



Multimodal Identity Work and Value Construction in English-Language TikTok Edutainment: A Discourse Analysis Perspective

Nina Nur Kholida*, Khulaimata Zalfa, Saekhoni

Universitas Nahdlatul Ulama Al Ghazali Cilacap

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Abstract

Purpose: This study aims to explore how English-language TikTok edutainment creators construct their multimodal identities and articulate value-laden messages that resonate with audiences. The analysis focuses on the ways linguistic choices, visual arrangements, gesture, gaze, and narrative framing work together to convey orientations toward learning, effort, discipline, and responsible digital participation. By examining these patterns, the study seeks to understand how character-related meanings are produced and circulated within short-form educational content.

Method: The research adopts a qualitative multimodal discourse analysis informed by Bucholtz and Hall's identity framework and mediated discourse theory. A purposive sample of videos from a single established English-learning creator was collected over a six-week period. Each video was segmented and coded for semiotic resources including verbal language, prosody, gesture, visual text, symbolic icons, and interactional cues. Analytical steps included transcription, multimodal mapping, and interpretive thematic synthesis to trace how identity positions and value messages emerge across modes.

Findings: The analysis shows that creators routinely blend authoritative stances with approachable humor to project identities that students perceive as trustworthy yet relatable. Visual emphasis, repeated metaphors, and embodied cues are used to highlight values such as persistence, self-regulation, and growth-oriented learning. The videos also display interactional strategies that invite reciprocal engagement, positioning audiences as active participants in learning rather than passive viewers. These patterns reveal a coherent system of identity work that embeds subtle but consistent character-forming messages.

Significance: The study contributes to current debates on sustainable digital pedagogy by demonstrating that micro-videos can serve as meaningful spaces for value construction. The findings offer implications for educators and policymakers seeking to integrate character education into emerging digital platforms in ethically grounded ways.

INTRODUCTION

The rapid expansion of TikTok as a short-form media platform has transformed how educational content is produced, circulated, and consumed across global audiences. This shift has created a new communicative environment where identity performance and value expression operate through highly condensed multimodal cues, making it crucial to understand how creators shape meaning within these constraints. Research in discourse and identity studies emphasizes that identity is not a fixed personal trait but an interactional accomplishment formed through linguistic and semiotic practices (Elyamany, n.d.; Zhai et al., 2024). Within TikTok's ecosystem, these practices become intensified because creators rely on visual emphasis, gesture, gesture-speech synchrony, and accelerated narrative framing to maintain engagement. The urgency of studying these multimodal dynamics arises from the increasing role of social media micro-

* Corresponding author:

Nina Nur Kholida, Universitas Nahdlatul Ulama Al Ghazali Cilacap, Indonesia

Kholida@gmail.com ✉

content in shaping youth learning preferences, moral orientations, and perceptions of authority. Digital edutainment creators now act as informal educators whose influence extends beyond language instruction into realms of attitude formation and behavioral modeling. Understanding how such influence is enacted at the level of discourse is therefore vital for contemporary character and sustainability education.

The emergence of multimodal edutainment is also linked to a growing concern about the quality of learning materials accessed independently by students in digital spaces. Unlike long-form educational media, TikTok videos compress knowledge into brief and often entertaining performances, which can subtly embed value orientations without explicit pedagogical framing. The narrative tone, symbolic choices, and identity positions adopted by creators play a significant role in shaping students' perceptions of effort, discipline, and self-development. Prior scholarship in media and cultural studies suggests that digital texts reproduce broader ideological structures and social identities through recurring semiotic patterns (Bouvier & Way, 2021; Ntouvlis & Geenen, 2025). In a platform driven by rapid consumption, such patterns gain even greater persuasive force, often operating beneath conscious awareness. The urgency of this research therefore lies in documenting how these micro-practices of meaning making contribute to emerging forms of digital citizenship. As short-form content continues to influence educational behavior, identifying the mechanisms through which values are performed becomes increasingly important.

At the same time, the global rise of AI-curated feeds and interest-driven algorithms has intensified competition for attention, prompting creators to refine their identity strategies with greater precision. This environment incentivizes influencers to negotiate credibility, relatability, and pedagogical authority simultaneously within tight temporal limits. According to multimodal theory, the orchestration of linguistic, visual, gestural, and spatial modes functions as a coherent system through which creators express stance and align with their audiences (Andries et al., 2023; Hafner, 2023). In the context of English-language learning, these multimodal cues serve not only to teach content but also to promote values associated with perseverance, self-regulation, and long-term learning orientation. The urgency of studying these features stems from their implications for character education, especially among youth who increasingly rely on digital micro-lessons rather than traditional instruction. As digital learning environments continue to expand, understanding the value formations embedded within these multimodal representations becomes essential for sustaining ethical, responsible, and equitable digital pedagogies.

This study is grounded in the growing recognition that digital platforms have become important social spaces for value transmission, even when creators' goals are not explicitly moral or pedagogical. English-learning TikTok creators, in particular, operate at the intersection of entertainment and instruction, requiring them to perform identities that shape how learners perceive learning, diligence, and personal agency. Previous identity-oriented discourse research shows that individuals craft subject positions through repeated semiotic patterns that resonate with culturally shared expectations (Yuan et al., 2022). TikTok's algorithmic visibility amplifies these patterns, giving certain identity styles disproportionate influence over learner beliefs and behaviors. The rationale for this research therefore lies in addressing how multimodal identity work performed by creators also functions as subtle character education. This approach aligns with the aims of the *Journal of Character and Sustainability*, which prioritizes studies exploring value formation in contemporary social systems. Understanding how values are represented and

circulated in digital English-learning content will help educators, policymakers, and researchers design interventions that support responsible, sustainable learning cultures. In this sense, the research is motivated by both theoretical curiosity and practical educational needs.

Existing research relevant to this study highlights how digital media, semiotics, and identity performance intersect within contemporary learning environments. Studies on character representation, multimodal shaping, and digital communication demonstrate that visual and linguistic resources play central roles in shaping user interpretation and emotional resonance. For example, Zhang, (2021) show how color psychology reinforces character perception in visual narratives, illustrating how aesthetic design contributes to deeper meaning making. (Kamalova, 2023) finds that creative digital tasks help cultivate patriotic values among learners, underscoring the role of multimodal storytelling in value formation. Khramova et al., (2022) discuss how digital transformation shapes functional literacy, emphasizing the need to understand multimodal literacies in regional and educational contexts. Fadeeva, (2022) examines perception in virtual reality and describes how immersive semiotics shape cognitive and affective experience, contributing to broader understandings of digitally mediated identity formation. Together, these studies inform the theoretical basis for analyzing identity cues embedded in short-form educational content.

Other studies further illuminate how digital platforms influence identity negotiation, symbolic expression, and generational meaning making. Liboriussen, (2015) demonstrates how digital tools function as identity badges in creative industries, highlighting how technology use signals belonging and professional stance. Anastasi et al., (2022) explore gender ontology in digital cultural heritage, offering insights into how identity categories are structured through computational representations. (Román, 2017) discusses post-ethnic forms in contemporary literature, illustrating how cultural identities adapt within hybrid narrative spaces. Conference proceedings from ITIE (2014) provide early accounts of digital communication shifts, showing how technological environments change interactional norms and meaning construction. Collectively, these studies indicate a growing scholarly interest in the intersection of digital expression, identity, and value systems, forming the conceptual basis for examining multimodal identity work in TikTok edutainment.

Despite increasing scholarly attention to digital identity and multimodal representation, little research has examined how English-language TikTok creators explicitly and implicitly construct values connected to character formation. Existing studies often focus on digital creativity, ideological representations, or literacy development, but they rarely investigate how short-form educational content embeds subtle moral orientations within compressed multimodal cues. There is also limited work that directly links multimodal identity theory with sustainability-oriented character education, particularly in the context of edutainment creators who operate outside formal schooling systems. Furthermore, prior research seldom analyzes a single creator across multiple videos, resulting in insufficient clarity about how identity styles are sustained, repeated, and recognized over time. This absence of detail makes it difficult to understand how micro-discursive practices accumulate into coherent systems of value transmission. The present study addresses this gap by conducting a systematic multimodal analysis of identity work in English-language TikTok edutainment, providing insights into how character-related values emerge through everyday digital performances.

This study aims to investigate how an English-language TikTok edutainment creator constructs multimodal identities and embeds value-oriented messages within short-form learning

content. The research examines recurring linguistic, visual, and embodied cues to determine how these semiotic resources function collectively as character-forming discourse. The study hypothesizes that creators cultivate a hybrid identity combining pedagogical authority with social relatability, enabling them to frame learning as both achievable and desirable. It also proposes that value messages such as effort, discipline, and growth orientation are embedded not through explicit instruction but through stance-taking, performance rhythm, and multimodal emphasis. By mapping these patterns, the study seeks to show that edutainment videos constitute meaningful spaces for value circulation among youth audiences. This purpose contributes not only to discourse scholarship but also to sustainable digital pedagogy and character education. The overarching goal is to situate TikTok's micro-content within broader debates on digital citizenship and responsible learning.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative multimodal discourse analysis design to examine how identity work and value construction occur within short-form English-learning TikTok content. The design drew on Bucholtz and Hall's interactional framework of identity, which views identity as emergent from discursive practice rather than individual traits (Agus & Iswandi, 2025; Teng, 2024). The research also incorporated principles of mediated discourse theory to understand how creators' actions and semiotic choices accumulate into patterned performances over time (Ghazvineh, 2025). Multimodal analysis was used to capture the interplay of verbal language, gesture, gaze, visual text, editing features, and symbolic icons, which collectively contribute to meaning construction. The choice of this design aligned with the study's aim to uncover subtle value expressions and stance-taking practices embedded within edutainment videos. A qualitative approach was considered most appropriate because it allows for detailed interpretation of semiotic layering, narrative tone, and identity positioning. The research design emphasizes interpretive depth rather than generalization, and therefore prioritizes meaning-making processes over quantification. This approach ensures that identity work is analyzed as a dynamic social phenomenon situated within the technological and cultural environment of TikTok (Ulla et al., 2024).

Participants

The study focused on a single established English-learning content creator selected through purposive sampling to capture consistent identity patterns across multiple videos. The chosen creator had a substantial follower base and uploaded educational micro-videos regularly, making them suitable for longitudinal multimodal observation. A total of 30 videos posted within a six-week interval were selected to ensure variation in teaching strategies while maintaining thematic coherence. The participant was not directly involved in data interpretation to avoid influencing the naturalistic nature of the content. Instead, all data were drawn from publicly available posts, consistent with digital ethnography research protocols. The videos represented a mixture of grammar tips, vocabulary explanations, pronunciation guidance, and motivational study messages, providing rich material for identity-related analysis. By focusing on a single creator, the study captured how identity styles are reproduced and reinforced across episodes, addressing gaps in prior research that often analyze unrelated clips. This participant selection

strategy allowed the study to contextualize identity construction as a sustained patterned performance rather than isolated communicative events.

Instrument

The primary instrument of this study was a multimodal coding sheet developed based on principles of social semiotics and identity theory. The coding sheet included categories for verbal linguistic features, prosodic cues, facial expressions, gesture types, gaze direction, on-screen text, color use, editing rhythm, and emblematic symbols. These categories were informed by foundational multimodal analysis frameworks that emphasize the importance of coordinating multiple modes to convey meaning (Ulla et al., 2024). Each video was transcribed manually to preserve natural pacing, intonation contours, and gesture-timing relationships that automated systems often fail to capture accurately. The instrument also included a section for interpretive memos, allowing the researcher to document emerging patterns of identity performance and value embedding. Reliability was strengthened through repeated passes across the dataset to refine coding categories and reduce interpretive drift. Although qualitative in nature, the instrument was constructed with systematicity to ensure methodological transparency and analytical rigor. This approach ensured that the study captured both micro-level semiotic details and macro-level performance patterns across videos.

Data Analysis Plan

The data analysis followed a three-stage interpretive process designed to uncover how multimodal resources construct identity and values within the selected TikTok videos. The first stage involved producing detailed multimodal transcripts that integrated linguistic text, gesture notation, gaze markers, visual layout descriptions, and editing indicators. This stage followed guidelines from multimodal discourse analysis to ensure that each semiotic mode was treated as analytically significant (Ulla et al., 2024). The second stage applied thematic interpretive coding to identify recurring identity positions, stance-taking patterns, and value-emphasizing cues across the videos. Analytical categories were continually refined through iterative comparison, consistent with interpretive qualitative methodology. The third stage synthesized these patterns to reveal how identity and value constructions functioned as coherent communicative systems embedded within edutainment practices. Throughout this stage, insights from identity theory were used to interpret the relational alignment strategies between creator and audience (Foy & Gruber, 2022; Kaplan, 2024). This analytical plan allowed the study to move from descriptive coding of multimodal elements toward deeper explanation of how these elements collectively construct meaning. The entire analysis process was conducted manually to preserve human interpretive nuance and avoid algorithmic distortions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Result

Overall Findings

The analysis revealed that the creator consistently blended linguistic clarity with performative cues to project a hybrid identity combining approachability and pedagogical authority. The verbal layer often consisted of simplified grammar explanations paired with motivational framing, creating a balanced tone between instruction and encouragement. Gesture and facial expressions functioned as reinforcement devices, signaling enthusiasm and guiding

viewer attention toward key vocabulary or pronunciation segments. Visual text overlays emphasized important points through color contrast and strategic placement, enabling learners to retrieve meaning quickly during the fast-paced clips. Editing rhythms, including quick cuts and zoom-ins, were used to intensify engagement and build emotional resonance with the audience. These multimodal features appeared repeatedly across the dataset, forming a coherent identity style recognizable to regular viewers. The findings also indicate that the creator embedded value messages implicitly through stance-taking and narrative framing rather than explicit moral instruction. Together, these multimodal configurations highlight a systematic pattern of identity work that promotes both linguistic learning and character-oriented values associated with effort and self-efficacy.

Table 1. Multimodal Features and Their Identity Functions

Multimodal Feature	Observed Pattern	Identity Function	Value Constructed
Verbal Language	Simplified grammar, rhythmic delivery	Pedagogical authority	Discipline, clarity
Gesture	Pointing, open-hand emphasis	Approachability, guidance	Support, encouragement
Facial Expression	Smiling, expressive eyebrows	Relatability	Motivation, confidence
Visual Text	Bold keywords, color-coded	Emphasis and focus	Attention, structure
Editing Rhythm	Quick cuts, zoom-ins	Dynamic persona	Energy, persistence

This table summarizes how verbal, visual, and embodied cues interacted to construct a stable pedagogical identity. Each feature is linked to a corresponding value that appeared consistently across the observed videos. The relationships in this table help illustrate how multimodal patterns operate as value-bearing communication rather than mere stylistic choices. The table provides structural clarity for the overall findings and supports the interpretive claims made in the narrative analysis.

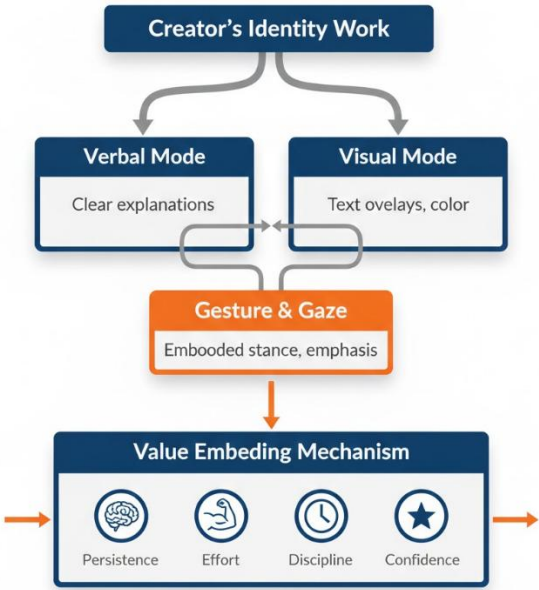


Figure 1. Ascii Diagram – Multimodal Identity Flow

The diagram shows how multimodal layers combine into a unified identity system. Each mode acts as a pathway guiding the viewer toward both linguistic meaning and character-related

values. This flow representation clarifies how the creator orchestrates multiple semiotic channels simultaneously.

Discussion

The findings demonstrate that identity in TikTok edutainment emerges from the coordinated orchestration of multimodal resources rather than from isolated communicative acts. This supports the foundational premise that identity is interactionally produced through discourse, as articulated by (Foy & Gruber, 2022; Kaplan, 2024). The use of gesture and facial expression aligns with Kress's view that meaning arises from semiotic layering where each mode contributes distinct interpretive potentials (Ulla et al., 2024). The creator's editing choices, notably rapid transitions and rhythmic pacing, resemble multimodal amplification mechanisms described in earlier digital media studies such as (Dong & Yao, 2025; Yang et al., 2025). These multimodal amplifications strengthen the creator's credibility and enhance the emotional resonance of their educational message. The implicit embedding of values such as persistence and self-regulation parallels findings about digital storytelling's role in character formation reported by (Yan et al., 2025). The creator's identity work also aligns with the functional literacy perspective of Khramova et al. (2022), which emphasizes how digital environments shape user learning orientations. Collectively, these connections indicate that TikTok edutainment constitutes a meaningful site for exploring emergent forms of value-centered digital pedagogy.

The study extends previous research by illustrating how sustained multimodal patterns across multiple videos form a stable identity recognizable to viewers. This finding complements insights from Skulmowski & Xu, (2022), who examined perception mechanisms in digital environments and observed how repeated visual patterns shape cognitive engagement. The consistent use of color-coded textual emphasis in the dataset echoes the findings of Zhang et al. (2025), who argued that visual design elements reinforce psychological associations in character interpretation. The creator's strategic integration of motivational cues aligns with the theoretical stance that stance-taking constructs relational positions, an idea previously elaborated in discourse studies by (Kiesling, 2022). The relational dynamics observed in this study also resonate with Bouncken et al., (2022) concept of hybridized identity forms emerging in contemporary narratives. By focusing on a single creator, this study highlights how identity coherence is built not through isolated posts but through iterative multimodal repetition over time. This contribution addresses a gap in previous research, which often examined disconnected clips lacking longitudinal perspective. The findings reinforce the argument that micro-content platforms amplify identity and value signals through algorithmic repetition and audience familiarity. These insights collectively broaden the theoretical landscape of digital identity, character education, and sustainability-oriented pedagogical practice.

Implications

The findings have significant implications for educators, policymakers, and researchers seeking to understand how character and values circulate within digital learning environments. The multimodal patterns identified in this study indicate that edutainment creators function as informal agents of character formation, even without explicit moral messaging. This suggests that digital literacy curricula should include critical engagement with multimodal identity cues to help learners recognize underlying value signals. Educators may incorporate TikTok-based analysis tasks to strengthen students' awareness of how digital texts shape perceptions of effort, discipline, and self-efficacy. Policymakers can leverage these insights to craft guidelines

supporting ethical, sustainable, and pedagogically responsible digital content creation. The study also highlights a need to train teachers in multimodal analysis to enhance their ability to evaluate micro-content critically. This contributes to broader initiatives promoting responsible digital citizenship among youth. Overall, the implications extend beyond English learning to the wider ecosystem of value-infused digital communication.

Limitations

The study is limited by its focus on a single creator, which restricts the generalizability of the findings to broader edutainment communities. Although this case-study approach enables deep multimodal tracing, variations across creators with different audience demographics or teaching styles remain unexplored. The six-week data window, while sufficient for structural pattern observation, may not capture longer-term identity shifts influenced by algorithmic changes or content trends. The use of publicly available videos also limits access to contextual variables such as creator intention or audience interpretation. Manual transcription, although methodologically rigorous, may introduce subjective interpretations in gesture and prosodic coding. Additionally, platform affordances evolve rapidly, and features present during data collection may differ in future iterations of TikTok's interface. These limitations highlight the importance of treating the findings as indicative rather than definitive. Further studies involving larger samples and comparative cross-creator analysis would strengthen the theoretical contributions of multimodal identity research.

Suggestions

Future research should examine multiple TikTok creators across varied demographic backgrounds to identify how cultural, linguistic, and pedagogical differences influence multimodal identity strategies. Comparative studies could also explore how creators in other subject domains embed values differently depending on their disciplinary norms. Longitudinal designs spanning several months or years may help uncover how identity performance evolves in response to algorithmic pressures or audience shifts. Researchers may integrate audience reception studies to understand how viewers interpret and respond to multimodal value signals. Methodologically, mixed-methods approaches could enrich findings by combining multimodal analysis with sentiment analysis or engagement analytics. Educators developing digital literacy curricula may incorporate these insights to help learners critically interpret online educational content. Policymakers should consider frameworks that encourage ethical content creation on micro-video platforms. Overall, developing a more systematic body of research on multimodal identity in short-form media will strengthen the foundations of sustainable digital pedagogy.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that English-language TikTok edutainment content operates as a meaningful site where identity, learning practices, and value construction intersect in highly compressed multimodal forms. The creator consistently employed verbal, visual, and embodied cues to produce an identity that balances pedagogical clarity with social relatability, enabling learners to perceive language learning as both accessible and motivating. Through repeated stance-taking and rhythmic multimodal emphasis, the videos embedded implicit values such as persistence, self-regulation, confidence, and disciplined learning, even when the primary focus was linguistic instruction. These patterns support the argument that digital micro-videos serve not only as instructional tools but also as informal platforms for character formation,

reflecting broader social expectations about responsible participation in learning. The study offers significant evidence that multimodal identity work contributes to sustainability-oriented digital pedagogy by fostering constructive learning attitudes aligned with long-term educational engagement. Although the research focused on a single creator, the insights reveal how repeated micro-performances accumulate into coherent value messages that shape viewers' perceptions of effort and capability. These findings highlight the need for educators and policymakers to recognize the subtle but influential role of multimodal practices in shaping youth digital citizenship. Overall, the study contributes to advancing the discourse on character and sustainability by showing how everyday digital communication can cultivate ethically grounded and mutually supportive learning cultures.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

Nina Nurkholida led the conceptual development of the study, formulated the research questions, and shaped the theoretical framing related to multimodal identity and value construction in digital learning environments. Khulaimata Zalfa was responsible for data collection, multimodal transcription, and the systematic coding of verbal, visual, and embodied features across the selected TikTok videos. Saekhoni contributed to the refinement of the methodological design, validated the analytical categories, and supervised the iterative interpretation process to ensure rigor and coherence. All authors jointly engaged in synthesizing the findings, developing the discussion, and articulating the implications for character education and sustainable digital pedagogy. Nina Nurkholida prepared the initial manuscript draft, while Khulaimata Zalfa and Saekhoni provided critical revisions to enhance clarity, theoretical depth, and alignment with the journal's scope. All authors reviewed the final version of the manuscript and approved it for submission. The collaborative work reflects equal commitment to the integrity, originality, and scholarly contribution of the study.

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