Exploring Body Image And Identity: A Semiotic Study Of Viral Tiktok Reels In Pakistan

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Abstract

This research examines how TikTok creators construct and present identities through symbolic interactionism and the Communication Theory of Identity (CTI). Analyzing a series of TikTok videos featuring Pakistani creators, the study explores how attire, gestures, settings, and props are utilized to perform and negotiate identities. D[1]rawing on Identity Theory, which posits that identity is shaped through social roles and interactions, and CTI, which emphasizes the multifaceted nature of identity across personal, relational, enacted, and communal layers, this research reveals how digital platforms like TikTok facilitate identity expression and negotiation. Through semiotic analysis, the study uncovers how symbols and cultural codes convey nuanced meanings, influencing audience perceptions and interactions.

Keywords: *TikTok, identity construction, Body Image, Communication Theory of Identity (CTI), Semiotics, digital media*, *Reels.*

Introduction

The influence of media on society is undeniable. It serves as a source of knowledge on a wide range of subjects, molds opinions, and aids in decision-making. The media is the conduit through which we stay informed about local and global events, shaping our understanding of the world. It is often considered a reflection of modern society and has a significant impact on our lives. However, managing our time in an era dominated by social media demands conscious effort. The media stands as one of the most potent forces globally, with the power to shape public perception and even influence legal outcomes. To counter this influence, individuals must regain control over their thoughts and discern right from wrong. Social media, in this context, emerges as a great equalizer, providing a platform and voice to all who wish to participate. It has become a pervasive force, altering how we communicate and perceive others, both positively and negatively, as every online action contributes to the construction of a personal digital brand. In recent years, scholars have explored how individuals construct their identities on social media. Early studies predominantly focused on text-based platforms like blogs and Twitter (Elliott, Richard & Andrea, 2006), but attention has shifted to visual media platforms like Instagram and TikTok (Karaduman, 2013). These platforms offer efficient and cost-effective ways for users to promote their personal brands, thanks to their technological and ideological foundations. Social media has revolutionized content creation by departing from traditional intellectual property control models, operating at the convergence of entertainment, interactivity, communication, and content industries (Hudson, 2017). While entertainment is a primary media goal, it carries profound implications for a nation's success

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or failure. Hence, engaging programs should not only entertain but also impart knowledge and moral values. This is particularly relevant in Pakistan, where women, nearly equal in population to men, predominantly use media for entertainment (Baker. et al, 2019).

TikTok is a social media platform that places a strong emphasis on short video content. With videos ranging from five to 120 seconds, it's often likened to a streamlined version of YouTube. TikTok's mission is to "inspire creativity and joy," positioning itself as the primary hub for short-form mobile videos. Users can select from various soundtracks and add their own effects and filters, even allowing direct video uploads from mobile devices. It has quickly become a favored platform for sharing social videos, encompassing a wide array of content, including challenges, dance routines, magic tricks, and humor. TikTok's popularity is undeniable, with 1.5 billion downloads in 2019 alone, making it one of the most downloaded apps on both the App Store and Google Play. TikTok's origins are traced back to three distinct applications. The first, Musical.ly, emerged in 2014, with a substantial following in the United States. In 2016, the Chinese tech giant Byte Dance introduced a similar app named Douyin, which swiftly amassed 100 million users in China and Thailand within a year. Recognizing its potential, Byte Dance rebranded it as TikTok and integrated Musical.ly in 2018, commencing its international expansion. This strategic move has been lucrative, with Byte Dance's overall value estimated at up to $140 billion in 2020, and TikTok alone valued at $50 billion. TikTok's revenue model includes in-app purchases, enabling users to tip their favorite content creators by purchasing coins ranging from 99 cents to $99.99. TikTok has evolved into one of the world's most prominent social media platforms, accessible in over 150 markets and supporting 75 languages. As of March 2020, it boasts over two billion downloads, with a staggering 104.7 million occurring within a single month (Liang, 2023).

The concept of body image is multifaceted, encompassing individuals' perceptions and feelings about their physical appearance. Body image involves self-perception, beliefs, attitudes, and emotional responses tied to one's appearance (Cash, 2002). It revolves around two fundamental aspects: assessment, such as body satisfaction, and investment, which pertains to the psychological value attached to one's appearance. These perceptions can be influenced by overall appearance or specific physical attributes like size and shape, often interlinked with self-esteem. This study offers a semiotic perspective on how TikTok provides a platform for users to gain fame by displaying their body image. TikTok has democratized fame, allowing individuals from diverse backgrounds to be seen and heard globally. It enables viewers to monetize their audiences without relying solely on brand agreements, providing a unique perspective on fame and identity in the digital age.

Objectives of the Study

- To Identify and Categorize the Elements of Body Image in Pakistani TikTok Videos.
- To Explore and Interpret the Construction of Identity Through Pakistani TikTok Videos.
- To Conduct a Semiotic Analysis of the Content Produced in Pakistani Viral TikTok Videos

Literature review

Short videos have become a prevalent form of content distribution on the Internet, quickly gaining traction within minutes of being posted. The rise of mobile devices and faster network speeds have contributed to the widespread adoption of the "TikTok" app, garnering support from various platforms, fans, and financial backers as short-form, high-traffic content continues to grow (Jiaru, 2018).

The "TikTok" app, originally known as "A.me," is a music-centric, short-form social video platform launched in September 2016. The app underwent a significant promotion in the second quarter of 2017 after its name change, gaining notable popularity by 2018. Currently, TikTok ranks sixth among popular apps. Its slogan was changed from "letting worship from here" to "document a good life" on March 19, 2018. The majority of TikTok users are teenagers, with a predominance of female users. On TikTok, users can create 15-second videos with background music, motion editing, and special effects. Additionally, TikTok has fostered a unique music community and introduced the "Dance Machine" using "Human Key Detection Technology," making music a central element of its content segmentation (Wei, 2015).

According to the "Use and Satisfaction" theory, audiences are seen as having specific "needs," and their media-related behaviors are understood as their "use" of media to fulfill those particular demands. Gaojie, (2018) states that TikTok can be used to meet needs related to entertainment, social interaction, self-expression, financial gain, and caregiving. Today, media significantly influence the values of young people, with body image being one of the most stereotyped values in popular culture.

TikTok serves as a platform for young people to express themselves through various forms, including lip-syncing videos and quirky dance moves. The platform's culture and structure encourage users to imitate each other and engage with current trends. According to daily TikTok video statistics, social media is inundated with unrealistic ideals of what men's and women's bodies should look like to be considered attractive. TikTok body activist S. Kaufman noted in 2020, "When I first downloaded TikTok, I saw many extremely negative body image videos." The academic community critically examines the risks associated with the increasing authority of platforms in deciding what is considered "irrelevant," "false," or "harmful," while lawmakers and the public continue to pressure digital platforms to regulate content and user behavior. For   example, the flagging system enforces and validates the platform's own standards and logic by assigning moderation tasks to users. Gerrard and Thornham (2020) explored content moderation on Instagram and Pinterest, using the concept of sexist assemblages to investigate how human and technological factors maintain normative gender roles and police representations of women's bodies. Hassan et al, (2023) discuss that the increased media exposure correlates with heightened self-objectification, especially among younger students, while religiosity and cultural engagement act as protective factors against self-objectification. They underscored the need for media literacy and culturally enriched content to mitigate these effects.

TikTok fosters body image at the meso level by involving creative communities and users in social justice initiatives, particularly those that enhance the platform's corporate image through the promotion of charitable causes. Since its global launch in 2018, TikTok has evolved into a crucial online space for youth-led protests against issues such as racial inequality and climate change (Kaye, 2022). Participating in these campaigns has become a quick way for creators to gain visibility, as the algorithm is believed to prioritize hashtags explicitly supported by the platform.

Identity Theory and Symbolic Interactionism

Identity theory, rooted in symbolic interactionism, explains the relationship between society and individuals. It posits that identity is shaped by roles, perceptions, social constructions, and performances. These elements are internalized and transformed into role identities, which are then created and performed in relation to others. This framework asserts that a person's sense of self develops through social interactions and is continuously defined and redefined through social contact.

The Communication Theory of Identity (CTI), developed by Michael Hecht and colleagues, expands on identity theory by considering social activity as part of the self, or the enacted identity. CTI proposes that identity is multifaceted, consisting of four layers: personal, relational, enacted, and communal. These layers interact and often overlap, highlighting the relational and discursive nature of identity (Hecht et al, 2005). CTI integrates concepts from postmodernism and Eastern philosophy, viewing identity as contradictory yet coherent. CTI has been used to examine cultural phenomena, such as multiculturalism and media representations of identity. It views identity as a social process influenced by communication. In the context of TikTok, CTI can be applied to analyze how users construct their identities through personal, relational, and enacted layers. The theory also addresses identity gaps— conflicts between different layers of identity—which are prevalent in social media interactions. TikTok, as a platform, promotes body image and identity construction through user participation in social justice initiatives and creative content. The algorithmic promotion of specific hashtags facilitates visibility and engagement, shaping users' self-perceptions and social identities. CTI's framework allows for a detailed analysis of these processes, examining how personal, relational, and enacted identities are negotiated and expressed on TikTok.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative approach to conduct a semiotic analysis of body image and identity portrayed in viral TikTok videos from Pakistan. The research focuses on understanding the symbols and signs utilized by TikTok users, emphasizing the dramatism theory and communication theory of identity.

The primary instrument for data collection is the analysis of TikTok videos themselves. Researchers examine the visual elements, gestures, body representations, and expressions used by TikTok influencers to convey their identities and body images. The population under study comprises Pakistani TikTokers who prominently feature their bodies in their videos. The research includes five male and five female TikTok influencers, each selected based on the popularity and viral nature of their videos. Participants were selected through purposive sampling based on the popularity of their TikTok videos, particularly those that garnered millions of views. This method ensures that the sample represents influential figures in the TikTok community who actively shape body image perceptions. Data collection involves several steps: Watching and analyzing TikTok videos featuring body image and identity representations then identifying and documenting the signs and symbols used in these videos to convey specific meanings and lastly collecting quantitative data on views, likes, and comments to understand the reach and impact of each video.

The study includes the following TikTok influencers: Alex Bhatti, known for his personality, looks, and expressive gestures. He has 3.1M followers and 52.4M likes. Daniyal Khan, noted for his charming body language and physique. He has 1.1M followers and 13.3M likes. Ali Shan, recognized for his dance and fashion sense. He has 4.8M followers and 67.9M likes. Zarkaish Zari, known for modeling and makeup skills. She has 106.8k followers and 2.9M likes. Abubakar Arshad, gained popularity through acting and distinctive outfits. He has 259.5k followers and 6.5M views. Iqra Gillani is popular for gym and lifestyle videos. She has 3.0M followers, and 49.8M likes. Eman Shah, well-known for provocative outfits and dancing. She has 1.3M followers and 8.6M likes. Anmol Noor, known for modelling and posts bold and dancing videos. She has 6.9M followers and 147.4M likes. Anna Butt, gained popularity for fitness and workout videos. She has 199.5k followers and 2.0M likes. Fariya Mehboob showcases body image through stylish outfit videos. She has 262.1k followers and 2.5M likes. This sample was chosen based on their significant influence and the thematic focus of their TikTok content related to body image and identity. The methodology adopted in this study

ensures a comprehensive analysis of how Pakistani TikTokers construct and convey their identities and body images through viral videos. By applying semiotic analysis, dramatism theory, and communication theory of identity, this research aims to uncover the underlying symbols and meanings portrayed in these influential digital narratives.

Findings and Discussions

1. **Alex Bhatti**

Figure 1: TikTok video 1 of Alex Bhatti posing in front of mirror

Signifier: In this video, Alex Bhatti is dressed in a deep red shirt, adorned with red lipstick and sparkling rings on his hands. He wears a wig and his eyes are a hazy blue color. A grey locket hangs around his neck. He poses in front of a mirror in a room, using ring lights to enhance the lighting. The video has received 133.1k likes and 4.2M views.

Signified: Alex Bhatti attracts the audience by facing the camera with partially visible lips. Red, as a color, is known to evoke physiological responses associated with arousal, such as increased blood flow to the lips. The sparkling rings draw attention to his hands. The use of ring lights enhances the glamour of the video, eliminating shadows and emphasizing his facial features. His body language suggests an intention to attract or seduce viewers.

Figure 2: TikTok video 2 of Alex Bhatti posing

Signifier: In this video, Alex Bhatti sticks his tongue out while recording, wearing a wig and displaying a beard with makeup. His eyes are adorned with hazel blue lenses. He stands in front of the camera, accessorized with a wig and an earring. The lighting setup includes lights attached directly to his phone. The video received 155.4k likes and 4.4M views.

Signified: The signified message revolves around Alex's playful tongue gesture, which captures viewers' attention and adds a touch of allure. His hazel blue eyes and the combination of beard and makeup challenge traditional gender expectations, intriguing the audience. His body movements and props like the wig and earring contribute to his perceived identity and appeal in the video.

These analyses demonstrate how Alex Bhatti strategically uses attire, props, and body language to convey specific messages and appeal to his audience on TikTok.

2. Daniyal Khan

Figure 3: TikTok video 1 of Daniyal Khan acting in front of mirror

Signifier: In this video, Daniyal Khan wears a locket slung over his chest and dress pants with blood-red suspenders. He presents himself as a muscular, macho man with a well-built physique. An earring adorns one ear, and the scene is lit with a ring light casting different

colored sparkles, including red light. Props include the earring and locket. His actions of acting and dancing are central signifiers in this shot.

Signified: Daniyal's movements and attire project a macho image resembling a desirable boyfriend figure, aligning with the theme of the song. His muscular physique and attire contribute to his "hot boyfriend" persona. The use of lighting and filters enhances his youthful appearance and macho demeanor, with the red light adding dramatic effect. The single earring and suspenders further enhance his handsome boyfriend look. His body movements highlight his dance and acting skills, complemented by makeup that enhances his heroic appearance.

Figure 4: TikTok video 2 of Daniyal Khan while Posing and dancing

Signifier: In this video, Daniyal Khan wears a black locket slung over his chest, paired with a white button-up shirt and black pants. His personality is highlighted through the lighting setup, featuring a black headband with white dots and an earring in one ear. Ring lights behind him illuminate the scene as he performs an acting scene in a darkened room. Props used include the locket, earring, and headband.

Signified: The black locket emphasizes his heroic and macho personality. The headband signifies his action-oriented style, while his muscular flexing suggests anger and aggression within the role he portrays. The dark room setting adds a serious tone, focusing attention solely on him, reinforcing the intensity of his character portrayal. His single earring contributes to his charming hero persona, and the headband adds to his heroic character. Overall, these elements combine to enhance Daniyal Khan's image and appeal in the video.

These analyses illustrate how Daniyal Khan strategically uses clothing, accessories, lighting, and body language to convey specific messages and captivate his audience on TikTok.

3. **Ali Shan**

Figure 5: TikTok video 1 of Ali Shan on the road

Signifier: Ali Shan appears in yellow shorts, showcasing his bare legs confidently on a road. He adopts a low camera angle to display his entire body, with fingers near his mouth and a bare neck. His toenails are painted red, and he uses a filter to lighten his complexion. His hairstyle is creatively styled. The setting is a road, and he initially appears shirtless before pulling one side of his shirt. A gesture near his mouth adds to his confident pose, indicating performance.

Signified: Ali Shan's bold stance and exposure of his fair, bare legs seek attention. His confident demeanor and acting skills project audacity and self-assurance to his audience. The low camera angle emphasizes his strength and daring attitude. His gesture near his mouth aims to draw attention, while his partial shirtless appearance enhances the allure of his exposed shoulders and neck.

Figure 6: TikTok video 2 of Ali Shan in the market

Signifier: In this video, Ali Shan confidently walks towards the camera, adjusting his trousers while one button of his shirt remains open. He wears a nightdress in the morning setting. Boldly navigating a parking area, he captions, "I don't know what will happen to people when they see me." Dressed in all-black attire including a shirt, pants, slippers, and sunglasses, he uses a simple camera and low angle to showcase his entire body, with a fairer complexion filter applied.

Signified: Ali Shan's choice of all-black attire in a public space aims to attract attention. The low camera angle boldly displays his entire body, emphasizing his seductive persona as he confidently moves through the parking lot. His caption reflects his desire to provoke reactions from onlookers, complemented by his unconventional choice of morning attire. The all-black ensemble asserts his dominance in the shopping street environment.

These analyses reveal how Ali Shan strategically uses clothing, body language, settings, and captions to convey specific messages and captivate his audience on TikTok.

4. **Zarkaish Zari**

Figure 7: TikTok video 1 of Zarkaish on the rooftop

Signifier: In this video, Zarkaish Zari stands on a rooftop and dances in a seductive manner. He wears brown trousers, a shirt, and black khusa shoes. In the first shot, his hands are on his chest, and he lifts one leg in a dance pose. In the second shot, he performs a thumka, emphasizing his buttocks, with his arms extended to the left. His hairstyle is unique, and he smiles at the camera. Makeup and filters are applied to enhance his appearance. Daylight illuminates the scene, and the camera angle tilts downward to capture his entire dancing body.

Signified: Zarkaish Zari portrays a seductive dance performance on his rooftop in this video. His attire, including brown trousers, a shirt, and black khusa shoes, complements his dance moves. The gestures of placing his hands on his chest and lifting one leg, followed by a thumka motion to showcase his buttocks, highlight his dance style. His different hairstyle and smiling expression add to the allure. Makeup and filters enhance his visual appeal, while daylight and a downward camera angle emphasize his dance performance on the rooftop setting.

Figure 8: TikTok video 2 of Zarkaish while modeling

Signifier: Zarkaish Zari poses for the camera in this video, draped in a dark blue dupatta over a light green shirt and matching trousers. He sports shoulder-length, straight hair and natural makeup. The video is filmed during the daytime, and he includes the hashtag #viral. He strikes a modeling pose by accentuating his buttocks towards the camera.

Signified: In this video, Zarkaish Zari adopts poses reminiscent of traditional modeling techniques. His choice of clothing, including a dark blue dupatta over a light green shirt and trousers, adds to his girlish appearance. The juxtaposition of shoulder-length, straight hair and a beard prompts viewers to question gender norms. His use of light makeup and subtle pink lipstick complements his attire. Filmed in daylight with a straight-on camera angle, the video effectively captures his modeling gestures and style.

These analyses reveal how Zarkaish Zari strategically uses attire, gestures, facial expressions, and settings to convey specific messages and captivate his audience on TikTok.
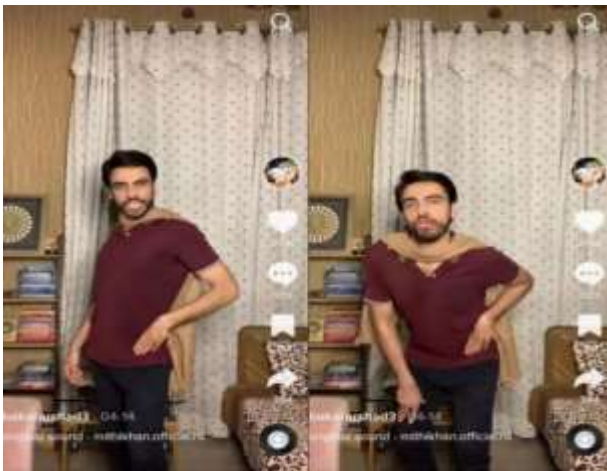
5. **Abubakar Arshad**

Figure 9: TikTok video 1 of Abubakar while acting

Signifier: Abubakar Arshad poses in a maroon shirt and black pants, accessorized with a brown dupatta. In the first frame, he strikes a model-like pose with one hand stylishly placed under

his waist. The second frame shows him bending over, acting, with his left hand on his leg and his right hand on his waist, making direct eye contact with the camera. A spotlight illuminates these shots, and props such as the dupatta, books, curtains, and a bed are used. He applies minimal makeup appropriate for his act.

Signified: Abubakar Arshad's body image and the way he positions his hands on his waist emphasize a feminine appearance. His confident posture, particularly in the second shot with one hand on his leg and the other on his waist, exudes a bold feminine look. The use of base makeup and light pink lipstick enhances his feminine portrayal on camera. His bending gestures add a seductive allure, effectively capturing the audience's attention during his performance.
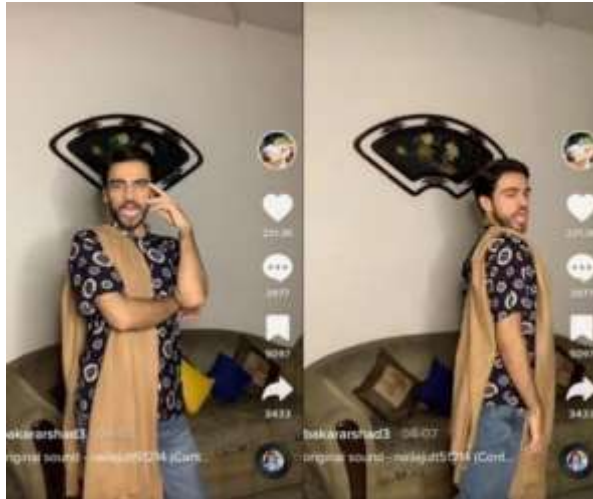

Figure 10: TikTok video 2 of Abubakar while acting

Signifier: In this video, Abubakar Arshad wears a brown dupatta over a blue shirt and sky-blue pants. In another shot, he bends down to showcase his left pose in front of the camera, still maintaining a model-like stance with one hand near his face and the other pointing towards his cheek. His acting utilizes a straight camera angle and effective use of spotlights. Props like the dupatta, sofa, and painting are strategically placed. He uses light pink lipstick and base makeup to complement the mood of his act.

Signified: Abubakar Arshad's gestures, particularly the way he points his fingers towards his head and cheek, evoke a feminine impression, especially in the subsequent shot where he bends down to display his pose. These actions highlight his confident acting skills and attract viewers with his body movements, expressions, and gestures. His choice of attire and makeup transforms his body image, altering his identity on screen. The minimal makeup he uses distinguishes his portrayal from other female performers.

These analyses demonstrate how Abubakar Arshad utilizes clothing, gestures, facial expressions, lighting, and props to convey specific messages and appeal to his audience through TikTok videos.

6. **Iqra Gillani**

Figure 11: TikTok video 2 of Iqra posing in front of mirror

Signifier: Iqra Gillani holds a smartphone in her hands and makes a provocative move by showcasing her buttocks. The phone's back case matches the color of her pants and the curtains in the background. She wears tight pants with an army theme and has brown hair styled loosely. Her makeup includes deep red lipstick, which she accentuates by standing sideways and opening her lips seductively. Daylight is used in this shot, along with a filter to enhance the contrast of her outfit. She uses the camera in front of the mirror to display her bold physique. The shot employs an ocean blue filter to create a provocative atmosphere.

Signified: The presence of the smartphone and its matching back case design with her pants suggests a deliberate aesthetic coordination. The use of daylight and the ocean blue filter intensifies the sensual appeal of the video. Her choice of tight jeans and makeup, especially the deep red lipstick and provocative stance, aims to captivate the audience with a sexy appearance. These elements collectively portray Iqra Gillani in a seductive light, leveraging visual cues and filters to enhance her allure.

Figure 12: TikTok video 2 of Iqra standing in front of mirror

Signifier: Iqra Gillani is dressed in a black T-shirt, blue pants, and an army green shirt. She wears tight jeans, with one hand placed on her buttocks, and tucks her T-shirt into her jeans. Her locket, touching her chest, serves as a prop in this shot, matching the color scheme of her T-shirt and shirt. The setting is a room with both the back camera and mirror back camera capturing the scene. The shot utilizes a sun-kissed filter and daylight.

Signified: The presence of the locket touching her chest draws attention to her chest area, adding to the visual appeal of the video. Iqra Gillani enhances her attractiveness by posing in front of the mirror and emphasizing her stance and hand placement on her buttocks. The use of sun-kissed and daylight filters further amplifies the video's appeal, creating a sensual ambiance. Her choice of tight jeans and the way she presents herself reflect her intent to appear alluring and provoke viewer interest. The back camera and mirror angle effectively showcase her full body, enhancing the overall impact of her performance.

These analyses illustrate how Iqra Gillani strategically uses clothing, gestures, makeup, and filters to convey specific messages and attract viewers through her TikTok videos.

7. Eman Shah

Figure 13: TikTok video 1 of Eman standing with the wall

Signifier: Eman Shah poses for the camera by standing against a wall. She wears a white cigarette trouser, a black camisole visible under a yellow half-sleeved shirt, and a yellow dupatta around her neck. The room lighting is used in this shot, and the angle is tilted to showcase her entire body. Her nails on both feet and hands are painted with red nail polish, and she wears dark red lipstick. A tissue is placed on the carpet as a prop.

Signified: Her pose against the wall suggests a sense of introspection and solitude. The deep red lipstick and makeup signify her desire for emotional depth and connection. The tilted angle emphasizes her emotional state and loneliness. The tissue on the carpet symbolizes her emotional vulnerability and longing for comfort. Her choice of clothing, particularly the black camisole and yellow shirt, expresses her style and identity in this performance.

Figure 14: TikTok video 2 of Eman on a road

Signifier: Eman Shah wears a white see-through shirt with a pattern, layered over a white camisole and a white lungi. She acts confidently on the road, spreading her arms open. Her nails are painted black, and she wears black heels. The shot uses a low angle to portray her as a brave and independent woman. A movie filter is applied to enhance the dramatic effect. She also wears dark red lipstick and makeup resembling that of heroines.

Signified: In this video, Eman Shah portrays herself as a bold and strong character. The white see-through shirt and lungi suggest a traditional yet confident attire. By spreading her arms open, she symbolizes freedom and strength. The use of a movie filter and dramatic makeup aligns her with the portrayal of heroines in Pakistani cinema. Her attire and gestures reflect a persona similar to Pakistani stage dancers, blending traditional elements with a modern, confident expression.

This analysis illustrates how Eman Shah utilizes clothing, props, gestures, and filters to convey specific meanings and portray different aspects of identity and emotion in her TikTok videos.

8. Anmol Noor

Figure 15: Dancing TikTok video 1 of Anmol Noor

Signifier: Anmol Noor starts the video displaying her back, revealing a neck tattoo and a cut-out back in a yellow nightshirt. She boldly dances, emphasizing body movements and chest extension towards the camera. Her hair is styled with bangs and a curl, and the room lighting

is used. The first shot focuses on her neck tattoo and backless detail, while the second shot provides a full view of her dance. She wears light makeup that complements her nightdress and dances barefoot. A movie filter is applied for a cinematic effect.

Signified: The neck tattoo symbolizes her identity as a daring and independent young woman, especially as a dancer. Her backless attire and tattoos exude a seductive vibe. During the dance, she uses hand movements to accentuate her body, creating a sensual appeal. The lighting suggests a nighttime ambiance, highlighting her directly. Her hairstyle with bangs and curls enhances her youthful appearance. The yellow nightshirt reflects her energetic and cheerful personality. The movie filter adds a cinematic touch, enhancing her heroic portrayal.

Figure 16: Tiktok video 2 of Anmol Noor while acting

Signifier: Anmol Noor appears to be acting in a jungle suit, one shoulder fully exposed, posing confidently in a park. She wears sunglasses and high heels, with her hair styled in bangs and curls. Her lipstick matches her outfit, which features a tiger print design. The shot is captured in natural daylight, revealing her neck tattoo and exposed shoulder. The location is set in a park, with props including her belt and sunglasses.

Signified: In this video, Anmol Noor portrays a strong and powerful character through her choice of outfit and confident posing. The jungle suit with tiger print symbolizes her bold and fearless personality. The low-angle viewpoint highlights her entire figure, emphasizing her attractive attire. Her neck tattoo and the exposed shoulder add to her portrayal as a strong protagonist. Matching her makeup with her outfit enhances her overall appearance. She adjusts her belt to accentuate her attire, further emphasizing her body image.

This analysis demonstrates how Anmol Noor utilizes clothing, props, gestures, and settings to convey specific meanings and portray different aspects of identity and performance in her TikTok videos.

9. **Ana Butt**

Figure 17: TikTok video 1 of Ana in gym

Signifier: Ana Butt is depicted lifting dumbbells while wearing a gym suit. Her hair is styled in a ponytail, and she lifts her chin and chest confidently. She bends to demonstrate her strength while lifting the dumbbell. The caption suggests waiting until the end to see how many repetitions she performs. The setting is a gym, with exercise equipment and dumbbells as visible props. She wears light makeup, and both natural gym lighting and camera light are used, with Ana positioned centrally in the frame.

Signified: In this shot, Ana symbolizes strength by lifting dumbbells, showcasing a healthy body image through exercise. Her bending posture while lifting the dumbbell highlights the flexibility and fitness of her physique. The tight gym suit emphasizes her toned body shape. Her ponytail hairstyle suggests a confident and tidy appearance typical of determined women. The camera angle and lighting emphasize her full-body workout routine in the gym.

Figure 18: TikTok video 2 of Ana in gym

Signifier: Ana Butt is seen tying a jacket around her hips, dressed in tights and a see-through green top. Props include gym equipment, her watch, and a chain around her neck. She turns her back to showcase her physical flexibility and body image. The gym setting provides standard

lighting. Her makeup emphasizes a strong and confident facial expression, and her ponytail is positioned in front of her neck.

Signified: In this video, Ana Butt portrays her body image through her workout attire and the way she ties her jacket around her hips. Displaying her back enhances her portrayal of strength and physical fitness. Her frequent workouts maintain her top physical condition, showcasing her fearless nature. The chain around her neck adds to her bold appearance. The way she ties her jacket underscores her strong personality, while positioning her ponytail in front of her neck highlights her self-assured demeanor.

This analysis highlights how Ana Butt uses clothing, props, posture, and setting to convey specific meanings about strength, fitness, and confidence in her TikTok videos.

10. Fariya Mehboob

Figure 19: TikTok video 1 of Fariya while doing acting

Signifier: Fariya Mehboob is seated on a bed, wearing a blue shalwar kameez with half-cut sleeves. She gestures towards her exposed sleeves with her hand. Her hair is dyed crimson, and she has a pierced nose. The shot uses a low angle and the camera's flashlight. She wears pink lipstick and light makeup, with a cold white filter applied to the video. Props include her nose ring and bracelet.

Signified: In this video, Fariya draws attention to her bare sleeves while seated, emphasizing her body in the shalwar kameez. Her pierced nose adds to her provocative appearance, highlighted by the camera's flashlight. Her chubby physique contributes to her bold and daring image. The pose and setting suggest she portrays a character with a confident and assertive personality.

Figure 20: TikTok video 2 of Fariya doing acting

Signifier: Fariya is seated on the street wearing a blue shalwar kameez with intricate embroidery. She turns her shirt in the shot, using light makeup and red lipstick. Natural light is combined with a movie filter in this video, with the road serving as the setting.

Signified: In this shot, Fariya's boldness is evident as she manipulates her shirt to attract attention. Despite wearing a dupatta, her ample chest reveals a robust body image. The movie filter enhances her heroic appearance, seated prominently on the road, showcasing her acting skills and attractive physique. The low-angle shot emphasizes her curves, enhancing her presence in the scene.

This analysis details how Fariya Mehboob uses her clothing choices, props, makeup, and setting to convey specific messages about boldness, confidence, and body image in her TikTok videos.

Conclusion

Based on the detailed semiotic analyses of TikTok videos from Alex Bhatti, Daniyal Khan, Ali Shan, Zarkaish Zari, Abubakar Arshad, Iqra Gillani, Eman Shah, Anmol Noor, and Fariya Mehboob, several key conclusions can be drawn within the theoretical framework of semiotics and identity portrayal:

Strategic Use of Attire and Props: Each TikTok creator strategically utilizes clothing, accessories, and props to construct and convey specific identities and messages. For instance, Alex Bhatti employs red attire and sparkling rings to evoke allure and seduction, while Daniyal Khan utilizes suspenders and specific lighting to emphasize a macho persona.

Body Language and Gestures: Body language and gestures play a crucial role in conveying identity and engaging the audience. Ali Shan's confident posture and provocative gestures, such as adjusting clothing in public spaces, aim to provoke reactions and highlight his self-assured persona.

Role of Settings and Lighting: Settings and lighting enhance the thematic and emotional resonance of the videos. For example, Zarkaish Zari uses rooftop and modeling settings with specific filters to enhance the allure and dramatic effect, aligning with traditional modeling aesthetics.

Gender and Cultural Identity: Many creators challenge traditional gender norms and cultural expectations through their attire and actions. Abubakar Arshad and Anmol Noor, for instance, use makeup, attire, and gestures that blur gender boundaries, reflecting evolving cultural attitudes towards identity and expression.

Audience Engagement and Influence: The use of specific filters, lighting effects, and camera angles serves not only to enhance visual appeal but also to engage and influence the audience emotionally. Iqra Gillani's use of provocative poses and filters aims to captivate viewers with a seductive and alluring persona.

Semiotic Analysis and Interpretation: The semiotic analysis reveals how each creator uses signs (signifiers) such as attire, props, gestures, and settings to signify specific meanings (signified). These meanings are constructed through cultural codes and norms, influencing how viewers interpret and engage with the content.

TikTok serves as a dynamic platform where creators strategically construct and convey identities through semiotic practices. The analyses demonstrate how attire, gestures, settings, and other visual elements are utilized to create compelling narratives that resonate with diverse audiences. These findings contribute to a deeper understanding of how digital platforms facilitate the construction and negotiation of identities in contemporary cultural contexts, offering insights into the evolving dynamics of social media influence and audience engagement. In analyzing the TikTok videos through the theoretical lenses of Identity Theory rooted in symbolic interactionism and the Communication Theory of Identity (CTI), several key insights emerge about how individuals on TikTok construct and present their identities. Firstly, TikTok creators strategically use attire, gestures, settings, and props to perform identities that resonate with their intended audience. This aligns with Identity Theory, which posits that individuals construct their sense of self through social interactions and roles. Each video serves as a performance where creators negotiate and communicate aspects of their identity, whether through challenging gender norms like Daniyal Khan and Anmol Noor, or emphasizing cultural symbols like Zarkaish Zari's traditional attire. Secondly, CTI's framework expands on Identity Theory by highlighting the multifaceted nature of identity. Personal identities, relational identities (how one relates to others), enacted identities (performed identities in specific contexts), and communal identities (shared identities within groups) are all evident in the TikTok videos. For instance, Ali Shan's confident demeanor in public spaces not only enacts his individual identity but also relates to communal expectations of boldness and audacity. Thirdly, the use of semiotics in these videos illustrates how symbols and signs convey meanings that are culturally and socially constructed. From Alex Bhatti's use of red attire symbolizing allure to Iqra Gillani's provocative poses signifying sensuality, these symbols are interpreted through shared cultural codes and norms, influencing audience perceptions and interactions. TikTok serves as a dynamic platform where creators engage in identity performances shaped by social interactions and cultural contexts. The videos analyzed demonstrate how individuals construct, negotiate, and present their identities through symbolic interactionism and CTI's relational and discursive perspectives. These frameworks provide a deeper understanding of how digital media platforms facilitate identity expression and negotiation in contemporary social environments, reflecting broader cultural dynamics and individual self-expression through communication.

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