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Analyzing (Anti-)Feminist Influencers' Content And Public
Sentiment on TikTok

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Contents

Abstract	2
Introduction.....	4
Theoretical Framework.....	6
SMIs as Opinion Leaders.....	6
Feminist and Anti-feminist Influencers	9
Liberal Feminism vs. Radical Feminism	12
Hashtags as a Framing Device	15
Comments as Collective Action.....	17
Affective Publics on TikTok	20
Methodology	25
Sample.....	25
Data Analysis	26
Quantitative Content Analysis	26
Network Analysis of Hashtags.....	27
Sentiment Analysis of Comments.....	28
Results.....	30
Dominant Topics	30
The Use of Hashtags	33
Sentiment Analysis.....	38
Discussion	41
Limitations and Future Research	50
Conclusion	54
References.....	55
Appendix 1. Codebook	73

Abstract

In the contemporary information landscape social media influencers (SMIs) producing political content have a powerful educational, curatorial, and mobilizing role among the audience. This study focuses on TikTok, an emerging platform with potential for political participation. Specifically, through a combination of quantitative content analysis, network analysis, and sentiment analysis, I aim to investigate the dominant topics and use of hashtags by (anti-)feminist influencers. Further, the sentiments and emotions expressed in response to these contents are taken into account. Results showed a variety of 23 topics discussed by three types of influencers: liberal feminists, radical feminists, and anti-feminists. 480 hashtags were used within various clusters to substantiate and emphasize the topics conveyed in the videos in question. Additionally, sentiment analysis showed an overwhelmingly positive sentiment in the comment section, although the distribution of emotions varied across influencers. The findings provide support for the rising political role of influencers as well as people's emotional engagement when exposed to online political content. The study also has implications for the effects of TikTok in information circulation and processing.

Keywords: feminism, social media influencers, content analysis, network analysis, sentiment analysis, TikTok

Im zeitgenössischen Informationsumfeld spielen Social-Media-Influencer (SMIs), die politische Inhalte produzieren, eine bedeutende pädagogische, kuratorische und mobilisierende Rolle unter dem Publikum. Diese Studie konzentriert sich auf TikTok, eine aufstrebende Plattform mit Potenzial für politische Partizipation. Konkret beabsichtige ich, mittels einer Kombination aus quantitativer Inhaltsanalyse, Netzwerkanalyse und Sentimentanalyse die dominierenden Themen und die Verwendung von Hashtags durch (anti-)feministische Influencer zu untersuchen. Darüber hinaus werden die Stimmungen und Emotionen berücksichtigt, die als Reaktion auf diese Inhalte zum Ausdruck gebracht werden. Die Ergebnisse zeigten eine Vielzahl von 23 Themen, die von drei Arten von Influencern diskutiert wurden: liberalen Feministinnen, radikalen Feministinnen und Anti-Feministinnen. 480 Hashtags wurden innerhalb verschiedener Cluster verwendet, um die in Frage stehenden Videos vermittelten Themen zu untermauern und zu betonen. Darüber hinaus zeigte die Sentimentanalyse eine überwiegend positive Stimmung im Kommentarbereich, obwohl die Verteilung der Emotionen zwischen den Influencern variierte. Die Ergebnisse unterstützen die wachsende politische Rolle von Influencern sowie das emotionale Engagement der Menschen, wenn sie Online-Politikinhalten ausgesetzt sind. Die Studie hat auch Implikationen für die Auswirkungen von TikTok auf die Informationsverbreitung und -verarbeitung.

Schlüsselwörter: Feminismus, Social-Media-Influencer, Inhaltsanalyse, Netzwerkanalyse, Sentimentanalyse, TikTok

Introduction

Social media influencers (SMIs) are people reputed to create and share content with a dedicated group of followers on social media on specific expertise, among which are political affairs. Just a few days into the start of 2024, Brussels announced that it is asking for help from celebrities and athletes to mobilize young voters ahead of the EU election this summer. This is a recognition of the appeal of non-political actors within the political process. Following political SMIs is related to increased political interest and trust among social media users, which are fundamental predictors of political efficacy (Harff, 2022; Wasike, 2023). Along the same line, previous studies have predicted the potential effect of SMIs on election outcomes, emphasizing their educational role and ability to reach groups that might otherwise be overlooked by politicians (Harff & Schmuck, 2024; Riedl, 2023). Nevertheless, following SMIs does not come without risks with previous studies pointing out the connection between exposure to SMIs' content and political cynicism and misconception (Schmuck et al., 2022; Harff & Schmuck, 2023), especially when the influencer is perceived as highly credible (Harff et al., 2022).

SMIs who go to discuss politics tend to combine multiple lifestyles and formal political issues (Suuronen et al., 2021; Gonzalez et al., 2023). One of the most popular topics among these actors is related to feminism. The fourth wave of feminism (FWF) allows for the integration of technology, specifically social media, as a means for mobilization of social movements and discursive construction (Fraser, 2009). Within this background, feminist influencers stand out as the leading voices of the movement in the digital space. Concerns have also been raised about the presence of anti-feminist influencers online (Leidig, 2023; Rothut et al., 2023). These actors take advantage of social media features to promote traditional gender ideology and the societal significance of nuclear families. They are also found to use gender topics to implicitly elevate racist agendas, contributing to the circulation of far-right politics (Leidig, 2023). The first

attempt to compare feminist and anti-feminist content revealed the permeation of both discourses under the same hashtags (Simoes et al., 2023).

Despite their social relevance, research on (anti-)feminist influencers and content is still scarce. The majority of studies concerning feminist discourses on social media were conducted on Facebook and Twitter, whose communities revolve around interpersonal connection, with the presence of political professionals, including politicians and news media. The TikTok environment is inherently different. TikTok is a visual-centric platform that operates on the creation and distribution of user-generated videos, known as TikTok (Zulli & Zulli, 2020). Similar to other social media platforms, TikTok allows users to create profiles, follow each other, upload videos and images, and direct messages. However, unlike Facebook or Instagram, TikTok's communities emerge not from interpersonal connections but through video sharing the same hashtags, sounds, and filters (Klinger & Svensson, 2016). The platform also enables creative interaction among users via features such as duets and stitches. While encouraging content parody and recreation, these affordances drive users to interact with similar content in recursive loops (Hautea et al., 2021). Existing research has found that TikTok is also used for political information, such as in environmental communication (Huber et al., 2022; Li, 2024; Sehl & Schützeneder, 2023).

This project contributes to literature in three important ways. First, it responds to the call for more research looking into the SMIs' content that young people are exposed to (Dekoninck & Schmuck, 2022; Harff & Schmuck, 2023). This study aims to investigate the feminist discourse initiated by TikTok influencers. By putting feminists in contrast to anti-feminists, it sheds light on the contest to legitimize and popularize corresponding ideologies in the digital space. Because of influencers' attitudinal and mobilizing effects, this comparison enhances our understanding of

the flow of online feminist debates. The second part of this study looks into comments under influencers' videos with the aim to exploring the presented sentiments and emotions. Social media is theorized to give rise to affective publics that are networked and driven through the expression of emotional valence (Papacharissi, 2014). In this sense, this study provides evidence for the emergence of an affective public on TikTok. Since SMIs are highly connected individuals with a special bond with their followers, the comment section under their videos provides an ideal space to analyze the public response to the matter at hand. Methodologically, this study combines manual quantitative content analysis and computational methods. While the former is suitable for multimodal videos, the latter helps effectively analyze large corpora of comments, thereby providing a comprehensive understanding of content posted by TikTok influencers.

I began by analyzing recent findings regarding SMIs and feminist discourses on social media communication. Subsequently, I presented the mixed-method approach, combining quantitative content analysis and automated content analysis to classify dominant themes and the presence of emotions within the data. I concluded the monograph with a discussion concerning the relevance of the results and suggestions for future research.

Theoretical framework

SMIs as Opinion Leaders

Extant research often characterizes SMIs as digital opinion leaders. The concept of opinion leadership is rooted in the two-step flow model of communication (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955). The theory posits that information flows from the mass media to opinion leaders, who interpret and contextualize it in a way that is more accessible and influential to the wider public. Opinion leaders are defined as socially active individuals with a high number of social ties and a high level of topical knowledge. What distinguishes SMIs from other kinds of opinion leaders such as

politicians, celebrities, and athletes is their relatable self-made representation (Bause, 2021). Their influence thus comes not from a position of power or prestige but from the connection with their followers and frequency of discussing the issue.

Agre (2004) argued that most of the debates on social media are not deliberating. Instead, people tend to repeat ideas they picked up from opinion makers and leaders, including politicians, scientists, and social media influencers. There exists a debate surrounding the role of SMIs in social media users' news consumption relative to legacy media. Lewis (2020) suggested that SMIs offer a critical perspective toward news media while providing the audience with alternative sources of information. Findings from Martin and Sharma's (2022) study contradicted this idea, showing that SMI news use is positively correlated with digital and print legacy media news use. This provides evidence for the more-and-more hypothesis, wherein heavy news users on one platform are more likely to get access to news on other platforms (Lazarsfeld et al., 1994).

Some argue that following SMIs enhances incidental exposure to political information, thereby increasing political interest. Research showed that grassroots political engagement, including protesting and boycotting is more popular among youth compared to institutional politics (Soleri-Marti, 2015). Within this context, social media, in which influencers are one of the dominant actors, are seen as potent channels for such activities. Recommendations from people perceived as opinion leaders increased people's news-seeking intentions (Turcotte et al., 2015). The special bond between SMIs and the audience might encourage followers to look into news shared by the influencers that they would otherwise ignore. Although young people still use traditional mainstream media as the primary source of information, they rely on influencers for topics that are less covered by established media but deemed important for opinion formation

(Peter & Muth, 2023). In this sense, SMIs act more as secondary gatekeepers to legacy media, highlighting and rendering some information more important to the audience than others. Furthermore, SMIs discussing politics from an ordinary citizen's perspective are perceived as more genuine than other sources such as politicians and journalists, who might be holding underlying motives (Manning et al., 2017). These underscore SMIs' active involvement in the co-creation and popularization of the existing worldviews and opinions.

On the contrary, the revised communication mediation model suggests that social media promotes a fragmented political communication ecology where citizens are more likely to seek like-minded sources of information and social interaction. This amplifies that tendency to participate along ideological lines, resulting in political extremity, distrust, and delegitimization of political actors (Shah et al., 2017). High exposure to online political influencers is related to extreme opinions (Gibson et al, 2023). In terms of affordances, previous research found a higher degree of polarization in platforms operated by algorithms compared to those dependent on user generation (Cinelli, 2021; Da Cunha Palmieri, 2023). Homophily also plays a significant role here, as online users tend to prefer content adhering to their beliefs while overlooking dissenting information (Cinelli, 2021). Social media users are more likely to take up recommended political actions from influencers sharing their interests and values (Naderer, 2023). This attitude congruence enhances selective exposure, fuelling constant reaffirmations of the same content, ideas, and discussion, leading to the emergence of the echo chamber effect (Boulianne et al., 2020).

The influencing power of SMIs is often explained by parasocial relationships (PSR), defined as the illusionary and enduring social relation with media personae emerging through mediated interactions experienced by the audience. This concept is not to be confused with

parasocial interaction, which refers to the one-sided interaction with the media character within one exposure episode (Horton & Wohl, 1956). Stehr and colleagues (2015) identified three mechanisms through which parasocial opinion leaders influence their audience including reduction of information complexity, providing orientation, and arousal of interest. While the effectiveness of PSR in brand endorsement has been widely researched (Conde & Casais, 2023; Kim et al., 2016), its role in the dissemination and persuasion of political information has just gained momentum with a few studies available so far (Breves & Liebers, 2022; Cheng et al., 2023; Harff, 2022; Harff et al., 2022)

Taking into account the interactive nature of social media, Lou (2022) proposed a concept of trans-parasocial relationships. A trans-parasocial relationship is characterized by a sense of collective reciprocal, (a)synchronous interactivity, and the co-creation of content and strategies. The theory also suggested mechanisms under which the audience is affected by SMIs' content, including positive bias, verification by cross-validation, and inspirational internalization. Dekoninck and colleagues (2023) provided further explanation for this special influencer-followers bond. Interviews with young social media users revealed that they perceived influencers as having a shared reality through content exhibiting the influencer's personal life and as super peers setting up examples for social norms. Moreover, similar to Lou's (2022) collective reciprocity, the mere perception of possible reciprocal interaction is sufficient for PSR to emerge.

Feminist and Anti-feminist Influencers

This study seeks to explore the role of SMIs within the context of the fourth wave of feminism (FWF). FWF is characterized by five important elements: technological mobilization, intersectionality, empowerment, social activism, and denunciation of sexual violence (Shiva &

Kharazmi, 2019). With the use of technological devices, especially social media, women are empowering themselves by establishing a global connection to the movement and enhancing analytical, critical, and symbolic elaboration (Peroni & Rodak, 2020). Young women choose social media to be the space of resistance due to its low cost, flexibility, and wide reach and accessibility to the public (Schuster, 2013). One of the central issues of FWF is discrimination and gender violence, and more concretely, sexual violence and its denunciation (Carbera et al., 2021; Shiva & Kharazmi, 2019). On Twitter and Facebook, this aspect is made visible through hashtags such as #MeToo, #BeenRapedNeverReported, and #Icantkeepquite, among others. This kind of activism challenges the dominant patriarchal narratives and gives voices to women who are still marginalized by the mainstream (Carbera et al., 2021). Nevertheless, concerns have been raised about FWF's reliance on social media and celebrity culture to promote social justice (Looft, 2017; Shiva & Kharazmi, 2019). While encouraging social and political impetus, it contributes to the rising dissidence and polarization on the issue (Kaba et al., 2014). FWF has come face-to-face with discriminatory and anti-feminist politics within several national contexts, for example, the fights for abortion rights in the US and Poland and the adoption of anti-LGBTQ+ policies in Hungary in 2022. For the first time in history, the Internet has facilitated direct encounters between feminism and its backlashes - anti-feminism (Chamberlain, 2016).

Along with feminism, the anti-feminist movement transforms itself to adapt to emerging issues and the evolving feminist discourses. During the last few decades, anti-feminism or anti-gender, particularly in Western Europe and North Atlantic countries, has moved toward a scientific defense, using science and nature as the main device to justify efforts to restore the hetero-patriarchal system at the legal and institutional level (Bielska-Brodziak et al., 2020). By painting sexual minorities as "the others", these actors managed to revoke a moral panic against

cultural colonization from foreign and abnormal forces (Paternotte & Kuhar, 2018; Wodak, 2015). In the current war on abortion, anti-feminists appeal to traditional familial values and the morality of heterosexual reproductive rights with a strong alliance with the Catholic Church (Bielska–Brodziak et al., 2020). This fuels homophobia, transphobia, and sexism by reducing women’s social position to sole motherhood and depriving them of political subjectivity and citizenship (Bielska–Brodziak et al., 2020). Another rhetoric revolves around the protection of children's innocence, which means guarding against a culture that encourages divorce, abortion, and homosexuality (Richardson, 2017; Datta, 2018). Further, they adopt digital activism by advocating for their agenda on social media through specialized groups and hashtags such as #tradwives, #prolife, and #stayathomemom widely accessible to the general public through social media (Bauer, 2023; Leidig, 2023; Rothermel, 2020).

This study advances the literature by looking into the feminism – anti-feminism dynamics on an emerging platform – TikTok. Furthermore, I choose to investigate the involvement of SMIs in the movement. These non-political actors wield influential power over their followers, possessing a mobilizing role that remains largely understudied, particularly within the context of feminism.

Previous studies showed that compared to celebrities, SMIs are more likely to speak up on lifestyle politics topics, among which are feminism and social equality (Gonzalez et al., 2022; Suuronen et al., 2022). Feminist influencers used Instagram stories and posts to educate their followers about sexual harassment and support each other’s activities (Barbala, 2023). They engaged in two prominent topics, including criticism on issues such as race and intersectionality and celebrity-centric stories (Borah et al., 2023), aligning with the essence of FWF.

In terms of platform dependencies, TikTok can enhance awareness of women's issues more effectively than Instagram (Pomerantz & Field, 2022). Additionally, it emerges as a less politically biased platform compared to Twitter, thereby providing a more conducive environment for constructive discussions on feminist topics (Peña-Fernández et al., 2023). Despite this prevalence, little is known about specific topics discussed by feminist and anti-feminist influencers on TikTok. Given the role of influencers as digital opinion leaders, understanding issues brought up in their videos enhances our knowledge about the popularity and circulation of different feminist topics in the online space. Therefore, the first research question is proposed as follows:

RQ1. What are the main topics discussed by feminist and anti-feminist influencers on TikTok?

Liberal Feminism vs. Radical Feminism

This paper distinguishes between liberal and radical feminism, accounting for the distinct existence and continual debates between these two strands of feminism on the internet. The third wave of feminism (TWF), with an emphasis on individualism, divided the movement into different schools (Dean, 2009). Liberal or mainstream feminism sees gender inequality as a result of discriminatory laws, attitudes, and practices that limit women's rights and opportunities within the existing system (Lorber, 1997). Liberal feminism acknowledges the biological differences between men and women but indicates that this does not justify unequal treatment or discrimination. Influenced by queer theories and current transgender and transsexual liberation movements, liberal feminism dismisses the idea of women as a universal category and calls for the inclusion of anyone, even men, into the pro-feminist agenda (Crenshaw, 1989; Dean, 2009). It emphasizes equal rights and opportunities regardless of biological sex and gender identity.

Consequently, it seeks to address gender equality via political and legal reforms, including lobbying, advocacy, and coalition-building (Baehr, 2013; Law, 2019).

Rooted within the framework of liberal democracy, liberal feminism emphasizes individualism, advocating for individual rights, autonomy, and choices. It often focuses on issues such as reproductive rights, equal payment, and access to education and employment. Liberal feminists are more likely to engage in conversations related to popular culture, and at the same time less likely to be critical of pornography and the sex industry (Dean, 2009). It is sometimes called feminism of choices, which is also one of its main critiques.

Radical feminism was born as a product of second-wave feminism, developed by criticism of the third wave, and continues until today (Coote & Campbell, 1987; Mackay, 2014). Mackay (2015) defined radical feminism as encompassing four characteristics: (1) recognition of women's oppression as a product of the existing patriarchy and a commitment to end this, (2) promotion of women-exclusive space as an organizing method, (3) a focus on all form of male violence against women as the main form of oppression, and (4) the extension of male oppression of women to include pornography and prostitute. These elements were seen by self-identified radical feminists as unique to radical feminism and what set them apart from the so-called third wave of feminism (Mackay, 2014).

Radical feminism takes an alternative, materialist approach to address gender inequality. Women are perceived as a social group that is oppressed by men as a social group and this is the primary oppression for women. The focus is on criticizing the systemic social structure, particularly the patriarchy, that allows this oppression to exist. Since the social system is inherently male-dominant, it is argued that emancipation and equality as proposed by liberal feminism reinforce the male terms, thus insufficient to achieve gender equality (Rowland &

Klein, 1996). Radical feminism denounces biological determinism, arguing that gender is a social construct, created through socialization within an oppressive system rather than being a part of nature. In this sense, male violence against women can be reduced and eventually ended by abolishing gender norms and performance (Millet, 1969, 1972).

Radical feminism emphasizes the intersectionality of gender-based and other types of oppression such as classism (Mackay, 2014). It advocates for radical structural changes to dismantle the patriarchy and other oppressing systems. It also criticizes capitalism for monetizing and commodifying women's labor, bodies, and reproductive capacities (Willis, 1984). Radical feminism challenges the underlying power dynamics and institutions that perpetuate gender equality often through collective actions and grassroots organizations. Changes are to be made at the economic level and class-based oppression alongside gender oppression.

Critiques saw radical feminism as feminism going too far, particularly through essentialism and sexual segregation (Byrne, 1996; Campbell, 1980). Gelb (1996) accused radical feminism of being a group of man-hating women, thus eradicating the liberal feminist movement's efforts to include all gender and sexuality in the fight against gender inequality.

To the best of my knowledge, despite the tension between the two strands, no research so far has looked into their presence in the digital space, let alone from a comparative perspective. Therefore, feminist influencers in the current studies are operationalized as including two distinctive groups, liberal feminists and radical feminists. The content they were discussing was therefore addressed separately.

Hashtags as a Framing dDevice

Framing research is often conceptualized within two broad branches: psychological and sociological (Druckman, 2001). Equivalence framing, or psychologically rooted framing, concerns the variation in which identical information is presented and how it triggers different responses among the receivers. Meanwhile, emphasis framing, or sociologically rooted framing, emphasizes the selection of a set of facts and information over others, with the aim of motivating the audience to take action accordingly. Despite the difference in operationalization, the two branches converge on the notion that frames activate both content-based and affective-based understanding of an issue, thereby influencing the process of meaning-making and decision-making among the audience (Reese, 2001). This study follows the sociological approach to framing, referring specifically to the use of words, images, phrases, and presentation styles by a speaker to convey information to the intended audience (Druckman, 2001).

Originally developed to analyze news coverage, framing research has expanded to various other contexts, such as influencers' content on social media (Gonzalez et al., 2023). Papacharissi (2014) argued for seeing social media platforms not as a force that brings about changes but as a socio-culturally shaped infrastructure that provides people with an environment for social interactions. On the one hand, the platform affordances present unique opportunities for different forms of information sharing and learning, natures of creation and innovation, and structures of the conversations taking place within them. On the other hand, the socio-cultural circumstances define the conditions under which the affordances of technology are deployed by users to claim agency and potential power.

Due to the uniqueness of social media platforms, academic attention is targeted on networked framing, manifested through specific features such as hashtags, mentions, and retweets. Meraz

and Papacharissi (2013, 2016) conceptualized networked framing as a dynamic process in which actors take up circulating content and integrate it with their layers of interpretation and information, thereby collectively transforming it in a way that fragmentizes and pluralizes the story. For issues that are already diffuse and polarized like feminism, created hashtags serve not only as an organic and emergent ad-hoc frame but also as a bottom-up classification system that allows actors to organize content as the issue unfolds (González-Ibáñez et al., 2011). The use of hashtags therefore provides the public with a cue to understand the thematic frames of the issue as it develops in a dynamic fashion (Meraz & Papacharissi, 2013).

Similar to Twitter, TikTok presents a unique case for networked framing research. Due to limited character availability and interpersonal connection, communities on the platform converge on the ground of common content characteristics that represent certain issues or topics (Hautea et al., 2021; Zulli & Zulli, 2020). Hashtags connect similar content and allow users to navigate through the massive TikTok space. However, unlike Twitter, on this platform, hashtags are not necessarily initiated and popularized by political elites. Rather, what is regularly seen is users making use of existing hashtags to articulate and re-frame the issue. In Brazil, for example, hashtags such as #NoMoreCatcalling and #MyFirstHarrassment were used not to pinpoint the perpetrator but to reverberate solidarity and strengthen the bond among women (Martins, 2020). Another re-framing activity is hashtag hijacking by far-right political actors as a means to influence public opinion in the digital space (Lewis, 2018). Simoes and colleagues (2023) examined TikTok content under #feminism revealing that 24% of which included antifeminist content. By disguising under feminist hashtags, anti-feminist influencers managed to occupy the issue space and challenge the feminist worldings (Bauer, 2023). Bauer's (2023) study, however, involved a netnographic approach to analyze content created by three anti-feminist influencers.

Whether such a practice is actually common among anti-feminist influencers in general is yet to be known. As such, RQ2 set out to investigate and compare the use of hashtags by both feminist and anti-feminist influencers.

RQ2.1. What hashtags are used by feminist and anti-feminist influencers on TikTok?

RQ2.2. What hashtags co-occur in influencers' TikTok videos?

Comments as Collective Action

This study applies the social identity model of collective action (SIMCA) to explain engagement in the form of comments in terms of social identity, perceived injustice, and perceived group efficacy (van Zomeren et al., 2008). In essence, the theory posits that social identity has a direct and indirect effect on collective actions via perceived injustice and perceived group efficacy. The original model defines collective actions as the attitudinal support for and protest behaviors aimed at removing the perceived underlying causes of a group's disadvantage and problem (van Zomeren et al., 2008). This study builds upon SIMCA in arguing that in the social media space, such attitudinal support can be derived from interactive features such as likes and comments. The importance of online engagement lies in the fact that the effect of media usage occurs when users actively engage with the media content rather than just mere consumption (Park et al., 2023). Exclusive use of the internet, including writing blogs or commenting, is positively related to political participation in real life (de Zúñiga et al., 2013). Acknowledging this, this study focuses on analyzing online comments as a form of collective action in response to digital feminism.

The core component of the model is one's identification with a social group. Essentially, it is the politicization of social identity that has a strong impact on collective actions (van Zomeren et al., 2008). Politicized identity refers to the extent to which people engage as self-conscious group

members in a power struggle on behalf of their group knowing that it is the societal context within which the struggles play out that need to be fought out (Simon & Klandermans, 2001). The politicization of a social identity allows the personal to become political (Haraway, 1991; Mansbridge, 1993). It touches upon the strength of collective identity, with a focus on changing the wider societal context to the benefit of the group. Identification with a politicized identity therefore predicts the tendency to act on behalf of the group's interests (Turner-Zwinkels & van Zomeren, 2020).

Gender has always been a substantial political issue, exemplified by the fights for women's right to vote, representation, equal payment, and most recently, the liberation of women's bodies in terms of abortion rights and legalization of the sex industry. A feminist identity is characterized by one's active efforts to distance oneself from the patriarchal definition of womanhood accompanied by the belief in the sociocultural causes of women's struggles (Szymanski, 2004). Self-labelling feminists are more likely to engage in debates, activities, and interactions related to the issue, especially in the online space (Heger & Hoffman, 2021; 2022; Weis et al., 2018; Yoder et al., 2010). The collective feminist identity enhances political participation by transferring the perception of gender-based inequalities within society into gender-based inequalities that affect the self. Notably, the negative connotations associated with feminism lead to a separation between feminist identity and feminist beliefs (Leaper & Arias, 2011; Roy et al., 2007). Not everyone who supports the feminist ideology is identified as a feminist (Fitz et al., 2012; Yoder et al., 2010). Nevertheless, feminist identity is strongly associated with political participation, regardless of the level of feminist attitude (Heger & Hoffman, 2022; Yoder et al., 2010).

The feminist identity influences collective actions through perceived group efficacy and perceived injustices. Group efficacy refers to the sense of collective power and the belief that one's actions can transform the group's destiny (Drury & Reicher, 2005; van Zomeren et al., 2008). Previous studies showed that group efficacy facilitates people's willingness to perform collective actions (Alberici & Milesi, 2012; Lee, 2006; Zhou & Qui, 2020). By connecting like-minded people, social media helps strengthen the perception of group efficacy, especially in the presence of past successful resistance stories (Drury & Reicher, 2005)

Regarding perceived injustices, the feminist movement tackles an inherent structural disadvantage attached to women's fate (Peroni & Kodak, 2020). These challenges stem from a deeply rooted, historically-driven social identity that needs to be transformed. Central to this process is the feeling of shared grievances and the attribution of responsibility for these illegitimate injustices (Simon & Klandermans, 2001). It is imperative that these grievances are experienced widely as a group, allowing individual experiences to transform into collective experiences, and vice versa. Perceived injustices reinforce collective identity by highlighting the power structure that disproportionately affects the in-group compared to other out-groups, thereby reinforcing the social-contextual fit and salience of the us-them distinction. In the context of established social structures, people may accept and internalize their disadvantages, diminishing the likelihood of collective actions (van Zomeren et al., 2008). While feminist actors see themselves as victims of the patriarchal social system, women of far-right politics, particularly anti-feminist influencers position themselves as victims of the left-wing, cosmopolitan society and various political and social elites (Rothut et al., 2023). These actors associate feminism with hatred towards men and as the cause of gender-based violence and other

social decays, hence advocating for a return to traditional gender ideology and nuclear families (Bauer, 2023; Leidig, 2023).

Drawing on SIMCA, I argue that exposure to (anti-)feminist influencers' content on social media reinforces the in-group perceived injustices and enhances perceived group efficacy related to these group identities. Altogether, they encourage social media users to engage with ideologically-aligned content in the form of comments. Social media influencers are considered digital opinion leaders with considerable persuasive power. Their follower base and frequency of discussing the issue allow them to be perceived as a group prototype, that is the most central, representative group member that easily comes to mind when thinking of the (anti-)feminist social group (Rosch, 1973). Group prototypes define the social by displaying intra-group similarities and differentiate the group from others by emphasizing intergroup differences (Turner, 1985, 1987). In this sense, exposure to SMI's content can evoke group-based identity and attitudes that guide subsequent interactions. This study focuses on the emotional aspect of comments, given the relevance of affective publics on social media.

Affective Publics on TikTok

In defining "the public", the discursive tradition concentrates on the conversational aspects of the formation of the public (Carpini et al., 2004). This approach emphasizes the issue-centricity of the discussion, wherein the public is defined as a group of people participating in a discussion characterized by the encounter of different views and opinions (Pietilä, 2010/1999, 2010/2000). The formulation of a public requires a certain degree of interaction or exchange of arguments and statements around a specific social issue (Blumer, 1961). On social media, users engage in topic discussion via posting, reacting, and commenting. This study is interested in the public as occurring in the comment section in response to TikTok influencers' videos. I focused

specifically on the emotional dimension of this public, through the lens of the theory of affective public (Papacharissi, 2014).

Social media opens an educational space for public communication and meaning-making (Andersson & Öhman, 2017). The prevalence of social media as a source of political information and a platform for political discussion has altered the nature of political practices. It gives rise to an alternative way of doing politics, revolving around self-identification and emotional allegiances rather than rational choices among the public (Erikson, 2008). Papacharissi (2016) defined affective publics as “networked publics that are mobilized and connected, identified, and potentially disconnected through expressions of sentiment.” (p. 311). This is particularly relevant for social media platforms with a blend of political and personal thoughts and opinions, thereby facilitating the use of “affective statements” (Papacharissi, 2016, p. 316) with a mix of fact and emotion, in a way that stimulates the audience’s political actions.

According to the affective intelligence theory, emotions are crucial for political engagement as they inform individual choices regarding attention to political topics, political learning, participation in political talk, and voting, among others (Marcus et al., 2000, 2006). The theory distinguishes between three dimensions of emotions, containing a range of emotions related to specific affective appraisals, that function differently across circumstances. Anxiety is assumed to be the strongest driver of political judgment and behavior as it encourages a reassessment of habitual routines. Marcus et al. (2000) argued that citizens do not always think deeply about their political judgments. Emotions, specifically anxiety appraisals, enhance citizens’ rationality by signaling when they should abandon routine behaviors and reconsider characteristics of the political environment. This mechanism is relevant during both electoral and ordinary times. In the contemporary political environment, affective statements often contain the expression of

frustration, dislike, and disagreement with the power hierarchy (Papacharissi, 2014), which is theorized within the range of anxiety appraisal (Marcus et al., 2000). Over time, these expressions of emotion may subtly disrupt power structures, generate collective resistance, and prompt a renegotiation of boundaries.

Notably, affective expression can overshadow factual information and take precedence over objective reality (Papacharissi, 2014). While affective mechanisms increase and intensify issue awareness, they do not necessarily enhance understanding of the problem or deepen the public knowledge of the issue at hand. Social media induces more negative affect on social networks, which in turn influences how people perceive political disagreement (Barnidge, 2018). This negativity can distort information processing and result in perceptions and behaviors that are based on group identification, making people more susceptible to reasoning biases (Anderson, 1989; Kaplan & Anderson, 1973).

Concerning FWF, participation through social media, specifically hashtags, generates virtual communities that connect through emotional convergence (Baumgardner, 2011; Chamberlain, 2016). In this sense, feelings not only become transferrable amongst wider groups but also carry out actions beyond cyberspace (Shiva & Kharazmi, 2019). Affects works to connect the private and the public, aligning with the inherent tenant of feminism, that is “the personal is political” and “the emotion is political” (Haraway, 1991, p. 239). Given the diversity and intersectionality of FWF (Strauss, 2023), the ground for collective actions relies less on identity but rather on shared public intimacy and feelings. This is why FWF is referred to as an affective intense period of feminism (Chamberlain, 2016).

Taken together, the assessment of emotional expression in online comments under (anti-)feminist videos is important for two reasons. First, the comments present a space of collective

actions where social media users express their support and opposition to the opinions conveyed in the videos. With hashtag hijacking, users are also driven to cross-cutting exposure with counter-attitudinal content, potentially resulting in not only positive but also negative appraisals. Since the presence of an affective public is inevitable considering the TikTok affordances of visibility, edibility, and association (Hautea et al., 2021), an analysis of emotions is essential to understand this digital variation of collective actions. Second, the prominence of emotions in FWF might enhance affective appraisals in exposing to (anti-)feminist content. While the relevance of such appraisals has been tested with an experimental setting, this study made use of social media content, specifically videos, and the following engagement. Assessment of online sentiment and emotions has been used as an indicator of public sentiment with implications for real-life political engagement. This approach therefore helps leverage our understanding of the response to (anti-)feminist content, at the same time explaining its popularity and relevance within the online political landscape.

Even though TikTok is increasingly relevant for research on emotions in political engagement, there is a dearth of studies looking into feminist content on this platform compared to more established social media. On Facebook, anti-feminist groups were overwhelmed with emotionally laden discourses (Rothermel, 2020). Stories shared within these groups concentrated on the experiences of painful victimization and were essentially fueled with cycles of anger, shame, and confusion. By labeling feminism as “the other”, and reinforcing ideological and affective polarization, anti-feminists legitimized hatred and destruction of the movement. On Twitter, tweets that reinforced feminine stereotypes, beauty norms, and slut-shaming of rape victims were largely charged with negative sentiment (Felmlee et al., 2020, Stubb-Richardson et al., 2018). Affective polarization is particularly evident on this platform, such that most feminist

tweets contain a negative and very negative sentiment, along with a high level of toxicity (Suárez et al., 2022). On the one hand, there was fear and rage against feminism, with tweets emphasizing traditional gender roles and calling protesters “wild beasts” and “crazy”. On the other hand, outrage was expressed towards the government and men as the main actors and accomplices of gendered violence. On Instagram, the majority of content related to the breastfeeding protest in Finland contained the use of negative emotions (Lehto, 2019). Positive emotions only occurred in stories about women’s experiences as nursing mothers. The spill-over of emotions leads to what is called affective attunement – a phenomenon in which people feel their way into the debate and are simultaneously affectively attuned to it (Papacharissi, 2014). The event connected strangers through a collective display of feelings, with the hashtag functioning as an “affective amplifier” (Rabukkana, 2015, p. 2). Beyond hashtag activism, a new form of protest – sharing of protest anthems – has been employed to describe gender-related injuries and the sentiment of grief (Proust, 2024). These anthems were widespread on social media, moving beyond their original communities, and appealing to collective feminist struggles with the potential for social changes.

As digital opinion leaders, the comment section under influencers’ videos offers an ideal place to study public sentiment toward the topic at hand. Given influencers’ effects on young people’s opinion formation and attitudes, it is important to assess the sentiment and emotional responses induced by their content among the audience. As such, RQ3 is formulated as:

RQ3.1. What is the prevalent sentiment in the comments under feminist and anti-feminist influencers’ videos on TikTok?

RQ3.2. What kinds of emotions are presented in the comments under feminist and anti-feminist influencers’ videos on TikTok?

Methodology

Sample

TikTok data was collected through TikTok Research API to address the research questions. This tool provides academia with substantial data related to public content on the platform, including videos and comments, which are the core components of this study.

The first step involved identifying relevant accounts. Following Bauer (2023), I began by keyword searching derived from literature. Feminist keywords were feminism, feminist, and women's rights, whereas anti-feminist keywords included tradwives, pro-life, and gender ideology, among others. Because of evidence of keyword hijacking by far-right political influencers (Lewis, 2018), I look for feminist and anti-feminist influencers in both types of keywords. I then scouted the accounts and corresponding videos to ensure they came up as feminist or anti-feminist influencers. Influencers are defined as individuals who (1) have at least 10,000 followers on TikTok and (2) express and promote (anti-)feminist ideology in between lifestyle content. The search resulted in 12 accounts, including 6 self-identified liberal feminists, 2 radical feminists, and 4 anti-feminist influencers (Table 1).

I included all English videos uploaded from the 1 January to 31 December 2023. All comments under videos classified as pro-feminist and anti-feminist are also extracted for further analysis. The manual search returned 1,509 videos, of which 509 were related to either feminism or anti-feminism.

Table 1*List of influencers*

Influencer	TikTok account	Type of influencer	Number of followers	Total number of videos
Liz Plank	@lizplank	Liberal feminist	280K	159
Blair Irmani Ali	@blairimani	Liberal feminist	132.8K	152
Wagatwe Wanjuki	@wagatwe	Liberal feminist	71.1K	19
Drew Afualo	@drewafualo	Liberal feminist	7.9M	285
Gina Martin	@ginamartinuk	Liberal feminist	51.4K	25
Nakedlydressed	@nakedltdressed	Liberal feminist	53K	166
Hannah Berrelli	@hannahberrelli2	Radical feminist	17.8K	70
Camelli	@dcsteele	Radical feminist	15.9K	474
Shannen Michaela	@shannen.michaela	Anti-feminist	564.4K	35
Ashley	@herblessedhome	Anti-feminist	85.5K	88
Morgan May	@themorganmay	Anti-feminist	82.6K	60
Kristan Marie	@thatpatriotteacher	Anti-feminist	54.7K	15

Data Analysis***Quantitative Content Analysis***

I adopted a mixed-method approach, combining quantitative and automated content analysis, to answer the research questions. The first phase addressed dominant topics discussed by feminist and anti-feminist influencers. 1,509 videos were collected from 12 TikTok accounts,

of which 806 belonged to liberal feminist influencers, 544 to radical feminist influencers, and 198 to anti-feminist influencers.

I developed a codebook based on Simoes and colleagues' (2023) study on TikTok feminist content during the COVID-19 pandemic (Appendix 1). Besides demographic information, the codebook specified predefined topic categories related to popular feminist issues. This included discussions around abortion, women's health care, sexual abuse, gender equality, sexism, gender ideology, women empowerment, workplace equity, domestic violence, child care, child abuse, beauty standards, and femicide. An open category was added to capture all possible topics. The subsequent analysis revealed 10 additional topics which are explanations of liberal feminism, radical feminism, critiques of the patriarchy, sexual liberation, feminism in pop culture, trans inclusion, homophobia, fatphobia, body positivity, and surrogacy. One main topic was assigned to each video. The extent to which feminist and anti-feminist influencers mentioned each topic was then compared to one another. One primary coder coded the whole dataset. To establish intra-coder reliability, the same 10% of the materials were coded again after two weeks. Results revealed 80% percentage agreement and a Cohen's kappa of 0.66, indicating substantial agreement between the two rounds of coding.

Network Analysis of Hashtags

In the second phase, a semi-automatic approach was employed to answer RQ2. After all feminism-related videos were identified, hashtags used in the caption were collected for the analysis. Of the 506 feminism-related videos, 326 posts contained hashtags. Following the framework for social media analysis based on hashtags (Pilař et al., 2021), the subset of data was first cleaned and transformed for further analysis. Non-hashtag text and irrelevant hashtags such as #fyp and #greenscreen were removed. Because of the study's purpose to compare hashtags used between different types of influencers, hashtags unique to one influencer were also

removed. The 10 most frequently used hashtags within the whole subset were identified and then specified for each type of influencer (liberal feminist, radical feminist, and anti-feminist).

To assess the relationship between hashtags, a network analysis was conducted with hashtags as nodes and the frequency of pairwise co-occurrence as weight. The network was defined as undirected to account for the co-occurrence of hashtags. The data was imported into Gephi for visualization and calculation of centrality metrics. Degree centrality represents the number of connections of a node. The node with the highest degree centrality is the one that appears with the highest number of other hashtags. Eigenvector centrality measures the influence of one node within the network. It identifies nodes that are not only well-connected but also are connected with highly influential nodes in the network. Betweenness centrality is the highest for a hashtag with the highest number of paths between two other hashtags going through it. It serves as a network bottleneck connecting remote parts of the network. Visualization of the network was done with the Forced Atlas algorithm.

Sentiment Analysis of Comments

RQ3 was addressed using sentiment analysis with a lexicon approach to the video comments. A lexicon-based approach is a common approach in sentiment analysis due to its domain independence and accuracy relying on the emotional words of the respective dictionary. Among various emotion extraction resources, this study employed the NRC Emotion Lexicon (NRC EmoLex) in the Python environment to analyze the sentiment valences and emotions of the comments. NRC Emotion Lexicon is an academically validated dictionary developed by the National Research Council of Canada focusing specifically on categorizations of emotions and sentiments. The Lexicon contains 13,972 words in several categories. Specifically, the words are classified into two sentiments, including negative and positive, and eight distinctive emotions based on Plutchik's theory (1980), including joy, surprise, anger, disgust, fear, sadness,

anticipation, and trust. The dictionary was constructed manually via crowdsourcing attempt to maximize its reliability. NRC EmoLex works by comparing the context-independent meaning of a word to predefined categories. The output provides raw counts of words associated with each sentiment and emotion.

Preprocessing the content of TikTok comments is an initial first step to improve the efficiency of computational analyses. Special characters and URLs were removed from the data to reduce dimensionality and allow the algorithm to focus on meaningful words only. Duplicated comments and non-English text were deleted. Hashtag # and mention @ used by TikTok users were also removed to enhance lexical processing with dictionary words.

Regarding RQ3.1 and RQ3.2, the sentiment analysis was conducted on the whole dataset and three sub-datasets. The original dataset contained 122,878 comments retrieved from the 12 accounts in the sample. After cleaning for duplicated comments, empty comments, and those having only emojis or mentions, the remaining set of comments included 87,387 comments. I then split this data into 3 smaller subsets for each type of influencer. Specifically, there were 52,595 comments under liberal feminist influencers' videos, 25,463 under radical feminist influencers', and 9,329 under anti-feminist influencers'.

The analysis was conducted in Python version 3.11, in which words loaded with each emotion were counted for occurrence. The sentiment score was then calculated by summing up the count of emotions making up the sentiment. Specifically, positive sentiment includes expressions of joy, anticipation, surprise, and trust, whereas negative sentiment is composed of anger, fear, disgust, and sadness. The figures were then compared to work out the prevalence of each sentiment and emotion in the comments.

Results

Dominant Topics

Of 1,509 videos in the sample, 506 were coded as containing feminism-related content, accounting for approximately 36% of the data. There were 23 topics identified from these videos. As shown in Table 2, the most frequently discussed topic was sexism, presented in 20% of the relevant posts. The second most addressed topic was gender ideology (N = 57), indicating that 11% of the videos present content supporting or opposing the traditional set of beliefs, attitudes, and values regarding gender roles, identities, and relations. The third popular topic was gender equality, covering the discussion about fair and equal treatment for individuals of all genders regarding equal rights, opportunities, and access to resources and privileges. 50 videos were assigned under this topic, making up 10% of the data. Femicide, workplace equity, and domestic violence were mentioned only once respectively.

The topics also varied across different types of influencers. Among liberal feminist influencers, sexism, and gender equality stood out as the most and second most common topics, accounting for 28% and 16% of the videos shared by these influencers respectively. Other popular themes were statistics, causes, and consequences of sexual abuse and harassment targeted at women (11%) as well as support for the legalization of abortion (7%). Content about homophobia, fatphobia, and body positivity was shared only by liberal feminist influencers. This can be seen as the manifestation of equality in liberal feminism's terms, emphasizing equal treatment for individuals of all genders and appearances.

The most popular topic by radical feminist influencers was discussions around the principles of radical feminism (30%). There seems to be a need to explain and justify the radical agendas and how it is different from mainstream feminism. Women's healthcare was the second most addressed topic (12%), aligning with the women-centric fundamental of radical feminism.

This category contained general information about female anatomy, arguments about birth control, and criticism of the male-centric medical systems that prevented women from getting better healthcare. One open category unique for radical feminist influencers was surrogacy. These influencers interpreted surrogacy as a means of monetizing and commodifying women's bodies, thus should be prohibited. They opposed the legalization of the sex industry, which was coded within sexual liberation, for the same reasons. Additionally, radical feminist influencers protested against the traditional beauty standard that is subjected to the male gaze, specifically the plastic surgery industry (10%).

Regarding trans inclusions, radical feminist influencers held an explicitly opposite stance compared to liberal feminists. While liberal feminists advocated for the inclusion of transgender people in public spaces, improvement in trans healthcare, and criticism of transphobia, radical feminist influencers saw the existence of gender transition as a threat to women's safety and the perpetuation of gender binarism that needs eradication.

Among anti-feminist influencers, the most discussed topic was gender ideology, accounting for 60% of the content identified. These videos conveyed the image of women as homemakers, taking care of the children and the working husband, calling for a return to traditional gender roles. This was followed by women's health care and childcare, presented in 15% and 13% of the content respectively. Specifically, the childcare category covers practices related to child nurturing, including motherhood, breastfeeding, daycare, and vaccination.

Table 2*Topics identified in the sample*

Topics	Liberal feminists	Radical feminists	Anti-feminists	Total
Abortion	21			21
Women's healthcare	7	19	9	35
Liberal feminism	6	1	1	8
Radical feminism	2	45		47
Patriarchy	16	1		17
Sexual abuse	32	3		35
Sexism	82	14	2	98
Gender equality	48	2		50
Gender ideology	13	8	36	57
Sexual liberation	5	4	1	10
Beauty standard	3	16	1	20
Women empowerment	7	2	1	10
Femicide	1			1
Domestic violence	1			1
Workplace equity	1			1
Feminism in pop culture	8	5		13
Childcare		3	8	11
Child abuse	4	2		6
Trans inclusion	8	9		17

Homophobia	14			14
Fatphobia	7			8
Body positivity	9			9
Surrogacy		18		18
Total	295	151	60	506

**Note.* This table demonstrates the frequency of occurrence of each topic in the dataset. One dominant topic was assigned to each video.

The Use of Hashtags

Of 326 posts that contain hashtags, 170 were made by liberal feminist influencers, 107 by radical feminist influencers, and 49 by anti-feminist influencers. This means that the proportion of posts with hashtags for each category was 58%, 71%, and 82% respectively. Anti-feminists were the most to use hashtags to popularize their content.

Results showed that there were 480 unique hashtags used in the set of hashtag data. There seems to be little overlap between the use of hashtags by the 3 types of influencers in this study. Table 3 revealed that the most frequently used hashtag was #feminism (N = 178), which was employed mostly by liberal feminist influencers (N = 122). This hashtag only occurred 3 times in anti-feminist influencers' posts. Likewise, #women was the second most observed hashtag (N = 88), which was found 88, 53, and 3 times in liberal feminists, radical feminists, and anti-feminists respectively.

#radicalfeminism and #radfem, despite being the third and fourth most used hashtags, were employed exclusively by radical feminist influencers. Notably, none of the anti-feminists applied #womensrights, #patriarchy, and #misogyny in their posts, indicating the difference in content focus between feminist and anti-feminist influencers.

Table 3*Top 10 most frequently used hashtags*

Hashtags	Liberal feminists	Radical feminists	Anti-feminists	Total
#feminism	122	53	3	178
#women	88	13	3	109
#feminist	78	18	0	95
#radicalfeminism	0	64	0	64
#radfem	0	56	0	56
#gender	48	1	1	50
#womensrights	43	1	0	34
#patriarchy	32	0	0	32
#men	32	3	0	29
#misogyny	24	0	0	24
Total	467	208	7	

To substantiate the results, a network analysis was conducted with 323 nodes and 611 edges (Figure 1). The average degree of 1.54 indicates a relatively sparse network, in which on average, one hashtag was only connected to 1.54 others. There was limited co-occurrence of hashtags in the posts, resonating with the previous results. Further, it suggests that topics represented by the hashtags were somewhat isolated from each other, reflecting the 23 topics with variation among the 3 types of influencers identified in RQ1.

The most central hashtag within the network was #feminism, followed by #feminist. #feminism had a degree centrality of 83, indicating its simultaneous usage with 83 other hashtags. The eigenvector centrality of 1 highlighted its prominent influence within the network while also connected to other high-influence hashtags. Meanwhile, as shown in Table 4 the degree centrality, betweenness centrality, and eigenvector centrality for #feminist were 48, 0.14, and 0.62 respectively. By putting these 2 hashtags in the caption, the influencers can enhance the chance of exposure with users looking specifically for feminism-related content. However, these hashtags seemed more likely to be used by feminist influencers compared to anti-feminists. #feminism and #feminist were positioned closely to #rapeculture, #misogyny, #womensrights, and #genderequality in the network. This implied the similarity in the topic represented by these hashtags. It emphasized the significance of topics of sexism and gender equality within the data.

#radicalfeminism was the fourth central hashtag in terms of degree centrality. It was connected with 23 other hashtags and relatively well-connected with other influential hashtags, as observed in the eigenvector centrality of 0.29. The relation between #feminism and #radicalfeminism might stem from different stances of liberal feminism and radical feminism within the same issues. The high frequency of the topic of radical feminism as well as the use of this hashtag underscored the need for radical feminists to justify themselves to the general public.

A sub-network linked to #feminism and #radfem via #womenshealth revolved around women's health issues, which was the second most mentioned topic by these actors classified in RQ1. This sub-network included hashtags such as #menstruation, #menstrualcycle, #toxicshocksyndrome, and #naturalhair, among others. Especially, the presence of

#medicalmisogyny and #medicalsexism within this group indicates the radical perspective on male oppression of women in medicine and the healthcare system suggested by radical feminism.

Distinct from the main cluster, a group of hashtags was connected with #feminism and #feminist through #womanhood. These include hashtags frequently used by anti-feminist influencers with the most influential being #homemaking, #homemaker, #stayathomemom, and #motherhood. This has implications for the type of content shared by these influencers. By focusing on around-the-house activities such as cooking, cleaning, doing laundry, and taking care of children, these videos conveyed the representation of a loving mom and wife who enjoy taking care of the family as the ideal life for women. It reinforces the results of RQ1, which revealed gender ideology to be the most common topic in content created by anti-feminist influencers. This group also included #mamabear, #christianwives, and #christianhome encompassing the significance of traditional Christian familial values for anti-feminist influencers. Videos using these hashtags tended to belong to a specific conservative digital space that might be out of reach for users looking for feminist content.

Another cluster connected with the major cluster via #femininity revolved around dating, signified by hashtags such as #datingadvice, #datingtipsforwomen, #datingtipsformen, and #datetok, among others. This suggested that feminist discussion on TikTok tended to take place within the context of heterosexual relationships, emphasizing the intertwining of “the personal” and politics on this platform.

Figure 1

Network of hashtags used by TikTok (anti-)feminist influencers

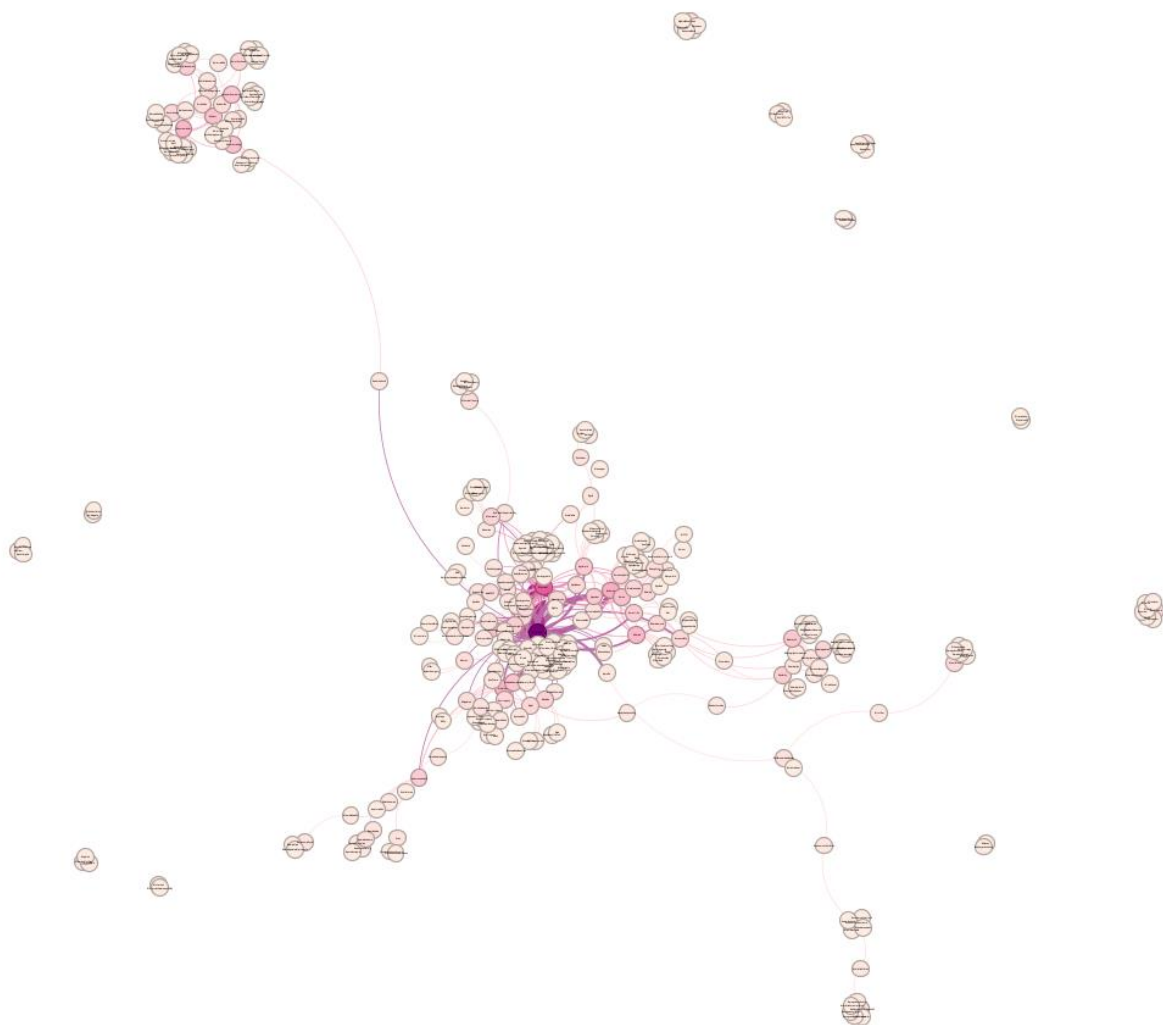


Table 4*Centrality metrics of central hashtags*

Hashtag	Degree centrality	Betweenness centrality	Eigenvector centrality
#feminism	85	0.61	1
#feminist	48	0.14	0.62
#women	20	0.052	0.32
#radfem	18	0.035	0.28
#homemaker	16	0.046	0.063

Sentiment Analysis

Of 506 feminism-related videos, comments were found under 191, of which 120 were liberal feminist influencers' videos, 26 were radical feminist influencers and 46 were anti-feminist influencers'. A sentiment analysis was conducted to detect the sentiment and emotion within comments under influencers' videos.

Table 5 illustrated that the comments leaned toward positive sentiment, outnumbered negative sentiment by 1.3 times. In terms of emotions, trust emerged as the most prominent, followed by joy, anticipation, fear, and anger in descending order of frequency. Surprise was the least detected emotion across the whole dataset, indicating that users might have certain expectations regarding the topics delivered by their favored influencers.

When examining comments under liberal feminist influencers' content, most comments contained the expression of trust, which was found 12,738 times within 52,595 comments. Joy was the second most detected emotion, appearing in 12,672 words. Negative emotions are also

present with sadness being the most prominent. The most frequently found negative emotion was sadness (N = 8,194), followed by fear, anger, and distrust.

For comments under radical feminist influencers' videos, trust was again the most counted emotion. However, anger came second with 6,645 times of detection. Compared to the liberal feminists, fear took over as the third most commonly expressed emotion (N = 6,598), trumping joy (N = 6,445) to the fourth place. Anticipation was the fifth in general and the third positive emotion to prevail in the comments by appearing 6,442 times. Surprise was again the least occur emotion (N = 2,178).

Comments directed at anti-feminist influencers reflected a similar trend with trust being the most prevalent emotion (N = 3,083). Joy and anticipation came next, occurring 2,528 and 2,313 times respectively in 9,329 comments. Fear was the fourth most frequently occurring emotion, which also dominated the expression of negative emotions (N = 1,967). This is followed by sadness (N = 1,713), anger (N = 1,433), and disgust (N = 1,232)

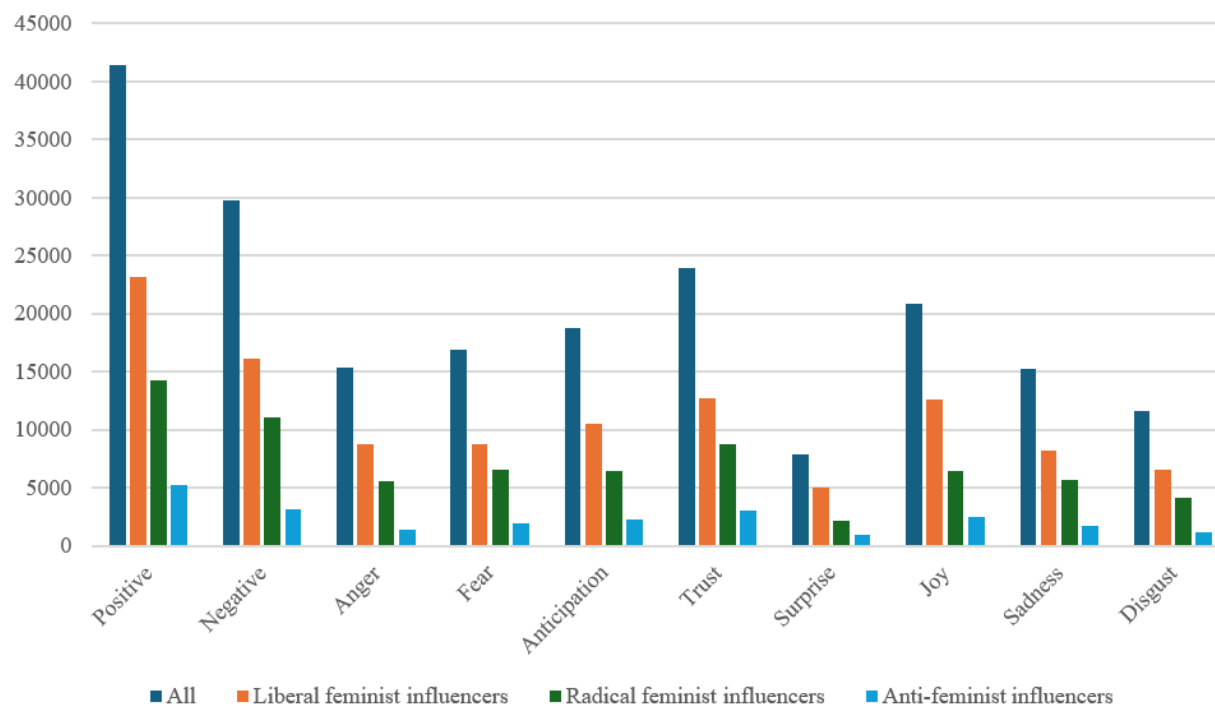
Overall, while positive emotions dominate the comment sections from all three types of influencers, the specific emotion patterns vary. Trust was consistently the highest-appearing emotion across all categories, suggesting a level of credibility and confidence in the content shared by influencers among their audience (Figure 2).

Table 5*Counts of sentiment and emotions across 3 types of influencers*

	Total	Liberal feminist influencers	Radical feminist influencers	Anti-feminist influencers
Positive	41,467	23,145	14,238	5,407
Negative	29,723	16,178	11,060	3,211
Anger	15,421	8,731	6,645	1,433
Fear	16,938	8,762	6,598	1,967
Anticipation	18,774	10,496	6,442	2,313
Trust	23,982	12,738	8,810	3,083
Surprise	7,915	5,034	2,187	919
Joy	20,912	12,672	6,445	2,528
Sadness	15,232	8,194	5,701	1,713
Disgust	11,592	6,545	4,114	1,232

Figure 2

Counts of sentiment and emotions across 3 types of influencers



Discussion

This study set out to explore the content and response to feminism-related videos by TikTok influencers. To that end, I employed a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative content analysis, network analysis, and sentiment analysis, to investigate the dominant topics of influencers' videos, their hashtag use, and the sentiment of the comments respectively. The difference between the two strands of the contemporary feminist movement might result in the variation in their presence on social media. This is the first study so far to distinguish between the online activities of liberal feminism and radical feminism, thereby shedding light on their struggle for dominance in the movement. The second goal of this study is to investigate the use of hashtags by influencers, given the role of hashtags in TikTok content circulation and as a framing device. Applying the social identity model of collective actions and the theory of

affective publics to TikTok content, I expected that exposure to (anti-)feminist videos would encourage users to engage with them in terms of commenting. By using both quantitative and automated content analysis, the present study provided an overview of feminist content initiated by TikTok influencers, contributing to the growing research in this field.

Results showed that the most popular topics delivered on TikTok were sexism, gender ideology, and gender equality. Sexism was mostly presented in feminist influencers' videos, indicating the concern with sex-based prejudice and discrimination still present in modern society. Gender equality being the third highest category resonates with Simoes and colleagues' (2023) result, in which it was the second most common topic. However, while Simoes et al.'s (2023) study combined all posts addressing the author's position in the movement together, I separated the justification of liberal feminism from radical feminism. Once added up, it would be the third most occurring topic. Despite being the focal issue of the forth wave of feminism and prominent on Instagram (Barbala, 2023), sexual violence was referred to in 35 TikTok videos, mostly by liberal feminists. Criticism of the rape culture took up a significant part of this topic. Nevertheless, unlike Twitter where critiques came along with the calls for justice and systemic changes (Nau et al., 2022), on TikTok, the discussion played out with personal stories and statistics, aimed to demonstrate the severity of male sexual aggression and violence. This stresses the platformization of online content (Wellman, 2021). Future research should investigate each social media platform individually in order to fully capture their roles in information circulation and processing.

The two most popular topics among radical feminist influencers were justification and women's health. They tend to be more concerned with explaining their principles, focusing on the oppression of women by men in current society, particularly in medical care. They openly

rejected gender transition, gender non-conforming, and non-binary people. Radical feminist influencers in this study claimed that this type of gender identity reinforces gender binarism, perpetuating the oppression faced by women, and thus needs to be eliminated.

Anti-feminist influencers also spent time on women's health care but from a different perspective. They criticized the capitalization and ineffectiveness of modern medicine by highlighting the side effects on women's bodies. The videos were then concluded with a call to return to natural treatment. Aligned with previous research (Bauer, 2023; Leidig, 2023), under the gender ideology category, anti-feminist influencers made use of lifestyle content to leverage traditional gender roles. Denouncement of modern feminism as ripping women off their natural role only occurred in two videos.

Abortion, though been widely discussed in the media since the overturn of *Rode v. Wade* in the US, was only mentioned in 21 out of 505 feminism-related videos, reflecting on the pro-choice perspectives. This suggests a difference in the media agenda and topics conveyed on social media, particularly TikTok. Additionally, femicide, domestic violence, and workplace equity were mentioned once, and 10 for women empowerment, despite intersectionality and empowerment being the focuses of FWF. With 23 topics identified, TikTok seemed to provide a variety of topics and diverse opinions related to feminism. It emphasizes how social media as a part of technological development has been integrated into the movement. This also confirms that the platform might be less biased than Instagram in information distribution (Pomerantz & Field, 2022).

Regarding RQ2, social network analysis showed that #feminism and #feminist were the most influential in the hashtag network, being used on 178 TikTok videos. This result seemed apparent, considering the main topic of feminist content of this study. Differences in the use of

hashtags also signal the variation in content shared by the three types of influencers. With the focus on sexism and gender equality, I found these two hashtags frequently used together with #rapeculture, #misogyny, #womensrights, and #genderequality in liberal feminism content. The presence of hashtags concerning dating in the network indicates “the personal” of feminist discourses on TikTok. Individual stories have become the reference point for political discussion (Bennett, 2012; Bauer, 2023). This tactic, being the central activities of influencers, helps put them on the map of political actors that have a persuasive power over the audience.

Aligning with the essence of radical feminism, the content on TikTok concentrated on explaining and spreading their views on the movement. One way that the radical feminist stance manifested was through women's health care. With hashtags #surrogacy, #period, and #medicalmisogyny, they sought to describe and clarify the systemic structure that allows the existence of male oppression. At the same time, the compilation of videos under the same hashtags can emphasize the need to dismantle oppression for the better. Generally speaking, the use of these hashtags helps compose stories of oppression in one digital space, illustrating the collective experiences of structural inequality (Baer, 2015). This is sound evidence of the politicization of the personal in FWF (Haraway, 1991; Mansbridge, 1993).

Besides, previous research has raised concerns about hashtag hijacking by right-wing actors, aiming to spread their ideology to the mainstream space (Lewis, 2018). Results from this study revealed differently. The data showed little overlap between the hashtags used by feminist and anti-feminist influencers. Liberal feminists and radical feminists shared some hashtags such as #feminism, #feminist, and #women, indicating the battle for public acceptance in the digital space. Meanwhile, anti-feminist influencers rarely used the abovementioned hashtags. #homemaking, #stayathomehome, and others were employed to strengthen the portrayal of

traditional gender roles in their videos. Accordingly, it can be argued that feminist and anti-feminist influencers operate in two separate TikTok spaces that are barely connected. As such, users from the other side of the debate can hardly be exposed to the alternative viewpoint. Exposure to the influencers' content is more likely to reinforce the existing worldview of TikTok users, leading to the potential feedback loops and echo chamber effects of this platform.

The parallel between the dominant topics and the use of hashtags across the three groups of influencers signifies the role of hashtags as a framing device (González-Ibáñez et al., 2011; Meraz & Papacharissi, 2013). Hashtags were used not only for distributing purposes but also to intensify the topic discussed in the video. Users can work out the topic by looking at the hashtags and decide whether they want to continue the exposure with the video in question. While being largely convenient, it might give way to engagement only with ideology-aligning content and intentional avoidance of counter-opinion ones. This finding tells TikTok apart from other social media platforms, in the sense that it might possess a stronger reinforcing effect compared to others, at least regarding feminist discussions. This is also concerning given the rising popularity of this platform. TikTok has reached 1.7 million users worldwide in 2023 and is widely favored among people aged 18 to 24 (Howarth, 2024). While the operation of TikTok's algorithms remains a black box to academia, this result needs revisiting to strengthen our knowledge and build up intervention if necessary.

These results provide evidence for the role of influencers in political discussion. According to Rosch (1973), influencers can be perceived as prototypes, or representatives, of the social group they identify with. The most central, representative group members reinforce group similarities, whereas the extremity that differentiates the group from others is observed via outliers or group stars (Bartel & Wiesenfeld, 2013; Hogg, 1992; Murphy, 2002). The current

study found that topics brought up in influencers' videos and the supplement of hashtags generally align with the essence of each branch of (anti-)feminism. In other words, influencers' content on TikTok is typical for the agenda of liberal feminism, radical feminism, and anti-feminism, making them more of a representative of their respective group. The differences in dominant content separate the three groups of influencers from one another with distinctive use of hashtags to formulate their communities. Consequently, users can infer what each strand of feminism stands for by going through the influencer' accounts. Further, current research positions influencers as role models and digital opinion leaders. Influencers are the primary source of information among individuals with high political participation and low subjective political knowledge (Schmuck & Harff, 2024). They act on this role by discussing the topics with great enthusiasm and showcasing their presence and expertise across various dimensions of the issue (Steinke et al., 2024). Influencers' usage of TikTok as a platform for information dissemination allows for exaggeration of this effect by enabling them to reach audiences that are normally out of touch with traditional media (Vijay & Gekker, 2021). Through content creation and personalization of (anti-)feminism, they contribute to the distribution, intensification, and popularization of the movement.

In terms of sentiment analysis, the results reinforce the presence of emotions in online discussions, manifesting through the comment section. It contradicts findings explored in previous research. Past studies revealed that by stimulating cross-cutting exposure and diversifying communication within the network, social media prompts a negative sentiment to political disagreement (Barnidge, 2018). There was an overwhelming negative sentiment in feminist discourses on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter (Felmlee et al., 2020; Lehto, 2019; Proust, 2024; Suárez et al., 2022; Stubb-Richardson et al., 2018). However, this study pointed to

the dominance of positive sentiment. TikTok narratives and audiovisual strategies are mainly responsible for positive reactions and comments (Pérez Escolar et al., 2023). TikTok encourages connections based on common content characteristics rather than interpersonal relationships (Klinger & Svensson, 2016; Hautea, 2021), thereby enabling people to selectively seek like-minded content sharing the same hashtags. This segregates different groups of users, allowing little disagreement to arise. As such, the fragmentation of TikTok communities offers a probable account for such positivity.

Regarding concrete emotions, affective intelligence theory suggests anxiety arousal be the strongest factor driving information processing (Marcus et al., 2000), with the prominence of anger and fear on social media communication (Felmlee et al., 2020; Proust, 2024; Suárez et al., 2022; Stubb-Richardson et al., 2018). Results from this study showed varying patterns. Trust was the most prevalent emotion across all three types of influencers. Users generally find credibility in the influencers' content. Influencers are perceived as self-educated experts in the issues of discussion, leading to a higher level of trust and credibility among the audience, especially younger generations (Cheng et al., 2023; Dekonick et al., 2023). Further, TikTok features allow users to seek content that is congruent with their interests and values, along with the segregation of TikTok communities that reinforces their preexisting worldview. This homophily fosters the formation of parasocial relationships (Harff, 2023; Schoenberger & Kim, 2023), thereby further increasing the trust between followers and influencers.

For liberal feminist influencers, joy stood out as the second most expressed emotion. Anticipation, defined as encompassing expectation and eagerness (Mohammed & Turney, 2020; Plutchik, 1962; 1980), was also strongly expressed. The audience is seemingly enthusiastic about the topics discussed by liberal influencers, which reflected the main issues ever since the

establishment of the feminist movement, including gender equality, sexism, and the breakdown of gender ideology. This can be explained by the unique TikTok content characteristics. TikTok revolves around the creation and sharing of short videos, incorporating features such as music and stitching (Vijay & Gekker, 2021; Zulli & Zulli, 2020), stimulating a more casual and entertaining way of obtaining information. One influencer in the current study, Drew Afualo, is known for her comical roasting comments and rebuttal against anti-feminist accounts and signature laughs through a lot of videos. Other influencers such as Nakedlydressed and Gina Martin often used background music accompanied by textual information. Compared to Facebook or Twitter which are developed along textual content, these shorter and more interactive forms of videos can elicit the participation of audiences with a low interest in politics (Hartley, 2010), meanwhile evoking a more positive sentiment in the topics at hand.

Similar findings were present among anti-feminist influencers. The significance of joy and anticipation was likely to emerge from their focal content. Aligning with Bauer's (2023) study, anti-feminist influencers examined in the current paper often share content related to their life as a wife and moms, including cooking, childcare, gardening, and other household chores without providing any concrete argument supporting their ideologies. While subtly stressing traditional roles, such contents tend to be more comfortable and pleasant to watch, leading to outstanding joy in the responses. By refraining from denouncing modern feminism, they manage to avoid harsh responses and backlash from the audience. Further, these types of content are inherently different from those found in anti-feminist communities on Facebook and Twitter, explaining the deviance from negative sentiment in previous studies. Anti-feminists on Facebook focused on stories of painful victimization by feminist actors (Rothermel, 2020), whereas Twitter

was used to reinforce gender stereotypes and beauty norms, all the while slut-shaming rape victims (Felmlee et al., 2020, Stubb-Richardson et al, 2018).

For radical feminist influencers, anger and fear followed trust as the third and second most dominant emotions. One reason might be the topic they often brought up. Besides the explanation of radical feminist ideologies, these influencers talked about women's health care, particularly about one central aspect of the female body which is menstruation. They also raised concerns about the male-dominant medical practice where women tend to benefit less compared to men. Lehto's (2019) study provided a comparable result, in which breastfeeding protests against the shaming of women's bodies on Instagram were overwhelmingly laden with negative emotions. Such types of content were likely to evoke negative experiences and, thus negative emotions among the audience.

Another important result is related to surprise being the least expressed emotion across all categories. Combined with the unique topics and usage of hashtags, this underlines the fragmentation of TikTok content and users. No matter if a user is aware that the TikTok algorithm facilitates the spread and replication of similar content (Vijay & Gekker, 2021), they generally have certain expectations regarding the content brought up by influencers. A low level of surprise means a higher level of homophily, which is one of the key facilitators of the echo chamber effects. Simultaneously, a high frequency of exposure to influencers' content enhances the perceived simplification of politics, referring to the perception of politics by the audience regardless of how well an influencer explains it (Schmuck et al., 2022). This is related to political cynicism, especially concerning gender equality (Schmuck et al., 2022). The fragmentation described above causes concerns as young people are more susceptible to political mobilization after continuous exposure to one-sided information from influencers (Peter & Muth, 2022).

By analyzing (anti-)feminist influencers' content and the audience's comments, this study highlights the fragmentation and echo-chamber effect of TikTok as a social media platform. As distinguished group prototypes and opinion leaders, the topics conveyed by these influencers help popularize their group's ideology while evoking audiences' emotional responses. Hashtags were used by these actors for distribution purposes, particularly in signaling the type of information to be discussed in the video. While uniquely fulfilling their role as an intermediate point of information distribution, this possesses certain risks to citizenship performance among social media users. With TikTok affordances centering around common content characteristics (Zulli & Zulli, 2020), this allows exposure to pro-attitudinal content, leading to positive sentiments and emotions expressed by the audience. Nevertheless, it creates an information bubble, preventing users from engaging with counter-opinion content. The segregation of different groups on TikTok inhibits women's solidarity in encountering their century-long struggles. Further, contradicts the essence of deliberative democracy, in which decisions are to be made via negotiation between social actors in a common space (Chambers, 2003). In an era of increased dependence on social media for information, this might hinder the development of the movement and the path towards women liberation.

Limitations and Future Research

This study does not come without limitations. The disproportionate presence of influencers in the sample might affect the results. Liberal feminist influencers dominated the sample with 7 accounts, whereas only 2 radical feminist influencers and 5 anti-feminist influencers were included. This might lead to the prevailing occurrence of liberal feminist agendas. Further, little is known so far about radical feminism's online activities and how it might differ from the mainstream agendas. Future research should therefore make efforts to analyze radical feminism and anti-feminism in more detail and on various other platforms.

This study set out to investigate the dominant topics delivered by feminist and anti-feminist influencers on TikTok. Results showed 23 distinct topics with variations across the three types of influencers. Yet, how they presented and expressed their opinions was not accounted for. Taking gender ideology for example, feminist and anti-feminist influencers are likely to have contradicting worldviews, which is out of the scope of this analysis. Thus, a qualitative perspective would expand our knowledge of each topic in more detail.

For analysis purposes, I only coded videos in which influencers explicitly expressed their opinions in favor of or against feminism. This did not cover the whole range of digital tactics used by anti-feminist influencers (Bauer, 2023). Anti-feminist influencers emphasized the significance of traditional gender roles and nuclear families by showing their lives as a nurturing mother and loving wives (Bauer, 2023; Leidig, 2023). Though not explicitly advocating for anti-feminist ideologies, this kind of content plays a central role in promoting their agenda. Further, Bauer (2023) specified the reference to Christianity within anti-feminist content. My results substantiated this finding by the presence of conservative hashtags in the hashtag network. Since religious topics were not included in the codebook, it remained obscure how prominent they are in anti-feminist influencers' content. Further, the sample included influencers who continuously openly argued for feminism or anti-feminism. Those with only a small amount of content addressing the issue were excluded. The decision was made based on previous findings that the frequency of discussion and expertise by influencers enhance the perceived fit between them and the topic, leading to a higher intention to follow and take up recommended political actions (Naderer, 2023). This made them more relevant to the purpose of the current study. However, the bond between social media users and lifestyle influencers discussing political affairs in critical moments might still render them persuasive. Though this is getting more popular on social media

it is out of the scope of this study. Future research would benefit from including a wider range of influencers in the sample.

The interactive nature of social media blurs the line between producers and users of media content (Klinger & Svensson, 2016). For analysis purposes, this study defined the public as occurring in the comment section of TikTok videos. Since the creation of videos is also a way of getting involved in the discussion, it is arguable that the influencers are also a part of the public. The sentiment of influencers' videos should receive more attention. A multi-modal approach to video analysis might enhance academic understanding of (anti-)feminist influencers' content characteristics.

Regarding the sentiment analysis, I used a lexicon-based approach to analyze the public sentiment toward influencers' videos. One drawback of this approach is that words within the lexicon have been defined by crowdsourcing since 2015. Therefore, the lexicon is unable to recognize and identify the sentiment of new words. The fast pace of the internet allows for the establishment of new phrases, and slang, and the negotiation of the meaning of existing words that are not accounted for by the lexicon. Besides, because of platform regulation, users often use modified versions of sensitive words, for example, r@pe for rape or de@d for dead, to prevent getting banned. Unfortunately, the negative sentiment laden in these words cannot be recognized by the lexicon. This, along with the lexicon's inability to detect negation, can lead to analysis errors along the process.

Nevertheless, the use of a lexicon is appropriate for this study. NRC Emotion Lexicon was developed to detect 2 sentiments and 8 emotions, enabling me to explore a wide range of emotions underlying the comments. The pre-defined dictionary can identify multi-labeled and

mixed-emotion words, leading to a more comprehensive result. At the same time, it reduces the time and effort needed to label and train new data without compromising the findings.

Conclusion

Overall, this study sheds light on the dynamics of feminist discussions on TikTok, particularly those initiated by influencers. The current media system is characterized by the abundance of information available for public consumption and a low level of gatekeeping (Metzger & Flanagin, 2013). With the increasing preference for image-based social media communication, TikTok plays a significant role in conveying diverse topics and stance points related to the feminist movement. This is the first study to distinguish among the presence of liberal feminists, radical feminists, and anti-feminist influencers on social media. Given the fragmentation of the movement in recent years, it is essential that research not only considers platform dependencies but also the various actors involved.

This study marks a substantial endeavor to provide an overview of feminist discourses through the analysis of TikTok videos, hashtags, and comments. It enriches the current literature on the political role of influencers by showing their topics of discussion and the complementary use of hashtags. Simultaneously, it provides evidence for the emotional turn in political communication, signaled by the dominance of positive sentiment and eight other emotions within the comment section.

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Appendix 1. Codebook

This codebook was developed inductively based on Simoes and colleagues' (2023) study and Shiva and Kharazmi's (2019) research on the fourth wave of feminism. It also included deductive categories to account for emerging issues related to feminism.

Code	Name	Definition
1	Abortion	Discussions around the legalization of abortion.
2	Women's healthcare	Discussions around birth control, reproductive healthcare (natural birthing, medical intervention), and female anatomy.
3	Liberal feminism	Explanation of the principles of liberal feminism.
4	Radical feminism	Explanation of the principles of radical feminism.
5	Patriarchy	Criticism of the patriarchy.
6	Sexual abuse	Discussions around sexual violence and abuse against women, especially the rape culture.
7	Sexism	Content discussing prejudices and discriminations based on one's gender or sex.
8	Gender equality	Discussions around treating individuals of all genders fairly and equally, with equal rights, opportunities, and access to resources and privileges.
9	Gender ideology	Content that supports or denounces the set of beliefs, attitudes, and values regarding gender roles, identities, and relations that shape how individuals understand and

		interpret concepts such as masculinity, femininity, and gender diversity.
10	Sexual liberation	Discussions around traditional codes of behavior related to sexuality and interpersonal relationships, including the legalization of the sex industry and the hookup culture, among others.
11	Beauty standard	Content describing how to appeal to the male gaze or what men find attractive to a woman.
12	Women empowerment	Content promoting acceptance of women's viewpoints and an effort to seek and raise the status of women through education, awareness, literacy, and training.
13	Femicide	Discussion around the mass murder of women in different contexts.
14	Domestic violence	Discussion and statistics to fight against domestic violence.
15	Workplace equity	Discussion of women's rights in professional roles including wage gap.
16	Feminism in pop culture	Discussion around feminist expression in movies, books, and other media productions.
17	Childcare	Content related to child nurturing, including breastfeeding, daycare, vaccination, etc.

18	Child abuse	Content discussing different types of child abuse, including neglect, emotional abuse, physical abuse, and sexual abuse.
19	Trans inclusion	Discussions around trans activism, trans rights and transphobia.
20	Homophobia	Discussions around hatred towards homosexuality.
21	Fatphobia	Discussions around hatred towards overweight people.
22	Body positivity	The discussion around the mindset that everyone is worthy of love and a positive body image, regardless of how the media and society try to define beauty or the ideal body type.
23	Surrogacy	Discussions around the legalization of surrogacy.
0	Not feminism-related	