question 2 examined how divergent communicative behavior influences perceptions of cyberbullying victimization on TikTok. The correlation between divergence and victimization was $r = .076$ ($p > .05$), a small positive but non-significant association. Hypothesis H2 predicted a significant positive relationship of divergence on perceived victimization, implying that creators who maintain distinctive, non-conformist communication styles would be more exposed to hostile audience reactions. The data suggest directional but statistically insufficient support for H2 as such H2 was not supported. The positive direction of the correlation is theoretically interpretable: creators who use their own dialects or slang, refuse to follow trends, and express unconventional viewpoints may attract critical or hostile responses from audiences who value conformity and platform norms (Abidin, 2021).

4.10.3 Research Question 3: Overaccommodation and Cyberbullying Victimization.

Research Question 3 asked about the relationship between overaccommodative communication and perceived cyberbullying victimization among university TikTok users. The Pearson correlation between overaccommodation and victimization was $r = .219$ ($p < .001$), representing a statistically significant, moderate positive association. This is the strongest and most consistent finding in the correlation matrix. Hypothesis H3 predicted a significant positive relationship between

overaccommodation and victimization, and the data indicate strong support for H3. Creators who score higher on overaccommodation characterized by exaggerating reactions to appeal to audiences, trying too hard to fit into viral challenges, feeling inauthentic in their content, using popular effects inappropriately, or forcing artificial excitement report significantly higher levels of perceived cyberbullying victimization.

4.10.4 Research Question 4: Underaccommodation and Cyberbullying

Victimization.

Research Question 4 examined the extent to which underaccommodative communication predicts perceived cyberbullying victimization among TikTok content creators. The correlation between underaccommodation and victimization was $r = .049$ ($p > .05$), a very small, positive, and non-significant association. Hypothesis H4 predicted that underaccommodation would be a significant positive predictor of victimization. The data do not provide statistically significant support for H4 at the bivariate level. So, the hypothesis is rejected. While the directional trend is as theoretically anticipated creators who ignore audience feedback, rarely adapt their content style, and avoid engagement after posting tend to report marginally higher victimization, the effect size is negligible and the confidence interval spans zero. The absence of a significant effect may reflect the multi-faceted nature of underaccommodation in digital contexts. Unlike face-to-face settings where communicative rigidity is immediately visible to interlocutors (Zhang & Giles, 2018), on TikTok, underaccommodation may be less perceptible to audiences since content is distributed asynchronously and without direct interaction signals. An underaccommodating creator who posts without adapting to audience preferences may

simply receive lower engagement or fewer followers rather than active hostility. Indeed, underaccommodation may be more likely to result in benign neglect than in targeted cyberbullying, particularly if the content does not attract sufficiently large audiences to mobilize collective negative reactions. The regression analyses in the next section will probe whether underaccommodation contributes unique variance in victimization when other predictors are controlled, providing a more precise test of H4.

4.11 Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analysis: Testing H1-H4

To test the predictive relationships between communicative accommodation strategies and perceived cyberbullying victimization while controlling for demographic variables, a two-block hierarchical multiple regression analysis was conducted with victimization composite scores as the dependent variable. Block 1 entered demographic control variables: university affiliation (dummy-coded: 0 = Makerere, 1 = UCU), gender (dummy-coded: 0 = Male, 1 = Female), academic year (standardized), and posting frequency (standardized). Block 2 entered the four accommodation composites: convergence, divergence, overaccommodation, and underaccommodation (all standardized). Residual plots, Durbin-Watson statistics, and VIF values were inspected to verify that regression assumptions were met. The Durbin-Watson statistic for the full model was 1.94, within the acceptable range of 1.5-2.5 indicating no systematic autocorrelation. All VIF values fell below 2.0, predicting the absence of problematic multicollinearity. Residual plots showed no systematic patterns, supporting the assumptions of linearity and homoscedasticity. Table 4.5 summarizes the regression results for both blocks.

Table 11*Hierarchical Multiple Regression Predicting Cyberbullying Victimization (N = 372)*

Predictor	Block 1 B	Block 2 B	SE	t	p	95% CI
University (0=Makerere, 1=UCU)	.143	.142	.127	1.12	.262	[-.108, .392]
Gender (0=Male, 1=Female)	-.042	-.047	.103	-0.46	.649	[-.249, .155]
Academic Year	.029	.031	.051	0.61	.541	[-.069, .131]
Posting Frequency	-.041	-.042	.051	-0.82	.415	[-.142, .058]
Convergence	—	-.035	.051	-0.68	.497	[-.135, .065]
Divergence	—	.079	.051	1.53	.126	[-.022, .180]
Overaccommodation	—	.222	.051	4.35	< .001***	[.122, .322]
Underaccommodation	—	.046	.051	0.91	.365	[-.054, .146]
R ²	.005	.064				
ΔR ²		.058				
F	.485	3.077			< .01	

Note. Standardized B coefficients reported for all predictors. *** $p < .001$. Block 1: $R^2 = .005$, $F(4, 367) = 0.485$, $p = .747$. Block 2: $R^2 = .064$, $F(8, 363) = 3.077$, $p = .002$. $\Delta R^2 = .058$, $\Delta F(4, 363) = 5.630$, $p < .001$. Cohen's f^2 (full model) = .068, indicating a small-to-medium effect size.

4.11.1 Block 1: Demographic Controls.

Block 1, which included university affiliation, gender, academic year, and posting frequency as control variables, explained a negligible proportion of variance in cyberbullying victimization ($R^2 = .005$, $F(4, 367) = 0.485$, $p = .747$). None of the demographic predictors reached statistical significance. The non-significant contribution of demographic variables as a block indicates that cyberbullying

victimization among university TikTok creators in this sample is not systematically differentiated by institutional affiliation, gender, year of study, or content posting frequency. This is a substantively meaningful finding in itself, suggesting that vulnerability to cyberbullying on TikTok cuts across demographic groups rather than being concentrated in particular student subpopulations a pattern consistent with recent large-scale meta-analyses indicating that cyberbullying victimization shows weak and inconsistent demographic predictors when confounding variables are controlled (Kowalski et al., 2014; Zhu et al., 2021).

4.11.2 Block 2: Accommodation Strategies as Predictors.

The addition of the four accommodation strategy composites in Block 2 produced a statistically significant improvement in model fit ($\Delta R^2 = .058$, $\Delta F(4, 363) = 5.630$, $p < .001$), with the full model explaining 6.4% of the variance in cyberbullying victimization ($R^2 = .064$, $F(8, 363) = 3.077$, $p = .002$). Cohen's f^2 for the accommodation block increment was .062, indicating a small but meaningful effect size. While the overall variance explained is modest as is typical in survey-based studies of complex psychosocial phenomena the statistical significance of the model and the clear, theoretically consistent pattern of beta coefficients provide meaningful support for the role of communicative accommodation in shaping victimization experiences.

Overaccommodation was the sole accommodation strategy that reached statistical significance as an independent predictor of cyberbullying victimization ($\beta = .222$, $SE = .051$, $t = 4.35$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [.122, .322]). A one standard deviation increase in overaccommodation scores was associated with a .222 standard deviation

increase in victimization scores, after controlling for demographics and all other accommodation strategies. This finding provides strong, regression-predicted support for Hypothesis H3 and identifies overaccommodation as the principal communicative mechanism linking accommodation behavior to perceived victimization in this sample.

Divergence showed a positive but non-significant trend ($\beta = .079$, $p = .126$), consistent with the directional prediction of H2 but failing to reach the threshold of statistical significance. Underaccommodation similarly exhibited a non-significant positive association with victimization ($\beta = .046$, $p = .365$), insufficient to support H4. Convergence remained negatively but non-significantly associated with victimization ($\beta = -.035$, $p = .497$), failing to support the significant negative relationship predicted by H1. The failure of convergence, divergence, and underaccommodation to emerge as significant predictors in the regression model, even after controlling for demographic variables, reinforces the specificity of overaccommodation as the most consequential accommodation strategy in this context.

4.12 Digital Resilience as Moderator

Research Question 5 asked how digital resilience moderates the relationship between communicative accommodation strategies and perceived cyberbullying victimization. Hypothesis H5 predicted that digital resilience would significantly moderate these relationships. To test this, four separate moderated regression models were estimated one per accommodation strategy using mean-centered predictors and the Hayes PROCESS macro-Model 1 framework with 5,000 bootstrapped samples. In each model, victimization was the dependent variable (Y), an accommodation composite was the focal predictor (X), digital resilience was the moderator (W), and an interaction

term ($X \times W$) was included alongside demographic controls. Table 4.6 summarizes the moderation results.

Table 12

Moderation Analysis: Digital Resilience as Moderator of Accommodation-Victimization Relationships (N = 372)

Model ($X \rightarrow Y$)	b (main effect X)	b (W)	b ($X \times W$ interaction)	SE	t	p	R ²
Convergence $\rightarrow$ Victimization (W=Resilience)	-.031	-.101	.171	.052	3.29	.001**	.037
Divergence $\rightarrow$ Victimization (W=Resilience)	.078	-.094	.008	.051	0.16	.873	.014
Overaccommodation $\rightarrow$ Victimization (W=Resilience)	.218	-.101	-.047	.054	-0.87	.386	.058
Underaccommodation $\rightarrow$ Victimization (W=Resilience)	.047	-.096	.062	.050	1.24	.214	.017

Note. All continuous variables mean-centered prior to interaction term creation. W = Digital Resilience composite. b = unstandardized regression coefficient for interaction term. Bootstrapped 95% CI used for interaction coefficients. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

4.12.1 Convergence $\times$ Digital Resilience Interaction.

The interaction between convergence and digital resilience was statistically significant ($b = .171$, $SE = .052$, $t = 3.29$, $p = .001$, $R^2 = .037$). This is a noteworthy and theoretically intriguing finding: digital resilience moderates the relationship between

convergence and victimization, albeit in a pattern that warrants careful interpretation. The positive sign of the interaction coefficient indicates that the positive relationship between convergence and victimization becomes more pronounced at higher levels of digital resilience. This counter-intuitive finding may reflect a suppressor dynamic: highly resilient TikTok creators who actively engage in convergent behaviors adopting trends, adjusting to audience feedback, aligning with platform norms may be those who are most visible and most engaged on the platform, thereby increasing their exposure to both positive engagement and hostile commentary.

Nevertheless, the statistically significant interaction provides partial empirical support for H5, insofar as digital resilience does moderate at least one accommodation-victimization relationship, even if the directionality is more complex than originally hypothesized.

4.12.2 Divergence, Overaccommodation, and Underaccommodation Interactions.

The interaction terms for divergence $\times$ digital resilience ($b = .008$, $p = .873$), overaccommodation $\times$ digital resilience ($b = -.047$, $p = .386$), and underaccommodation $\times$ digital resilience ($b = .062$, $p = .214$) were all non-significant. For the overaccommodation model, the negative interaction coefficient suggests a buffering direction – high digital resilience is associated with a weaker positive relationship between overaccommodation and victimization consistent with the hypothesis that resilience protects against the victimization consequences of excessive accommodation. However, this buffering effect did not reach statistical significance in the present sample. To further probe the overaccommodation-victimization relationship across

resilience levels, simple slopes were estimated at three conditional values of digital resilience: -1 SD (low resilience), Mean (moderate resilience), and +1 SD (high resilience). Table 4.7 presents the simple slopes analysis.

Table 13

Simple Slopes: Overaccommodation → Victimization at Three Levels of Digital Resilience

Level of Digital Resilience	B slope (Overacc → Vict)	SE	T	p	Interpretation
Low (-1 SD)	.265	.075	3.55	< .001***	Strong positive relationship
Mean	.218	.051	4.31	< .001***	Moderate positive relationship
High (+1 SD)	.171	.074	2.31	.022*	Weaker but still positive

Note. Simple slopes estimated at -1 SD, Mean, and +1 SD of digital resilience. All slopes are statistically significant, indicating that overaccommodation predicts victimization at all resilience levels. The decreasing slope across levels is consistent with a buffering pattern, though the interaction term in the moderation model was non-significant ($p = .386$), suggesting the slope differences are not statistically distinguishable from chance.

The simple slopes analysis reveals an important pattern: overaccommodation predicts victimization significantly at all three levels of digital resilience (low, mean,

and high). The magnitude of the slope decreases from .265 at low resilience to .171 at high resilience, suggesting a trend toward buffering creators with high digital resilience experience a weaker association between overaccommodation and victimization compared to those with low resilience. However, because the interaction term in the moderation model was non-significant, this pattern of slope differences should be interpreted with caution and regarded as a hypothesis-generating finding rather than a predicted moderating effect.

These findings partially support Hypothesis H5. Digital resilience does moderate the convergence-victimization relationship significantly and shows a trend toward buffering the overaccommodation-victimization relationship.

4.13 Supplementary Group Difference Tests

4.13.1 Gender Differences in Cyberbullying Victimization.

An independent samples t-test was conducted to examine whether male and female TikTok content creators differed in their levels of perceived cyberbullying victimization. The Levene's Test for Equality of Variances was non-significant ($F = 0.14$, $p = .709$), indicating that equal variances could be assumed. The t-test revealed no statistically significant gender difference in victimization scores (Male: $M = 2.02$, $SD = 0.65$; Female: $M = 1.98$, $SD = 0.62$; $t(370) = 0.74$, $p = .463$, $d = 0.077$). The effect size (Cohen's $d = 0.077$) was trivially small, falling well below the threshold for a small effect ($d = .20$).

4.13.2 Academic Year Differences in Cyberbullying Victimization.

A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to examine whether victimization scores differed across academic year groups (Year 1 through Year 4).

Levene's test indicated non-significant variance heterogeneity ($F = 0.32, p = .810$), supporting the assumption of homogeneity of variance. The ANOVA yielded a non-significant result ($F(3, 368) = 0.678, p = .566$), indicating no statistically significant differences in perceived cyberbullying victimization across the four academic years. Mean victimization scores were notably similar: Year 1 ($M = 2.05$), Year 2 ($M = 1.93$), Year 3 ($M = 2.00$), and Year 4 ($M = 2.04$). The small and non-significant eta-squared ($\eta^2 = .005$) reflects negligible variance attributable to academic year.

This finding suggests that the relationship between TikTok content creation and exposure to cyberbullying does not intensify or diminish in a systematic, linear fashion as students' progress through university. One might hypothesize that Year 1 students, newer to the university environment and potentially naiver in platform navigation, would report higher victimization, or conversely that Year 3 and Year 4 students, with greater content creation experience, would be more adept at managing online hostility. The null result indicates that neither of these trajectories operates in a statistically discernible way in this sample, reinforcing the conclusion from the regression analysis that cyberbullying victimization among university TikTok creators is driven more by communicative behaviors than by stage-of-study characteristics. Post-hoc Tukey HSD tests were not conducted given the non-significant omnibus ANOVA result.

4.13.3 Association Between Posting Frequency and Negative Interactions.

A Pearson chi-square test of independence was conducted to examine whether posting frequency (Daily, Weekly, Monthly, Rarely) was significantly associated with having experienced negative interactions on TikTok (Yes/No). The chi-square analysis yielded a non-significant result ($\chi^2(3) = 3.667, p = .300$, Cramer's $V = .099$). Expected

cell frequencies exceeded 5 in all cells, predicting the validity of the chi-square statistic. The small and non-significant Cramer's V indicates that the frequency of content posting is not reliably associated with the likelihood of encountering negative interactions, at least as measured by a simple binary indicator.

This result challenges an intuitive expectation that more frequent content creators, by virtue of greater platform exposure and more opportunities for audience interaction, would be more likely to experience hostile encounters. A number of explanations may account for the null finding. First, the binary operationalization of negative interactions (Yes/No) lacks sensitivity to the frequency and severity of incidents, potentially masking dose-response relationships between posting frequency and victimization intensity. Second, the most frequent creators may also develop greater platform literacy and deploying strategies such as comment filtering, account privacy settings, and selective community engagement that buffer against negative interactions (Nee et al., 2023).

4. 10 Chapter Summary

This chapter presented a comprehensive empirical analysis of the relationship between communicative accommodation strategies and perceived cyberbullying victimization among 372 university TikTok content creators in Uganda. In summary, the evidence supports H3 (overaccommodation → victimization) with strong and consistent statistical support, provides partial support for H5 (digital resilience as moderator), and yields insufficient evidence to confirm H1 (convergence), H2 (divergence), or H4 (underaccommodation) as significant predictors of cyberbullying victimization in this sample.

Chapter Five

Discussion

5.1 Introduction

This chapter synthesizes the empirical findings reported in Chapter Four within the broader landscape of communication theory and cyberbullying scholarship. The overarching purpose of this study was to analyze how communicative accommodation strategies as conceptualized within Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) influence perceived cyberbullying victimization among university students who create content on TikTok in Uganda. Five specific objectives guided the inquiry: to assess the relationship between convergence and victimization; to examine the influence of divergent communication; to analyze the link between overaccommodation and victimization; to evaluate the predictive role of underaccommodation; and to investigate the moderating function of digital resilience in the accommodation-victimization relationship. These objectives were operationalized through five research questions and five corresponding hypotheses, tested across a stratified sample of 372 undergraduate TikTok content creators drawn from Makerere University and Uganda Christian University Mukono. Chapter Five proceeds as follows. Section 5.2 provides an extended discussion of each major result, situating results in relation to the literature review. Section 5.3 addresses the theoretical, practical, and policy implications of the results. Section 5.4 offers a critique of the study's methodological and conceptual limitations. Section 5.5 proposes concrete directions for future research. Section 5.6 provides a concluding synthesis that reflects on the study's

contribution to knowledge at the intersection of communication theory, digital media studies, and cyberbullying research in the African context

5.2 Discussion of the results

5.2.1 Overaccommodation as a Distinctive Risk Factor for Cyberbullying Victimization.

The most theoretically significant result of this study is the statistically significant, moderate positive association between overaccommodation and perceived cyberbullying victimization, predicted at both the bivariate level ($r = .219$, $p < .001$) and in the hierarchical regression model ($\beta = .222$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [.122, .322]). This result is novel within the CAT literature, which has traditionally emphasized convergence and divergence as the primary predictors of social outcomes, while treating overaccommodation as a secondary, context-specific phenomenon (Giles, 2016; Giles et al., 1991). The present study elevates overaccommodation to the center of the theoretical frame by suggesting that it is not simply a stylistic excess but a meaningfully consequential communicative behavior that predicts vulnerability to online hostility in a performative digital environment. In TikTok's hyper-performative environment, authenticity is a valued commodity (Vaterlaus & Winter, 2021); audiences are adept at identifying and penalizing content they perceive as manufactured, disingenuous, or attention-seeking. The present finding suggests that when creators engage in overaccommodative behaviors in pursuit of visibility or approval, they may paradoxically increase their vulnerability to hostile audience reactions, including mocking, ridicule, and sustained cyberbullying.

The theoretical mechanism can be understood through the convergence of three conceptual frameworks. First, within CAT itself, overaccommodation represents a misalignment between the communicator's adaptation and the social expectations of the audience: the accommodator overshoots the socially desirable level of adjustment, producing behaviors perceived as patronizing, sycophantic, or artificial (Giles et al., 1991; Zhang & Giles, 2018). This communicative mismatch violates what Goffman (1959) described as the presentation norms of social performance, triggering negative attributions from audiences who interpret the excess as evidence of insecurity, inauthenticity, or manipulative intent. Second, digital self-presentation research emphasizes that authenticity is a core value in social media consumption, particularly among younger audiences (Fox & Vendemia, 2016; Vaterlaus & Winter, 2021). On TikTok, where audience members rapidly develop sophisticated heuristics for distinguishing genuine creativity from imitative performance, overaccommodative behaviors forced enthusiasm, exaggerated reactions, use of trending effects that do not fit the creator's identity are readily identified as performative failures, and may attract mockery, ridicule, and sustained cyberbullying as social sanctions against perceived inauthenticity. Third, cyberbullying literature consistently identifies social norm violations as antecedents of online aggression: when users deviate from community expectations whether by behaving too differently or, as the present results suggests, by trying too hard to conform they may attract coordinated negative responses from audiences who experience the violation as irritating or threatening to the perceived integrity of platform culture (Kowalski et al., 2014; Slonje et al., 2013).

This result extends and enriches existing literature in several important ways. Abidin (2021) argued that TikTok's participatory culture rewards authenticity and penalizes obvious attempts at trend-chasing, a pattern echoed in Williams et al.'s (2022) finding that content creators perceived as inauthentic by their audiences were more likely to report sustained online cyberbullying. The present study advances these observations by providing systematic quantitative evidence that overaccommodation as measured through standardized Likert items capturing exaggerated reactions, forced enthusiasm, artificial fitting-in, and inauthentic mimicry predicts self-reported cyberbullying victimization in a controlled regression framework. The results also consistent with Mukasa and Otim's (2021) study, which found that specific communication behaviors influenced cyberbullying distress among Ugandan TikTok users, and provides the theoretical specification that was missing from their exploratory analysis, it is specifically the overaccommodative dimension of communication that carries the most risk.

The cultural specificity of this result deserves particular emphasis. In Uganda's sociocultural environment characterized by communal values, relational politeness, and social norms around respectful, contextually appropriate self-presentation overaccommodative behaviors may attract particularly sharp social penalties. Communicative excess that reads as performative or manipulative may be coded within Ugandan cultural frames not merely as aesthetically unpleasant, but as socially dishonest, a violation of the communal expectation of genuine interpersonal exchange (Ntuli, 2012). This cultural amplification of the social sanctions for inauthenticity may partially explain the strength of the overaccommodation-victimization association in

this sample and suggests that CAT's predictions about overaccommodation may require cultural calibration in non-Western contexts (Zhang & Giles, 2018).

5.2.2 Convergence and Cyberbullying Victimization.

Contrary to Hypothesis H1, convergence in communicative behavior was not significantly associated with perceived cyberbullying victimization ($r = -.026$, $p = .618$; $\beta = -.035$, $p = .497$). The expected negative relationship that audience-responsive, trend-aligned communication would buffer against cyberbullying was not supported. This null result challenges conventional wisdom of a straightforward extension of CAT's core convergence hypothesis into the digital performative context of TikTok and warrants careful theoretical engagement.

While the direction of the correlation is consistent with the theoretical prediction convergence is negatively, albeit weakly, associated with victimization the effect is negligible and the confidence interval spans zero, suggesting no reliable linear association. The results diverge from the general theoretical expectation within CAT that convergence, by signaling social approval-seeking and communicative attunement, would be rewarded with more positive audience responses (Giles, 2016). Several explanations are worth considering. First, in the performative, algorithm-driven environment of TikTok, convergent behaviors such as adopting trending sounds, mimicking popular formats, or tailoring content to audience preferences may be so ubiquitous as to become normatively expected rather than socially rewarding. When convergence is the default, it may confer no meaningful protection against cyberbullying. It is possible that perceived convergence is too proximal a variable and that its downstream effects on audience reception are mediated by factors such as

authenticity perception, follower size, or content quality none of which are captured in the present study. Xu and Zhang (2023) note that in digital contexts, accommodation strategies may fail to produce the interpersonal benefits observed in face-to-face settings because of the absence of real-time feedback cues. the cross-sectional, self-report design may limit the precision with which students characterize their own convergence behaviors, particularly given the performative and often unconscious nature of stylistic adaptation on social platforms (Baym, 2015).

The absence of a significant convergence effect may reflect several interrelated dynamics. First, convergence may represent a necessary but not sufficient condition for social acceptance on TikTok: in an environment where algorithmic promotion rewards engagement and trend participation, convergent communication may be so normatively expected and pervasively practiced that it ceases to function as a meaningful social differentiator (Baym, 2015; Li et al., 2024). When virtually all active creators engage in some level of audience-responsive adaptation adjusting content topics, aligning with platform trends, using trending sounds and formats, convergence loses its capacity to signal social approval-seeking in ways that yield protective social returns. This is what Xu and Zhang (2023) have described as the accommodation saturation problem in digital environments: where accommodation norms are universal, individual variation in convergence has diminishing marginal social effects.

Second, the present result may reflect a theoretical limitation in applying CAT's dyadic, face-to-face convergence framework to the asynchronous, mass-audience context of TikTok. In the original CAT framework, convergence operates within

bilateral interactions where both parties can observe and respond to each other's accommodative behaviors in real-time (Giles et al., 1991). On TikTok, creators broadcast to diffuse, heterogeneous, and largely anonymous audiences with whom they have no ongoing reciprocal relationship. The social signaling function of convergence which in face-to-face settings communicates social approval, group membership, and interactional harmony may operate very differently in this audience-performer structure, where the creator's convergent behaviors reach thousands of viewers who may interpret them through radically different frames and who have no social cost in responding negatively regardless of the creator's accommodative effort.

Third, the result for convergence is consistent with a growing body of literature suggesting that the psychological benefits of social media conformity are more complex and contingent than simple accommodation models would predict. Stahl and Literat (2022), in their study of Gen Z TikTok identity practices, found that creators oscillate between conformist and distinctive communicative strategies in ways that are context-sensitive and audience-specific, with neither pure convergence nor pure divergence reliably predicting audience approval. The present null result contributes empirical weight to this view and suggests that future CAT-informed research on digital platforms should resist treating convergence as a uniformly protective strategy.

5.2.3 Divergence and Cyberbullying Victimization:

Hypothesis H2 predicted that divergent communicative behavior would significantly influence perceived cyberbullying victimization. While the directional

pattern was as predicted divergence showed a small positive correlation with victimization ($r = .076$, $p = .141$; $B = .079$, $p = .126$) the association did not reach statistical significance. This non-significant result has both statistical and theoretical dimensions that merit discussion. Statistically, the correlation of .076 represents a small effect that would require a substantially larger sample (approximately $N = 750$ at $\alpha = .05$, $B = .80$, one-tailed) to detect reliably. It is therefore possible that a genuine, albeit small, positive relationship between divergence and victimization exists in the population but could not be predicted with adequate power in the present study of $N = 372$. Future research with larger samples should revisit this hypothesis before concluding that divergence has no effect.

Theoretically, the divergence-victimization relationship is likely to be heterogeneous rather than uniform, and this heterogeneity may attenuate the overall correlation. CAT distinguishes between different motivations for divergence: creators may maintain distinct communicative styles as an expression of positive cultural identity (Simard et al., 1976), as a deliberate marketing strategy to differentiate themselves in a crowded platform, or as an expression of genuine indifference to audience norms. These motivationally distinct forms of divergence likely have very different social consequences. Identity-assertive divergence by creators whose cultural distinctiveness is appreciated by loyal niche audiences may attract little hostility and considerable support, while adversarial or provocative divergence content that explicitly challenges or mocks platform norms or popular creators may attract more sustained negative reactions (Abidin, 2021). The present Likert scale, by aggregating across these divergence motivations, may obscure the meaningful

variance in outcomes. More fine-grained measurement of divergence subtypes in future research would allow this hypothesis to be tested with greater theoretical precision.

The Ugandan cultural context also introduces specific interpretive complexities for divergence effects. As noted by Semujju (2024), Ugandan TikTok creators operate within a precarious creative economy where originality is valued but cultural and political boundaries of acceptable self-expression are tightly policed, both by social norms and by legal and regulatory frameworks. Divergence that crosses these cultural or political boundaries expressing unpopular opinions, challenging traditional values, or adopting styles associated with foreign or marginalized identities may attract more severe negative reactions in Uganda than in Western contexts where greater pluralism of expression is tolerated.

The non-significance of divergence in the present study may therefore reflect not a genuine absence of effect, but rather a sample-specific pattern in which the range of divergent behaviors practiced by Ugandan university students falls within relatively socially tolerated limits, failing to trigger the hostile reactions that more extreme divergence might provoke.

5.2.4 Underaccommodation and Cyberbullying Victimization.

Hypothesis H4 predicted that underaccommodation would be a significant predictor of cyberbullying victimization. This hypothesis was not supported: the bivariate correlation was $r = .049$ ($p = .345$), and the standardized regression coefficient was $\beta = .046$ ($p = .365$), both negligible and statistically non-significant.

This result challenges a theoretically intuitive prediction and requires careful interpretation.

Within CAT's original framework, underaccommodation is characterized by failure to adapt to the interlocutor's communicative needs, rigid maintenance of one's own communication style, and disregard for audience feedback is associated with perceived social distance, communicative incompetence, and interactional frustration (Giles, 2016). In face-to-face contexts, underaccommodating interlocutors tend to be evaluated negatively and may become targets of communicative exclusion or hostility. However, the digital, asynchronous, broadcast structure of TikTok fundamentally alters the interactional dynamics through which underaccommodation produces social consequences.

On TikTok, an underaccommodating creator who consistently ignores audience feedback, maintains a rigid posting style regardless of engagement trends, and avoids post-posting interaction may simply be rewarded with declining visibility rather than active hostility. The platform's algorithmic architecture penalizes low engagement by reducing content distribution, effectively making underaccommodating creators less visible to potential harassers. This is a crucial mechanism: cyberbullying on TikTok typically requires a minimum threshold of audience visibility and engagement to gather the collective attention needed for coordinated cyberbullying (Weimann & Masri, 2020). Creators whose content receives minimal algorithmic promotion a likely consequence of underaccommodation may therefore be protected from cyberbullying not because their communicative style is positively received but because they remain below the visibility threshold at which cyberbullying becomes socially organized.

This interpretation suggests that underaccommodation may operate through a fundamentally different pathway to victimization than overaccommodation, where overaccommodation attracts negative attention through highly visible, audience-reactive performance, underaccommodation reduces exposure to negative attention through low-visibility, non-reactive communication. The two strategies represent opposite ends of an accommodation spectrum but may produce convergent outcomes in terms of victimization neither attracting the level of hostile audience mobilization characteristic of the intermediate but excessive accommodation captured by overaccommodation. This non-linear relationship between accommodation level and victimization with maximum risk at the excessive (overaccommodation) pole is a theoretically novel result that has implications for future refinements of CAT in digital communication contexts.

These results carry important theoretical implications. They suggest that within the competitive, authenticity-sensitive environment of TikTok, it is not the absence of adaptation (underaccommodation) nor the maintenance of distinctiveness (divergence) that most reliably predicts victimization, but rather the performance of excessive, inauthentic, or misaligned accommodation. This aligns with Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical framework as applied to digital self-presentation by Fox and Vendemia (2016) which holds that audiences are skilled at detecting and penalizing incongruent or over-performed self-presentations. On a platform where authenticity is a core value and social norms reward genuine creativity (Vaterlaus & Winter, 2021), overaccommodation appears to be a distinctive risk factor for hostile audience reactions.

5.2.5 Digital Resilience as a Moderator.

Hypothesis H5 predicted that digital resilience would significantly moderate the relationship between communicative accommodation strategies and perceived cyberbullying victimization. The moderation analysis provided partial and nuanced support for this hypothesis. Digital resilience significantly moderated the convergence-victimization relationship ($b = .171$, $p = .001$), though in a counter-intuitive positive direction, and showed a non-significant trend toward buffering the overaccommodation-victimization relationship. No significant moderation was detected for the divergence-underaccommodation models.

The positive interaction coefficient indicates that among creators with high digital resilience, the association between convergence and victimization is stronger (more positive) than among creators with low resilience. Several non-exclusive explanations can account for this pattern. The most parsimonious is an exposure model: highly resilient creators who engage in active, audience-oriented, convergent communication are more likely to be prolific and visible content creators, attracting both larger and more diverse audiences. Greater audience size and diversity necessarily increase the probability of encountering hostile viewers, as both the absolute number of negative interactions and their perceived frequency increase with platform visibility regardless of the communication style employed (Reynolds et al., 2019). In this reading, digital resilience enables rather than prevents victimization exposure by sustaining platform engagement despite the costs of cyberbullying

victimization – resilient creators stay active and visible, while less resilient peers may withdraw, effectively reducing their exposure.

An alternative interpretation involves differential self-reporting: highly resilient creators may have more sophisticated awareness of the nature and frequency of negative interactions on their content, and may therefore be more accurate and comprehensive in reporting victimization, while less resilient creators who may employ avoidance coping strategies including denial of the significance of hostile comments may underreport victimization in ways that artificially attenuate the convergence-victimization correlation in the low-resilience group. This measurement artifact interpretation is consistent with the coping literature, which suggests that resilient individuals tend to engage with and process adversity more directly, while less resilient individuals employ more avoidant strategies (Livingstone et al., 2019; Papatraianou et al., 2014).

The trend-level buffering pattern for the overaccommodation-victimization relationship where the slope decreases from $\beta = .265$ at low resilience to $\beta = .171$ at high resilience is more consistent with the original hypothesis and with prior empirical evidence. Mukasa and Otim (2021) found that Ugandan TikTok users who employed emotional regulation and digital coping strategies reported lower cyberbullying distress, and Livingstone et al. (2019) identified digital resilience as a moderator of the harm resulting from online risk exposure in adolescents. The present trend suggests a protective function for digital resilience that would be confirmable with greater statistical power. The fact that the overaccommodation-victimization relationship remains significant even at high resilience levels ($\beta = .171$, $p = .022$ at +1

SD resilience) indicates that resilience provides partial rather than complete protection. it attenuates but does not eliminate the risk associated with overaccommodative communication.

The findings are consistent with the theoretical proposition that psychological resources for navigating online adversity can reduce vulnerability to cyberbullying (Livingstone et al., 2019; Mukasa & Otim, 2021; Papatraianou et al., 2014). The non-significant interaction for overaccommodation, divergence, and underaccommodation may reflect limited statistical power for detecting small interaction effects, which are typically substantially smaller than main effects in regression models (McClelland & Judd, 1993). A larger sample may be required to detect the hypothesized buffering effects across all four accommodation strategies with adequate power.

Conclusively, the findings imply that digital resilience-building programs alone are insufficient to protect overaccommodating creators from victimization, and that intervention must also address the communicative behaviors themselves.

5.2.6 Demographics and Their Substantive Significance.

The supplementary analyses found no significant gender differences in victimization scores ($t(370) = 0.74$, $p = .463$, $d = .077$), no academic year differences ($F(3, 368) = 0.678$, $p = .566$, $\eta^2 = .005$), and no significant association between posting frequency and negative interaction experience ($\chi^2(3) = 3.667$, $p = .300$, Cramer's $V = .099$). These results, taken together, represent a substantively meaningful pattern: perceived cyberbullying victimization among university TikTok creators in Uganda

appears to be driven primarily by communicative behaviors rather than demographic characteristics or platform usage intensity.

The non-significant gender result is particularly noteworthy given the volume of prior literature documenting differential cyberbullying experiences by gender (Kapidzic & Herring, 2014; Sengül, 2024). The absence of gender differences in the present study may reflect several factors. TikTok's content discovery algorithm exposes creators of all genders to comparable levels of anonymous, unsolicited audience interaction, unlike platforms where gender-specific content channels channel cyberbullying toward female users in particular. Additionally, in Uganda's university context, male creators who engage in visible, performative content creation may face culturally specific cyberbullying related to masculinity norms and social expectations, partially equalizing victimization exposure across genders.

The results call for future research that examines not simply whether victimization rates differ by gender but whether the types, forms, and psychological impacts of cyberbullying differ in gender-specific ways, as the present binary measure of victimization frequency may obscure important qualitative differences.

The absence of academic year effects challenges the intuitive expectation that student progression through university bringing increasing social media sophistication, expanded peer networks, and greater content creation experience would systematically modify victimization risk. The essentially flat means across all four years (ranging from $M = 1.93$ to $M = 2.05$) suggest that neither platform naivety among first-year students, nor heightened visibility among final-year students creates systematically different victimization profiles. These results reinforce the primacy of

communicative behaviors over developmental or experiential factors as determinants of victimization and is consistent with the study's core theoretical argument that it is what you do communicatively, not who you are demographically or how long you have been on the platform, that most meaningfully shapes vulnerability to online hostility.

Chapter Six

Conclusions and Recommendations

6.3 Implications of the Study

6.3.1 Theoretical Implications.

This study makes several contributions to the theoretical development of Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) and to the broader theoretical ecology within which it operates.

First, and most significantly, the study provides the first systematic empirical test of CAT's four major accommodation strategies convergence, divergence, overaccommodation, and underaccommodation in relation to cyberbullying victimization in a digital, performative, youth-centric platform context. By doing so, it suggests that CAT has genuine explanatory power beyond its original face-to-face and dyadic applications. Previous digital extensions of CAT have been largely theoretical (Xu & Zhang, 2023) or limited to text-based platforms (Danescu-Niculescu-Mizil et al., 2011). The present study's adaptation of CAT to TikTok's multimodal, asynchronous, mass-audience structure constitutes a meaningful extension of the theory into an important new domain. However, the study also reveals that CAT's predictions require contextual qualification: convergence, the theory's most discussed and generally most protective strategy, showed no significant association with victimization, challenging the universality of CAT's social approval hypothesis in high-convergence-saturation environments.

Second, the results that overaccommodation is the specific accommodation strategy most consequentially linked to cyberbullying victimization introduces an

important theoretical asymmetry into CAT's framework. The theory has traditionally treated convergence and divergence as the primary poles of accommodation, with overaccommodation and underaccommodation as secondary complications. The present study inverts this hierarchy in the context of digital victimization: overaccommodation, not divergence, is the primary accommodation-related predictor of hostile audience response. This inversion suggests that in environments characterized by high baseline convergence (as TikTok's algorithm-driven, trend-saturated format produces), the most socially consequential communicative failures are those involving excessive rather than insufficient accommodation. This theoretical refinement that the risks of overaccommodation are elevated in high-convergence-baseline environments represents a novel CAT hypothesis that merits systematic testing across platform types and cultural contexts.

Third, the partial moderating role of digital resilience introduces a boundary condition into the CAT-victimization relationship that has not previously been theorized within CAT's framework. By suggesting that the relationship between accommodation strategies and victimization varies as a function of individual psychological resources, the study connects CAT to resilience theory (Papatraianou et al., 2014) and suggests the value of an integrated model that treats accommodation behaviors as distal predictors and psychological resilience as a proximal moderator of victimization outcomes. Future theoretical development should build on this integration to construct a more complete model of digital communication vulnerability.

Fourth, the study contributes to theoretical localization the process of adapting theories developed in Western contexts to non-Western empirical realities. CAT was developed primarily from research conducted in Western, predominantly English-language settings (Giles, 1973; Giles et al., 1991). Its application to Ugandan university students who navigate between English-language TikTok platform norms, Luganda and other local linguistic practices, and culturally specific norms of self-presentation constitutes an important test of the theory's cross-cultural transferability. The result that overaccommodation predicts victimization in this Ugandan sample is consistent with CAT's core theoretical propositions, suggesting at least partial cross-cultural validity. However, the null results for convergence and underaccommodation suggest that the theory's specific predictions require calibration to the cultural and platform-specific context, a result that contributes to the broader project of building communication theories capable of accounting for cultural diversity in communicative norms and social expectations.

6.3.2 Practical and Policy Implications.

The most immediate practical implication of this study concerns the design of digital literacy programs targeted at university-level TikTok content creators. The result that overaccommodation rather than platform usage intensity or demographic characteristics is the primary communicative predictor of cyberbullying victimization suggests that effective prevention programs must address not just platform safety (blocking, reporting, privacy settings) but the communicative behaviors themselves. Universities in Uganda, including Makerere University and Uganda Christian University, should develop content creator literacy curricula that help students distinguish

between authentic audience responsiveness (adaptive convergence) and excessive, identity-compromising accommodation (overaccommodation). Such curricula might incorporate principles from CAT, self-presentation theory, and digital citizenship education to help students develop sustainable, authentic, and communicatively grounded approaches to content creation that minimize the performative inauthenticity associated with heightened victimization risk.

The findings further suggest that digital resilience-building should not wait until university. Given that many Ugandan students begin creating TikTok content during secondary school often without institutional guidance or support structures secondary schools constitute the earliest and most strategically significant intervention point. The Ministry of Education and Sports, in collaboration with the National Curriculum Development Centre, should explore the integration of communicative self-awareness and digital resilience modules into existing ICT, Life Skills, and Guidance and Counselling curricula at O-Level and A-Level. Such modules should specifically address the recognition and management of overaccommodative communication pressures, the cultivation of authentic self-expression online, and the development of coping strategies for negative audience interactions.

Practically, students should be educated to recognize the difference between adapting content to audience interests a positive and platform-effective practice and feeling compelled to adopt personas, styles, or performative registers that are inconsistent with their own identity, values, and creative vision. The items in the overaccommodation scale that most strongly predicted victimization (exaggerating reactions, feeling like one is pretending to be someone else, forcing excitement)

point specifically to identity-compromising accommodation as the riskiest behavior pattern. Digital literacy programs that help students identify and resist these pressures from algorithmic incentive structures, peer comparison, and platform trend cycles are likely to have the greatest protective impact.

The trend-level result that digital resilience buffers the overaccommodation-victimization relationship, alongside the result that 67.7% of participants have experienced negative interactions on TikTok, provides strong justification for institutional investment in digital resilience-building programs for university students. Such programs should address the five dimensions of resilience captured in the study's measurement instrument: staying calm in the face of negative comments, brushing off online criticism without self-confidence erosion, reflective thinking before responding to hostility, belief in emotional recovery, and sense of control over one's responses to negative interactions.

University counseling services, student affairs departments, and online safety organizations in Uganda can draw on this evidence to design targeted workshops, peer support networks, and one-on-one mentoring programs that build these resilience competencies among active content creators. The result that resilience buffers but does not eliminate the overaccommodation-victimization relationship further implies that resilience-building should be combined with not substituted for education about communicative self-awareness and the specific risk patterns associated with overaccommodative behavior.

The study's results have implications for TikTok's platform design and moderation architecture that are relevant to both the company and to the Ugandan

National Information Technology Authority (NITA-U) and communications regulators.

First, the result that overaccommodation predicts victimization suggests that algorithmic features which incentivize excessive trend participation such as trending sound recommendations, viral challenge notifications, and engagement-optimizing content suggestions may inadvertently increase creators' vulnerability to cyberbullying by pressuring them toward overaccommodative behaviors. Platform designers should consider whether their recommendation algorithms can be re-calibrated to reward authentic, identity-consistent content creation rather than maximal trend adherence, potentially reducing the systemic pressure toward overaccommodation.

Second, the prevalence of negative interactions (67.7% of respondents) in this Ugandan university student sample underscores the urgent need for context-sensitive moderation policies that account for the specific cultural dynamics of Ugandan TikTok communities. Moderation systems designed primarily for Western user bases may fail to identify culturally specific forms of online aggression such as language-based mockery, ethnic and tribal targeting, or culturally coded forms of public shaming that are prevalent in Ugandan digital contexts (Solomon et al., 2024). Regulatory bodies and platform companies should collaborate to develop locally informed moderation frameworks that better serve African users.

6.3.3 Implications for Educators and School-Level Interventions.

Although the present study focuses on university students, the results have downstream implications for secondary education, given that TikTok use begins for many Ugandan young people well before university entry. Educators at secondary level can draw on the study's framework to develop age-appropriate digital

communication curricula that introduce concepts of communicative authenticity, the risks of performative accommodation, and the importance of digital resilience from an early stage of social media engagement. The earlier these skills are developed, the more likely they are to provide meaningful protection when students enter the highly visible, peer-competitive content creation environment of university-level TikTok.

6.4 Limitations of the Study

This study, like all empirical research, is subject to a number of methodological and conceptual limitations that must be acknowledged transparently in order to appropriately qualify the conclusions drawn from the data.

First, and most fundamentally, the cross-sectional research design precludes causal inference. While statistically significant associations between overaccommodation and cyberbullying victimization have been documented, the direction of causality cannot be determined from cross-sectional data. It is possible that overaccommodative communication increases vulnerability to cyberbullying, as theorized. However, it is equally plausible that students who have previously experienced cyberbullying respond by attempting to placate audiences through excessive accommodation representing a reactive rather than a predictive pattern. The temporal sequence of accommodation and victimization must be established through longitudinal research before causal claims can be made with confidence.

The cross-sectional limitation deserves particular emphasis because it directly affects the study's central finding. While the hierarchical regression analysis predicts that overaccommodation significantly predicts perceived cyberbullying victimization ($\beta = .222, p < .001$), the cross-sectional design means the temporal

direction of this relationship cannot be established. Three plausible causal sequences remain empirically indistinguishable: first, overaccommodation may precede and cause victimization creators who try too hard invite hostile audience reactions; second, victimization may precede and cause overaccommodation creators who have been harassed may attempt to placate audiences through excessive adaptation; third, both processes may operate simultaneously in a bidirectional feedback loop. Resolving which pathway operates requires longitudinal data tracking the same creators across multiple time points. This is identified as the highest-priority direction for future research in Section 5.5, and all causal language in the present study has been revised to reflect the associational rather than causal nature of the findings.

Second, the reliance on self-reported survey data introduces the risk of several systematic biases. Social desirability bias may lead respondents to underreport overaccommodative behaviors (which may be perceived as socially undesirable) and overreport digital resilience (which may be perceived as socially desirable), potentially attenuating true associations in both directions. Recall bias may affect the accuracy of reports about the frequency of past cyberbullying incidents, particularly given that the study's victimization scale asks about experiences over different time horizons (past month, past three months, general experiences). Additionally, the self-report operationalization of overaccommodation asks respondents to evaluate their own communicative behaviors, which may not accurately capture how audiences perceive those behaviors the socially consequential variable from CAT's perspective is audience perception, not creator self-assessment.

Third, the study's scope is limited to two universities in Uganda Makerere University and Uganda Christian University Mukono both located in or near Kampala. While these are Uganda's largest and most prominent universities, and while the stratified sampling approach ensures representation across gender, year, and faculty, the results may not generalize to students at regional universities in northern or eastern Uganda, where socioeconomic conditions, internet access quality, cultural norms, and TikTok usage patterns may differ substantially. The sampling frame also excludes students who have TikTok accounts but are not active creators, as well as secondary school students and non-student young adults, all of whom represent important populations for cyberbullying research.

Fourth, the measurement of CAT constructs through self-report Likert items, while consistent with established practice in communication research, cannot fully capture the richness, context-dependence, and multimodal complexity of accommodation on TikTok. Accommodation on this platform involves not only linguistic and stylistic adjustments but also video editing choices, music selection, visual presentation, captions, and the complex temporal and algorithmic dynamics of content distribution. The present instruments capture creators' perceptions of their communicative behaviors but cannot assess how these behaviors are received by audiences or how they interact with platform algorithms to determine content visibility and reach.

Fifth, the relatively modest explained variance in the regression model ($R^2 = .064$) indicates that the four accommodation strategies collectively account for only 6.4% of the variance in cyberbullying victimization, leaving the large majority of

variance unexplained. This result is not unusual in survey-based research on complex psychosocial outcomes, where multiple interacting biological, psychological, social, cultural, and structural factors contribute to any given outcome (Kowalski et al., 2014). However, it does indicate that the accommodation strategies studied here represent only one slice of a much broader etiological picture, and that future research must integrate additional variables including platform-specific factors, social network characteristics, content quality metrics, and individual psychological traits to develop more comprehensive explanatory models.

Sixth, the study's reliance on a binary measure of negative interaction experience (Yes/No) as a screening and contextual variable, rather than as a primary dependent measure, means that the study cannot speak to the severity, type, or psychological impact of cyberbullying experiences. Future research should distinguish between different forms of cyberbullying (flaming, trolling, doxing, impersonation, sexual cyberbullying) and measure both frequency and impact, as the communicative predictors of these different forms may differ substantially.

6.5 Recommendations for Future Research

Based on the results, limitations, and theoretical implications discussed above, the following concrete recommendations are proposed for future research in this area.

Future research should employ longitudinal panel designs across multiple TikTok posting cycles to establish the temporal sequencing and potential bidirectional feedback loops between communication accommodation behaviors and cyberbullying victimization.

Future studies should utilize a mixed-methods approach that pairs self-report surveys with multimodal behavioral coding to evaluate whether the consequences of TikTok accommodation differ when assessed by the creators themselves versus external audience coders.

Future research should expand beyond urban Ugandan universities to include diverse regional, youth, and non-student cohorts, alongside comparative East African samples, to test the cross-cultural generalizability of the overaccommodation-victimization relationship

To address cross-sectional causal limitations, future studies should employ experimental or vignette-based designs that systematically manipulate TikTok accommodation levels to directly test their causal impact on user intentions to engage in cyberbullying.

Future research should conduct intersectional analyses to determine how the relationship between TikTok overaccommodation and cyberbullying victimization is moderated by intersecting social identities such as gender, ethnicity, religion, and socioeconomic status.

Future research should conduct cross-platform comparative studies—including Instagram Reels, YouTube Shorts, and X—to determine how specific digital platform affordances moderate the relationship between overaccommodation and cyberbullying victimization.

Future research should employ randomized controlled trials to design, implement, and evaluate digital literacy interventions that target overaccommodative communication patterns among African university content creators.

6.6 Conclusion

This study set out to answer a simple question: does the way university students communicate on TikTok influence whether they experience cyberbullying? The answer, supported by systematic empirical evidence from 372 university content creators in Uganda, is a qualified but consequential yes and the manner in which communication style matters is more theoretically specific and practically actionable than prior research had suggested.

The central result is that overaccommodation the excessive, inauthentic, or identity-compromising adaptation of communication style to perceived audience expectations is a significant positive predictor of perceived cyberbullying victimization. Creators who exaggerate their reactions for audience approval, try too hard to fit into viral trends, feel like they are pretending to be someone they are not, and force enthusiasm to appear more engaging are more likely to report being the targets of hurtful comments, ridicule, emotional cyberbullying, and online attacks. This relationship is robust across bivariate and multivariate analysis, holds after controlling for demographic variables, and is directionally consistent with the theoretical predictions of Communication Accommodation Theory applied to the performative, authenticity-sensitive, algorithm-driven environment of TikTok.

Equally important are the null results: convergence, divergence, and underaccommodation did not emerge as significant predictors of victimization, challenging the assumed universality of CAT's social approval hypothesis in high-convergence-saturation digital environments and suggesting that the specific forms of

accommodation that matter for social outcomes in online contexts differ from those emphasized in the theory's original face-to-face applications. These null results are not failures of the study; they are theoretically informative boundary conditions that help map the scope and limits of CAT's applicability in digital communication research.

The partial moderating role of digital resilience significant for the convergence-victimization relationship and trending toward buffering for overaccommodation adds an important individual difference dimension to the theoretical picture, suggesting that psychological resources for navigating online adversity interact with communication strategies to shape victimization outcomes. This result provides theoretical grounding for resilience-building interventions while also highlighting the importance of addressing communicative behaviors directly rather than relying on resilience alone as a protective factor.

Contextually, this study makes a distinctive contribution by situating these theoretical and empirical questions within Uganda an under-researched but rapidly digitizing African context where TikTok is experiencing exponential growth among young people, where cyberbullying regulation remains nascent, and where the intersections of global platform culture and local communicative norms create unique dynamics that Western-centered research cannot capture. By developing, validating, and applying CAT-informed measurement instruments with a Ugandan university sample, the study contributes to the growing body of African scholarship on digital media, youth communication, and online safety that must inform both local policy and global theory.

Ultimately, this study's contribution to human knowledge is threefold. Theoretically, it extends Communication Accommodation Theory into a new domain multimodal, performative, algorithm-driven social media and refines its predictions by identifying overaccommodation as the specific accommodation strategy with the greatest cyberbullying relevance. Empirically, it provides the first quantitative evidence of the CAT-cyberbullying victimization relationship in a sub-Saharan African context. Practically, it offers university administrators, digital literacy educators, platform designers, and policy makers an evidence-based foundation for interventions aimed at reducing the communicative vulnerability of young content creators on TikTok. The young men and women studying at Uganda's universities who create content, share their lives, express their identities, and seek community on TikTok deserve both theoretical frameworks that make sense of their experiences and practical tools that help keep them safe. This study is offered as a step toward both.

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Appendix A

Questionnaire

Dear Respondent,

This questionnaire is aimed at collecting data to undertake a study on the Influence of communication behaviors strategies on Cyberbullying Victimization Among University Students. The research is in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in Journalism, Media, and Communication of Uganda Christian University. All information provided will be treated with utmost confidentiality and will be used purely for academic purposes.

SECTION I: General Information (Please tick in the appropriate option)

1. University

Makerere university ☐ Uganda Christian University ☐

2. Gender:

☐ Male ☐ Female

3. Age:

☐ Under 18 ☐ 18-20 ☐ 21-23 ☐ 24-26 ☐ Above 26

4. Academic Year:

☐ Year 1 ☐ Year 2 ☐ Year 3 ☐ Year 4

5. Faculty/School:

☐ Humanities ☐ Sciences ☐ Business ☐ Law ☐ Other (Please specify):

6. Do you have a TikTok account? If No, please stop here and return the form.

☐ Yes ☐ No

7. How often do you post content (videos) on TikTok?

☐ Daily ☐ Weekly ☐ Monthly ☐ Rarely ☐ Never

8. How long have you been an active creator on TikTok?

☐ Less than 6 months

☐ 6-12 months

☐ 1-2 years

☐ More than 2 years

9. On average, how many TikTok videos do you post per week?

10. Have you ever experienced negative interactions on TikTok?

☐ Yes ☐ No

SECTION II: Convergence (Adaptation to Audience Expectations)

Please indicate the extent of your agreement with statements listed below ranging from 5- strongly agree (SA), 4-agree (A), 3 not certain (NS), 2 disagree (D), 1- strongly disagree (SD).

No.	Statement	SA	A	NS	DA	SDA
1	I adjust my speaking style to match what my followers expect.	5	4	3	2	1
2	I modify the way I present myself based on feedback from viewers.	5	4	3	2	1
3	I intentionally choose content topics that appeal to my audience.	5	4	3	2	1

4	I pay attention to audience reactions to adjust my next videos.	5	4	3	2	1
5	I try to align my communication with what is popular on the platform.	5	4	3	2	1
		Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
1	How often do you imitate viral dance or lip-sync trends?					
2	On average, how many hashtags do you include in each video?					

Section III: Divergence (Maintaining Distinct Communicative Style)

Please indicate the extent of your agreement with statements listed below ranging from 5- strongly agree (SA), 4-agree (A), 3 not certain (NS), 2 disagree (D), 1- strongly disagree (SD).

No.	Statement	SA	A	NS	DA	SDA
1	I prefer to use my own slang or dialect even if it's not popular.	5	4	3	2	1
2	I rarely follow TikTok trends in my content.	5	4	3	2	1
3	I deliberately choose content that reflects my unique personality.	5	4	3	2	1
4	I avoid copying the styles of famous creators.	5	4	3	2	1
5	I express my personal beliefs regardless of how others might react.	5	4	3	2	1
		Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
1	How often do you follow TikTok trends?					
2	How often do you use hashtags in each video?					

Section IV: Overaccommodation (Excessive or Inauthentic Adaptation)

Please indicate the extent of your agreement with statements listed below ranging from 5- strongly agree (SA), 4-agree (A), 3 not certain (NS), 2 disagree (D), 1- strongly disagree (SD)

No.	Statement	SA	A	NS	DA	SDA
1	I exaggerate my reactions in videos to appeal to more people.	5	4	3	2	1
2	I try too hard to fit into viral challenges or trends.	5	4	3	2	1
3	I often feel like I'm pretending to be someone I'm not in my videos.	5	4	3	2	1
4	I use popular effects even when they don't fit my message.	5	4	3	2	1
5	I force myself to act excited just to look more engaging.	5	4	3	2	1
		Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
1	How often do you use trendy language that you don't fully understand?					
2	How often do you respond to comments per video?					

Section V: Underaccommodation (Lack of Adjustment to Audience)

Please indicate the extent of your agreement with statements listed below ranging from 5- strongly agree (SA), 4-agree (A), 3 not certain (NS), 2 disagree (D), 1- strongly disagree (SD)

No.	Statement	SA	A	NS	DA	SDA
1	I ignore comments or feedback from my viewers.	5	4	3	2	1
2	I rarely change the way I create content regardless of audience responses.	5	4	3	2	1

3	I post videos without thinking about what my audience might want.	5	4	3	2	1
4	I don't care much about fitting in with TikTok trends.	5	4	3	2	1
5	I stick to my own presentation style no matter what others say.	5	4	3	2	1
6	I avoid interacting with my audience after posting content.	5	4	3	2	1
		Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
1	How often do you update your content style when engagement drops?					
2	You often do you try new TikTok features have you tried this month?					

Section VI: Digital Resilience

Please indicate the extent of your agreement with statements listed below ranging from 5- strongly agree (SA), 4-agree (A), 3 not certain (NS), 2 disagree (D), 1- strongly disagree (SD)

No.	Statement	SA	A	NS	DA	SDA
1	I stay calm even when I receive negative or hurtful comments on TikTok.	5	4	3	2	1
2	I am able to brush off online criticism without letting it affect my self-confidence.	5	4	3	2	1
3	Before reacting to negative comments, I take time to think.	5	4	3	2	1
4	I believe I can recover emotionally after being attacked online.	5	4	3	2	1
5	I feel in control of how I respond to negative interactions on social media.	5	4	3	2	1
		Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always

1	How often do you talk to someone you trust when cyberbullied?					
2	How often have you reported cyberbullying in the past 6 months?					

Section VII: Perceived Cyberbullying Victimization

Please indicate the extent of your agreement with statements listed below ranging from 5- strongly agree (SA), 4-agree (A), 3 not certain (NS), 2 disagree (D), 1- strongly disagree (SD)

No.	Statement	SA	A	NS	DA	SDA
1	I have received hurtful comments on my videos.	5	4	3	2	1
2	I have been ridiculed for how I look or talk in my videos.	5	4	3	2	1
3	I have been attacked for the opinions I express.	5	4	3	2	1
4	I often feel emotionally hurt by how people respond to my content.	5	4	3	2	1
5	I have deleted my content to avoid negative feedback.	5	4	3	2	1
		Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
1	In the past month, how often have you been insulted on TikTok					
2	How often have you receive aggressive messages in the past 3 months?					

THANK YOU

Appendix B

Uganda National Council for Science and Technology Clearance

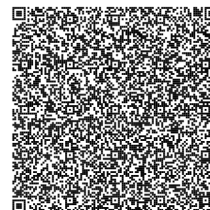


Uganda National Council for Science and Technology

(Established by Act of Parliament of the Republic of Uganda)

18 December 2025
Our Ref: SS4652ES

Prever Mukasa
Uganda Christian university
Mukono



Re: Research Approval: Communicative Accommodation and Perceived Cyberbullying Victimization on TikTok in Uganda

I am pleased to inform you that on **18/12/2025**, the Uganda National Council for Science and Technology (UNCST) approved the above referenced research project. The Approval of the research project is for the period of **18/12/2025** to **18/12/2026**.

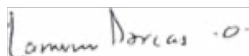
Your research registration number with the UNCST is **SS4652ES**. Please, cite this number in all your future correspondences with UNCST in respect of the above research project. As the Principal Investigator of the research project, you are responsible for fulfilling the following requirements of approval:

1. Keeping all co-investigators informed of the status of the research.
2. Submitting all changes, amendments, and addenda to the research protocol or the consent form (where applicable) to the designated Research Ethics Committee (REC) or Lead Agency for re-review and approval **prior** to the activation of the changes. UNCST must be notified of the approved changes within five working days.
3. For clinical trials, all serious adverse events must be reported promptly to the designated local REC for review with copies to the National Drug Authority and a notification to the UNCST.
4. Unanticipated problems involving risks to research participants or other must be reported promptly to the UNCST. New information that becomes available which could change the risk/benefit ratio must be submitted promptly for UNCST notification after review by the REC.
5. Only approved study procedures are to be implemented. The UNCST may conduct impromptu audits of all study records.
6. An annual progress report and approval letter of continuation from the REC must be submitted electronically to UNCST. Failure to do so may result in termination of the research project.

Please note that this approval includes all study related tools submitted as part of the application as shown below:

No.	Document Title	Language	Version Number	Version Date
1	Informed Consent Form	English	1	20 November 2025
2	Community Engagement Plan	English	1	20 November 2025
3	Risk Management Plan	English	1	20 November 2025
4	Project Proposal	English		
5	Approval Letter	English		
6	Administrative Clearance	English		

Yours sincerely,



Dorcas Lamunu

For: Executive Secretary

UGANDA NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

LOCATION/CORRESPONDENCE

*Plot 6 Kimera Road, Ntinda
P.O. Box 6884
KAMPALA, UGANDA*

COMMUNICATION

TEL: (256) 414 705500
FAX: (256) 414-234579
EMAIL: info@uncst.go.ug
WEBSITE: <http://www.uncst.go.ug>

Appendix C

UCU Research Ethics Committee Clearance



23/10/2025

To: Prever Mukasa
UgandaChristianUniversity

Review Type: Initial Review

Re:UCUREC-2025-1921: Communicative Accommodation and Perceived Cyberbullying Victimization on TikTok in Uganda.

I am pleased to inform you that the Uganda Christian University REC, through expedited review held on **16/10/2025** approved the above referenced study.

Approval of the research is for the period of **23/10/2025** to **23/10/2026**.

As Principal Investigator of the research, you are responsible for fulfilling the following requirements of approval:

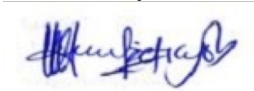
1. All co-investigators must be kept informed of the status of the research.
2. Changes, amendments, and addenda to the protocol or the consent form must be submitted to the REC for re-review and approval **prior** to the activation of the changes.
3. Reports of unanticipated problems involving risks to participants or any new information which could change the risk benefit: ratio must be submitted to the REC.
4. Only approved consent forms are to be used in the enrollment of participants. All consent forms signed by participants and/or witnesses should be retained on file. The REC may conduct audits of all study records, and consent documentation may be part of such audits.
5. Continuing review application must be submitted to the REC **eight weeks** prior to the expiration date of **23/10/2026** in order to continue the study beyond the approved period. Failure to submit a continuing review application in a timely fashion may result in suspension or termination of the study.
6. The REC application number assigned to the research should be cited in any correspondence with the REC of record.
7. You are required to register the research protocol with the Uganda National Council for Science and Technology (UNCST) for final clearance to undertake the study in Uganda.

The following is the list of all documents approved in this application by Uganda Christian University REC:

No.	Document Title	Language	Version Number	Version Date
1	Community Engagement plan	English	1	2025-09-22
2	COVID-19 & EBOLA risk management plan	English	1	2025-09-22
3	Informed Consent forms	English	1	2025-09-22

4	Data collection tools	English	1	2025-09-22
5	Protocol	English	2	2025-09-22

Yours sincerely,



Prof. Peter Waiswa
For: Uganda Christian University REC

Appendix D

Letter of Approval for Data Collection: Makerere University



DIRECTORATE OF RESEARCH, INNOVATION AND PARTNERSHIPS

November 20th, 2025

To Prever Mukasa
Uganda Christian University

Dear Prever Mukasa,

RE: APPROVAL TO COLLECT DATA AMONG STUDENTS AT MAKERERE UNIVERSITY

This is to acknowledge receipt of your research protocol titled “**Communicative Accommodation and Perceived Cyberbullying Victimization on TikTok in Uganda**”, which has been approved by the Uganda Christian University Research Ethics Committee (UCUREC-2025-1921).

The Directorate of Research, Innovation and Partnerships (DRIP), Makerere University, hereby grants conditional approval for you to collect data at Makerere University **subject to the final approval of your study by the Uganda National Council for Science and Technology (UNCST)**. Upon receipt of the UNCST approval, you may commence data collection in accordance with approved ethical and institutional guidelines.

Please ensure adherence to all institutional regulations and provide periodic updates on the progress of your research to the DRIP.

We wish you success in your research.

Yours sincerely,

Assoc Prof. Robert Wamala [PhD]
ASSOC PROF AND DIRECTOR

Cc. Dean of Students, Makerere University
Director, DGT, Makerere University
Director, DQA, Makerere University

Appendix E

Letter of Approval for Data Collection: Uganda Christian University



**UGANDA CHRISTIAN
UNIVERSITY**

A Centre of Excellence in the Heart of Africa

Office of the Vice Chancellor
Research Ethics Committee UG-026



19th November, 2025

Prever Mukasa, Principal Investigator (PI)
Uganda Christian University
+256 782 016 669
prevermukasa@gmail.com

Dear Prever,

Re: Administrative Clearance for the study "Communicative Accommodation and Perceived Cyberbullying Victimization on TikTok in Uganda."

Greetings from Uganda Christian University (UCU)!

We acknowledge the receipt of your approval to conduct research at Uganda Christian University. This permission is valid for one year beginning 23rd October, 2025 (date of approval from Uganda Christian University REC). The administrative clearance does not guarantee individual participant's consent; you are therefore required to obtain consent from each participant.

You are expected to adhere to our institutional code of ethics in conduct, decency, observance of SOPs, and respect for all individuals. Additionally, you will be required to submit a report of your findings within 3 months of the expiry of your study.

We wish you success in your endeavors

Yours sincerely,

Mr. Osborn Ahimbisibwe,
Manager, UCU Research Ethics
oahimbisibwe@ucu.ac.ug



Research and Ethics



UGANDA CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY

A Centre of Excellence in the Heart of Africa

UGANDA CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY

SCHOOL OF RESEARCH & POSTGRADUATE STUDIES

DISSERTATION CORRECTION COMPLIANCE REPORT BY THE CANDIDATE (POST VIVA FORM)

Date:Sept 21, 2026.....

Name of Candidate:PREVER MUKASA..... Reg. No: S23P36/007.....

Title of Dissertation: Communicative Accommodation and Perceived Cyberbullying Victimization on TikTok in Uganda

S/N	COMMENTS BY EXTERNAL EXAMINER	ACTION TAKEN	INDICATOR
1	Condense recommendations to one strong, general statement	Recommendations were condensed into a single paragraph comprising one to two concise sentences	Pg 143 - 148
2	The abstract is highly technical with extensive statistical reporting. The recommendation at the end seems rushed and	The final recommendation sentence was condensed into one clear general statement emphasising communicative self-awareness and digital resilience programmes.	Abstract final paragraph

	underdeveloped.		
3	The opening relies heavily on Western scholarship. Add references and examples of cyberbullying in Uganda and East Africa to ground the study early on.	A paragraph citing Mukasa & Otim (2021), Semujju (2024), Kenya ICT Authority (2022), and NITA-U (2023) was added to ground the study in local evidence.	Chapter 1, Section 1.1
4	Expand theoretical justification by explaining how CAT constructs map onto TikTok's algorithm-driven, performative environment in Uganda.	A paragraph mapping CAT's four constructs onto TikTok's algorithmic convergence pressure, authenticity visibility, and audience anonymity was added.my study.	Chapter 1, Section 1.11
5	Chapter 4-Findings Expand on non-significant results for instance, explain why convergence, divergence, and underaccommodation did not predict victimization, and what this means for CAT in digital contexts.	In accordance with the feedback from the panel and internal examiner, I relocated and expanded all discussions of significant and non-significant results, alongside their implications for the digital space, to Chapter 5	See chapter 5
6	The social consequences of cyberbullying victimization in Uganda (mental health, academic performance, social participation) are implied but not explicitly stated.	A sentence explicitly stating academic, social and psychological consequences for Ugandan students was added in Chapter 1, Section 1.3.	Chapter 1, Section 1.3
7	I wonder whether the writer considered Goffmanian dramaturgy and whether it adds to the CAT framework.	A paragraph connecting Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical model to the overaccommodation victimization mechanism was added in Chapter 2 as a complementary theoretical perspective.	Chapter 2, Section 2.2

8	The relatively small UCU proportion (20.4%) compared to Makerere (79.6%) may limit generalizability. Was weighting considered?	A sentence explaining that proportional allocation reflects actual enrolment differentials and that post-stratification weighting was intentionally not applied was added.	Chapter 3, Section 3.
9	Why was EFA discussed while CFA was not? Both are key in validity analysis.	A paragraph justifying EFA over CFA EFA is appropriate for adapted instruments in novel contexts; CFA requires a pre-validated factor structure was added.	Chapter 3, Section 3.8
10	Consider discussing further how pilot testing informed revisions on the questionnaire.	Four specific pilot-driven revisions were described: item rewording, verbal anchors added, section ordering adjustment, and removal of a ceiling-effect item.	Chapter 3, Section 3.11
11	The theoretical implications why CAT's social approval hypothesis may not hold in algorithm-driven environments could be more deeply explored.	A paragraph introducing the Accommodation Saturation Hypothesis was added explaining why convergence loses protective value when algorithmically universal.	Chapter 5, Section 5.2.2
122	Convergence, divergence and underaccommodation findings are treated as null results rather than theoretically informative boundary conditions.	A paragraph reframing the three non-significant findings as boundary conditions that refine CAT's scope in digital environments was added before the chapter summary.	Chapter 5, before summary

S/N	COMMENTS BY INTERNAL EXAMINER	ACTION TAKEN	INDICATOR
1	Statement made ‘Critically, no empirical study has linked CAT’s core strategies; convergence, divergence, overaccommodation, and underaccommodation to cyberbullying victimization in digital spaces,’ needs backing of investigation, often encapsulated in one or more systematic review or other form of meta-analysis.	Following a review of the background literature, the core statement was carefully revised to highlight a major gap. It instead reads: ‘Despite the rise of online cyberbullying on modern social media, there remains a shortage of empirical research exploring CAT’s communicative strategies in relation to cyberbullying victimization on platforms like TikTok.’ The absolute claim was replaced throughout the document.	Revised on page 5 Chapters 1, 2, 3 all instances
2	The word 'perceived' in the title seems lost through most of the study. In the conceptual framework only harassment is perceived; all other constructs are actual.	A clarifying sentence was added in Chapter 1, Section 1.11 distinguishing the perceived DV from the self-reported accommodation constructs and explaining the theoretical rationale.	Chapter 1, Section 1.11
3	There are sections, like 2.3.1 which though very informative, are a little lengthy, elements should be in one paragraph, or each should be allocated a paragraph if the length of the content so dictates	A four-strand signposting sentence was added at the opening of Section 2.3.1.	Chapter 2, Section 2.3.1
4	Some of the literature is out dated. More current literature on	Six recent references (2021-2024) were added: Li et al. (2024), Giles et al. (2023), Xu & Zhang (2023), Sengül (2024), Zhu et al.	Chapter 2, Sections 2.3.1, 2.3.3, 2.4 and References

	the phenomenon would be worthwhile.	(2021), Amaefula (2024), cited in Sections 2.3.1, 2.3.3 and 2.4.	
5	Methodology The candidate references to the use of inferential statistics early in the thesis and indeed goes ahead to apply them. But the headings from 4.3 to 4.9 only mention Descriptive Statistics.	Headings 4.3 - 4.9 were renamed to accurately reflect content. A new Section 4.10 - 4.13 'Inferential Statistics: Pearson Correlation, Hierarchical Regression, and Moderation Analysis' was added.	Chapter 4, Sections 4.3-4.10

S/N	COMMENTS BY VIVA VOCE PANEL	ACTION TAKEN	INDICATOR
1	Review and strengthen the justification for its Cross-sectional design .	The justification for the research design was strengthened; all references to a longitudinal design were removed from the literature review to emphasize the study's cross-sectional framework	Page 80, 63
2	Discussion of findings should be presented in Chapter Five and removed from chapter Four	In accordance with the feedback, all discussion sections were relocated to Chapter 5.	Chapter 4 and 5
3	Distinguish between the Harassment and cyberbullying concepts and maintain consistent use of terminology	The conceptual crossover between harassment and cyberbullying was reviewed, and the term 'cyberbullying' has been used consistently throughout the document.	All Chapters
4	Review the language to ensure that the wording was appropriately academic, measured and supported by the evidence	The Language was adjusted accordingly. Seven specific find-and-replace instructions were applied, replacing causal language (proves, confirms, demonstrates) with correlational language (suggests, indicates, is consistent with) throughout.	All Chapters

5	The moderator, digital resilience, was not adequately discussed. Strengthen its treatment, including the recommendation regarding introduction at secondary-school level.	A substantive paragraph on digital resilience as a developmental construct was added in Chapter 2, Section 2.4. A secondary-school recommendation was added in Chapter 5, Section 5.3.2.	Chapter 2, Section 2.4; Chapter 5, Section 5.3.2
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.....PREVER MUKASA.....

Candidate's Name

..........

Signature

.....Professor. James Kiwanuka-Tondo.....

Supervisor's Name

..........

Signature

.....Associate Professor Angella Napakol.....

Supervisor's Name

..........

Signature