

Viral TikTok Breakthroughs Case:

Instructor's Notes

This instructor's edition of the Viral TikTok Breakthroughs case provides classroom guidance, debriefing suggestions, and sample responses for each activity. It is designed to help instructors connect the case to key learning outcomes in *Business Communication Today*, 16th Edition—especially Chapters 8 (Social Media), 9 (Visual Media), and 12 (Persuasive Messages).

Case Summary

This case examines how Lil Nas X and Olivia Rodrigo leveraged short-form video and authentic storytelling on TikTok to transform their careers. The examples show how persuasive communication now relies on multimodal content, emotional resonance, and audience participation. Students analyze how AI-driven feedback loops amplify these dynamics and how ethical considerations shape persuasive media in the digital age.

Learning Objectives

- Analyze persuasive strategies used in short-form digital media.
- Apply the AIDA model to contemporary campaigns.
- Evaluate authenticity and ethical boundaries in influencer marketing.
- Integrate AI tools into audience and message analysis.
- Design and critique persuasive campaigns for social platforms.

Activity 1: Real-Time Analysis Challenge—Decoding Virality

Instructor Guidance:

Assign trending TikTok videos or campaigns (e.g., a viral song, product reveal, or social cause). Ask students to apply the AIDA model: Attention, Interest, Desire, Action. This activity builds analytical and critical thinking skills.

Sample Student Insights:

- Attention: Lil Nas X grabbed attention using humor, meme culture, and an instantly recognizable beat.
- Interest: He sustained curiosity through multiple remixes and collaborations.
- Desire: The authenticity and humor built personal identification among fans.

- Action: Users replicated the dance, boosting viral spread and engagement.

Instructor Debrief: Focus on the emotional and participatory cues that drive engagement. Discuss how persuasive strategy differs when the audience becomes the messenger.

Activity 2: The Remix Strategy Workshop

Instructor Guidance:

Organize students into groups. Each group creates a 30-second TikTok concept for a cause or company. Encourage creativity, emphasizing emotion, narrative clarity, and participation. Introduce AI-assisted brainstorming (e.g., using ChatGPT to refine slogans).

Sample Student Concepts:

- For a nonprofit: A challenge encouraging users to share how they 'give back' with a simple gesture.
- For a product launch: Split-screen clips showing 'before' and 'after' using a product with an upbeat song.
- For a cause campaign: A hashtag challenge tied to climate action or inclusivity.

Instructor Debrief: Highlight which strategies feel authentic and emotionally grounded. Ask students whether AI-assisted phrasing enhances or diminishes perceived authenticity.

Activity 3: Ethics Spotlight—Manipulation or Engagement?

Instructor Guidance:

Present case examples such as the 'Pink Sauce' controversy or influencer marketing scandals. Discuss transparency and the ethical responsibilities of communicators using persuasive media. Encourage students to link back to ethical principles from Chapter 1 and Chapter 12.

Sample Answers:

- Persuasion becomes manipulation when messages withhold key facts, create false scarcity, or exploit emotional vulnerabilities.
- Ethical persuasion maintains transparency, respects the audience's autonomy, and prioritizes truthfulness.

Instructor Debrief: Ask: 'Can viral marketing be ethical if it uses emotional triggers intentionally?' Encourage debate to reinforce critical awareness.

Activity 4: AI Simulation—Predicting Virality

Instructor Guidance:

Have students input a prompt such as: 'Analyze why this TikTok video went viral.' Compare AI-generated insights to human analysis. This activity builds awareness of AI's strengths and limitations in communication analytics.

Sample AI Output Discussion:

- AI highlights structural elements (hashtags, timing, sound selection) but often underestimates emotional authenticity.
- Human analysis identifies cultural nuance, humor, and timing that AI overlooks.

Instructor Debrief: Emphasize how human empathy and cultural intelligence complement AI data insights.

Activity 5: Persuasive Presentation Assignment

Instructor Guidance:

Students prepare a short presentation proposing a TikTok-based campaign for a brand or organization. Evaluate clarity, persuasive structure, creativity, and ethics. Use rubrics based on clarity, visual appeal, and integration of AI tools.

Sample Student Presentation Framework:

- Audience: Gen Z consumers with strong social cause alignment.
- Message Strategy: Empathy-based appeal linking brand to a shared cultural moment.
- Visual Elements: Short video loop, strong caption, call-to-action hashtag.
- AI Integration: Use AI analytics to track response and adjust visuals.
- Ethical Caution: Avoid exploiting social movements or oversimplifying causes for virality.

Instructor Debrief: Focus feedback on alignment between message tone, visual design, and brand integrity.

Engagement Question (with Sample Instructor Commentary)

Student Question: Is authenticity still possible in a digital world shaped by algorithms and AI?

Sample Instructor Response: Authenticity remains possible but must be redefined. Students can discuss hybrid authenticity—messages that blend algorithmic optimization with human sincerity. Encourage examples of creators or companies that maintain trust while leveraging data-driven insights.

Instructor Takeaway

This case encourages instructors to help students see persuasion as participatory, ethical, and technologically informed. It reinforces cross-chapter integration—linking audience feedback (Ch. 8), visual storytelling (Ch. 9), persuasive writing (Ch. 12), and ethical

communication (Ch. 1). Instructors can extend discussion by having students design full campaigns or evaluate the next viral phenomenon.

Viral TikTok Breakthroughs Case: Student Version

A Study of Persuasion, Visual Storytelling, AI, and Authenticity on TikTok

Case Overview

In this case, you'll explore how Lil Nas X and Olivia Rodrigo used short-form video, authenticity, and audience participation on TikTok to accelerate their careers. Their success shows how persuasive communication now relies on visual storytelling, emotional resonance, and collaborative audience engagement.

You'll also examine how AI tools influence virality—both by amplifying content and by giving communicators new ways to analyze audience behavior. Throughout the activities, you will apply key concepts from *Business Communication Today*, 16th Edition, especially from Chapters 8 (Social Media), 9 (Visual Media), and 12 (Persuasive Messages).

Learning Goals

By the end of this case, you will be able to:

- Identify persuasive techniques used in short-form social media content.
 - Apply the AIDA model (Attention–Interest–Desire–Action) to modern campaigns.
 - Evaluate how authenticity affects audience trust.
 - Analyze how AI tools shape or predict viral communication.
 - Design a persuasive TikTok-style campaign that integrates ethical communication practices.
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Activity 1 — Real-Time Analysis Challenge: Why Did It Go Viral?

Your Task:

Choose a trending TikTok video or viral campaign (music, product, challenge, or cause). Apply the AIDA model to explain its success:

1. Attention: What grabbed viewers instantly?
2. Interest: What kept them watching?
3. Desire: What made people want the product, idea, or message?
4. Action: What did viewers do next—comment, remix, share, purchase, participate?

Focus Questions:

- What emotional or visual elements drove engagement?

- How did audience participation (duets, stitches, remixes) contribute to virality?
- Would this video succeed without TikTok’s algorithm? Why or why not?

Activity 2 — The Remix Strategy Workshop

Your Task:

Work individually or in a small group to create a 30-second TikTok concept for a brand, product, cause, or campus initiative. Your concept must include:

- A clear message or story.
- An emotional hook.
- A visual or musical element.
- An invitation for audience participation (challenge, duet, reaction, etc.).

Optional: Use AI tools (such as ChatGPT) to brainstorm captions, slogans, or content variations—then refine them with your own voice.

Reflection Questions:

- What makes your concept feel authentic (or not)?
- How does your idea encourage people to join in or remix your message?
- How could the campaign be misinterpreted—or misused—if it went viral?

Activity 3 — Ethics Spotlight: Engagement vs. Manipulation

Review a real-world example of a questionable viral trend (such as the “Pink Sauce” controversy) or an influencer marketing misstep.

Your Task: Answer the following:

- When does persuasion cross into manipulation?
- What ethical standards (such as transparency, accuracy, and respect for the audience) apply here?
- What responsibilities do creators have when their message spreads faster than they expect?
- How can communicators maintain credibility while trying to go viral?

Activity 4 — AI Simulation: Can AI Predict Virality?

Your Task:

Paste a link (or describe a viral TikTok) into an AI tool and ask: “Why did this video go viral?”

Then compare the AI’s analysis to your own.

Reflect on the following:

- How accurate was the AI’s explanation?
- What did the AI notice that you hadn’t considered?
- What did you notice that the AI missed—such as cultural nuance, humor, or authenticity?
- What aspects of persuasion still require human insight?

Activity 5 — Persuasive Pitch: Your TikTok Campaign Proposal

Your Task:

Create a short persuasive presentation proposing a TikTok-based campaign for a brand or organization of your choice.

Your presentation should include:

- Target Audience: Who are you trying to reach?
 - Message Strategy: What persuasive appeal will you use (emotional, logical, credibility-based, etc.)?
 - Visual & Audio Choices: How will visuals, sounds, captions, and pacing support your goal?
 - Call to Action: What specific response do you want from your audience?
 - AI Use: How could AI assist with planning, analyzing feedback, or optimizing content?
 - Ethical Considerations: What boundaries should the campaign respect?
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Discussion Question

Is authenticity still possible in a digital world shaped by algorithms and AI?

Consider:

- What does “authentic” mean on social media?
- Can content be both strategic and sincere?
- When does “authenticity” become a performance?
- How do you personally decide whether a creator is trustworthy?

★ Key Takeaways

After completing this case, you should understand that:

- Virality combines persuasive strategy, emotional connection, and audience participation.
- Visual storytelling and short-form video are now core business communication skills.
- AI can enhance analysis but cannot replace human creativity, cultural awareness, or ethical judgment.
- Ethical communication matters—viral influence increases your responsibility, not just your reach.