

# Compliments and Compliment Responses on a Nigerian TikTok Celebrity

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## Abstract

This paper explores the linguistic and visual strategies in compliments and compliment responses on Nigerian TikTok by focusing on the interactions surrounding the TikTok celebrity Crispdal. It analyses 70 compliments and responses using a modified version of Yuan's (2002) compliment taxonomy and Placencia et al's 2016 compliment response framework. The data reveals that majority of the compliments are explicit compliments (63%); they are characterised by positive semantic markers. These markers are often expressed in slangy and colloquial expressions. The other categories of compliments include: implicit compliments (26%), semantically bound compliments and non-compliments (1%). The findings also reveal that compliment responses predominantly employed emojis or likes (27%) reflecting scalability needs and performance intimacy. 17% of the compliments were responded to while 32% were ignored showing online norms that non-response of compliments is not socially offensive. This paper broadens the understanding of speech acts in digital environments. The study contributes to digital sociolinguistics by demonstrating how social media platforms reshape compliment practices emphasising technology's role in evolving language practices.

**Key terms:** Compliments, Compliment responses, Digital communication, Sociolinguistics

## Introduction

With the rapid expansion of digital platforms, social media has transformed amongst other things, identity formation and interpersonal communication. TikTok, one of these platforms, stands out as a particularly influential space. It is a short-form video platform is used for creating and sharing short video and with the combination of visual, auditory, and textual communication, it has attracted millions of users worldwide. TikTok is said to have approximately 2.05 billion users globally (Singh, 2025); it integrates video content with written or emoji-driven comments and blends features of spoken and written language. This creates space for creativity, entertainment and cultural exchange among the users, particularly the younger generation. In Nigeria, where TikTok has gained much influence, the platform is a space to express talent, humour and cultural identity. Among its many features, TikTok's comment section facilitates interactions, including compliment exchanges, which play a crucial role in affirming social connections and admiration

One prominent Nigerian who has harnessed TikTok's vibrant culture to considerable effect is Chinye Elijah who is from the Igbo tribe, popularly known as Crispdal. His state of origin is not specified, it is confirmed that he grew up in Calabar, Cross River State, where he completed his primary and secondary education. He later graduated from the Cross River State University of Technology in October 2023 (Famous Naija). Crispdal is a professional dancer, brand influencer, and TikTok sensation, renowned for his energetic dance performances and innovative choreography. His style combines contemporary dance, slow mo/breakdance moves

with vibrant cultural expressions, appealing strongly to Nigerian youth and international audiences alike. With over twelve million followers (as at February 2025), Crispdal typifies the phenomenon of digital celebrityhood; leveraging TikTok's unique features, he has cultivated a strong, engaged community of fans who frequently interact with his content through compliments, playful banter, creative emojis, and likes.

The paper explores linguistic and visual strategies used in compliments and compliment responses on Crispdal's TikTok handle. It analyses interactions, namely compliments, around his popular dance videos. By employing a modified version of Yi Yuan's (2002) compliment taxonomy and Placencia et al.'s (2016) compliment response framework, this paper seeks to expand the understanding of digital sociolinguistics by highlighting how technology reshapes traditional communicative practices.

## **TikTok**

TikTok, originally known as Musical.ly in 2014, was acquired by ByteDance in 2017 and globally launched in 2018 (Hill, 2022) has rapidly become a dominant force in the social media landscape. Unlike traditional platforms that emphasise user connections, TikTok's core innovation lies in its algorithm-driven content delivery, which curates a personalised 'For You Page (FYP)' based on user interactions, watch time, and engagement patterns. This approach prioritises content visibility thereby allowing creators to reach wide audiences regardless of the number of followers that they have.

TikTok offers tools that encourage creative expression, including: short-form video creation which users can produce videos ranging from 15 seconds to 10 minutes, often set to music or trending audio clips; editing tools which have editing features, filters, and effects that helps even novices to create content and interactive functions: features like "Duet" and "Stitch" allow users to collaborate or respond to existing content allowing a participatory culture (Hill, Ibid) . These have contributed to TikTok's reputation as a hub for viral trends, challenges, and memes, particularly among younger demographics.

The platform's influence extends beyond entertainment; it has become a space for educational content, political discourse, social activism and so on. Despite its cultural contributions, TikTok has faced scrutiny for several reasons. Privacy concerns have been a recurring issue, particularly regarding the way data is collected and its ties to China, prompting regulatory challenges in several countries, including the United States and India (Coulthard 2023). Additionally, the platform's addictive design has sparked debates about its effects on mental health, particularly among younger users who may spend excessive time engaging with its content. (Conte et al., 2024)

## **The Concept of Compliments**

Compliments are a fundamental aspect of human interaction; they function as social lubricants that help to smoothen communication thereby strengthening social bonds. Holmes (1988) in Hobbs (2003, p. 249) defines compliments as 'a speech act that explicitly or implicitly bestows credits upon the interlocutor for some possessions, ability, personality, or the like, which is positively evaluated by both speaker and the addressee'. This definition highlights the double nature of compliments: they do not only express admiration; they also reinforce shared values and mutual appreciation between individuals. The relational aspect of compliments is further emphasised by Kasper and Schmidt (1996), who defines them as expressions of appreciation for qualities valued by both the speaker and the recipient. Similarly, Searle and Vanderveken

(1985) identify compliments as expressions of approval, often recognising positive attributes such as heroic behaviour or artistic excellence.

Beyond their expressive function, compliments serve practical purposes in social interactions. They can initiate conversations, reinforce solidarity, or even substitute for other speech acts like gratitude or congratulations (Dendenne, 2021). As Golato (2005) observes, compliments are a universal aspect of human interaction, and they have drawn considerable attention from researchers due to their prevalence across languages and cultures. However, despite their ubiquity, complimenting is a complex sociolinguistic skill. It is subject to different interpretations and cultural nuances. Compliments are likened to windows into cultural values because they offer insights into what a society collectively highly regards or esteems (Thompson, Bullock, & Margulis 2023) but the content, frequency and interpretation of compliments are heavily influenced by the cultural norms of the society that they are expressed (Bergqvist, 2009).

Another complexity of compliments is in their potential to function as face-threatening acts. Brown and Levinson (1987, p. 66) note that while compliments are positive statements, they can threaten the recipient's negative face (the desire to be autonomous and not imposed upon) by creating a social demand for the recipient to respond or reciprocate. Holmes (1988) describes this as the 'complimentor's debt.' For instance, complimenting the outfit of a reserved colleague who wishes to be left alone can make the recipient feel uncomfortable or obligated to respond. Also, a compliment admiring the competence of the recipient might be seen as condescending. This highlights the complex interplay between the speaker's intentions and the recipient's perceptions, because compliments carry both intended and unintended meanings.

Holmes (1988) categorises compliments into five primary topics: (1) appearance, referring to physical attributes; (2) ability or performance, highlighting commendable skills or behaviour; (3) possessions, appreciating owned items; (4) personality or friendship, focusing on character traits; and (5) other miscellaneous topics. Al-Rassam (1992) in Shabeeb & Jibreen (2008) classifies compliments as 'formulaic speech acts in the sense that a very small number of lexical items and syntactic patterns account for a great majority of them'.

Wolfson (1983) identifies nine syntactic patterns commonly used in construct compliments, such as 'Your sweater is really nice' (NP + is/looks + ADJ) and 'I like your car' (I + like/love + NP). and despite their formulaic nature, compliments can be expressed through a variety of linguistic structures. Compliments can use stylistic figures of speech such as metonymy, similes, metaphors, rhetorical questions, and hyperbole, which add layers of creativity and cultural specificity to their expressions. (Komiati, & Mária 2024). The structure of a compliment speech act follows an adjacency pair: it consists of a first turn (the compliment) and a second turn (the compliment response) (Czerwionka, Dickerson & Aragon-Bautista 2021).

Recipients of compliments often face a 'double bind,' where they must balance agreeing with the person complimenting while adhering to social norms that discourage self-praise (Pomerantz 1978). Just like compliments, compliment responses are a complex and nuanced aspect of social interaction. They are also shaped by cultural norms, linguistic strategies, and the inherent tension between accepting praise and avoiding self-praise. This creates a delicate interplay between modesty and agreement because recipients strive to conform to both the modesty maxim (Fuad Hasyim, 2025) and to acknowledge the compliment positively.

Cultural specificity is a major determining factor in shaping compliment responses. For instance, in German-speaking cultures, agreeing strongly with a compliment may not be perceived as self-praise (Golato, 2005), whereas in Finnish, recipients typically agree with compliments but often provide explanations to mitigate any appearance of self-promotion (Etelämäki et al., 2013). This indirect approach allows recipients to acknowledge the compliment while maintaining modesty. Rabab'ah et al (2024) note that Emirati Arabic speakers would return the compliments or make religious expressions. This cultural variation underscores the importance of understanding the norms and expectations surrounding compliment responses in different linguistic and social contexts.

The face-threatening nature of compliments also influences how recipients respond. Brown and Levinson (1987) argue that compliments can function as face-threatening acts, creating social obligations for the recipient to respond or reciprocate. This places pressure on recipients to manage their responses carefully, as failing to acknowledge a compliment appropriately can lead to social discomfort or misinterpretation. For example, a recipient who dismisses a compliment too abruptly may appear ungrateful, while one who accepts it too readily may stand the risk of appearing too arrogant. This tension highlights the nuanced approach required in crafting an appropriate compliment response.

### **Literature Review**

Research on compliments and compliment responses has been carried out in multiple cultural contexts and a recurring theme is that cultural values inform the way people respond to compliments. Kharboot & Ni Ma (2021) compared British and American sitcoms; they highlight a slightly higher frequency of compliments among British speakers. This finding aligns with the stereotype that British culture, often regarded as highly polite, would encourage more frequent compliments. Razi (2013), in a contrastive study of compliment responses among Australian English and Iranian Persian speakers, found that Australians more readily accept compliments, while Iranians sometimes perceive accepting a compliment as boastful. Boroujeni *et al* (2016) in studying compliment response behaviour in American and Persian sitcoms noted that Americans often ignored or downplayed compliments to avoid self-praise while the Persians responses expressed gratitude but frequently questioned the sincerity of the compliment thus aligning with cultural values of modesty and social harmony.

In studying gender and compliments, scholars (including Holmes 1988 and Herbert 1990) have shown that women generally give and receive compliments more frequently than men do. Holmes notes that women use compliments to maintain intimacy and ongoing conversation, while men often treat compliments as face-threatening acts. (Kurita, 2024). In Jordan, as Balqa (2018) reports, women focus on each other's appearance and use more intensive syntactic forms, whereas men tend to hedge or minimise their praise. Shezi's, (2024). study on compliments and compliment responses among the Zulus in South Africa concludes that women compliment appearance and on material things such as clothes, while men seldom use compliments. It further notes that men prefer to use the compliment response pattern 'thank you' or appreciation token in a high frequency compared to their female counterparts who prefer challenge, sincerity and question.

Research on compliments in digital spaces also gives insights into how new media practices intersect with the use of compliments. Indah & Rohmani (2017) investigates compliments on Instagram ('Igers') and discovers that short syntactic structures featuring adjectives predominate when users praise skills or abilities. On Weibo, as Zhu & Ren (2022)

finds, Chinese users integrate memes and emojis to convey compliments, aligning with broader Chinese communication norms that value explicit yet harmonious social interactions. Users often express emotional solidarity through visual or multimodal creativity but rarely extend compliments into direct exchanges with high-profile figures such as celebrities.

Despite the plethora of works on compliments, there is a limited study on compliments in the Nigerian culture and especially in the digital space. This study will investigate the linguistic and paralinguistic strategies employed by TikTok users to compliment the viral sensation. The research applies Yi Yuan's (2002) taxonomy of compliment strategies and Placencia's (2016) framework for compliment responses.

### **Yi Yuan's Compliment taxonomy**

This formula is used to describe how compliments are constructed and how they function. Yuan, a socio-linguist categorised compliments to 2 macro-categories, they are: compliments and non-compliments. Compliments are further divided into unbound and bound semantic formulars. The unbound semantic formulars are subdivided into the explicit and implicit compliments. According to Boyle (2000), compliments are considered explicit when they 'are identifiable as compliments even without context, as they are expressed through a limited set of conventional phrases.' Setting aside context-dependent factors like irony or sarcasm, most speakers would easily recognise expressions such as 'Your voice is beautiful' or 'What a lovely meal you cooked today!' as compliments due to their linguistic structure. Explicit compliments are typically conveyed through declarative sentences, which can be either affirmative or exclamatory in nature. They are characterised by the presence of a positive semantic carrier. For example, in the statement, 'This is a nice house,' , the word 'nice' serves as the positive semantic carrier.

However, implicit compliments are those 'in which the value judgement is presupposed and/or implicated by Gricean maxims' (Boyle 2000, p.28). In other words, they do not necessarily have a linguistic form or are formulaic like explicit compliments, so inference needs to be made before a response is given. Boyle (ibid) gives the following examples to illustrate implicit compliments in English: 'I wish I could manage my work like you do' and 'Your husband is a very lucky man.'

The semantic bound formulars are statements that occur with the semantic unbound formular but if it occurs by itself cannot be regarded as compliment (Yuan 2002, p. 192). For example, in this statement 'Nice dress. Where did you buy it?' 'Where did you buy it?' is a bound semantic formular because if occurring alone cannot be regarded as a compliment. The semantic bounds are as follows:

1. Explanation: 'This car of yours is really nice! With a car like this, you won't even feel the bumps on the road.'
2. Information Question: 'Gosh! This is beautiful! Where did you buy it?'
3. Future Reference: 'Quite remarkable. You shouldn't have any problems in getting a job soon'
4. Contrast: 'Your house help is extremely capable, not like mine who is so lazy'
5. Advice: 'your contributions were most gratefully received. People should learn to send in a more mature and reasonable advice'.
6. Request: 'your dress is beautiful. Please can you lend me for a day?'

The non-compliments are compliments that do not have any positive semantic carrier but its meaning can be deduced by the use of the language. They sometimes come as insults or even complaints.

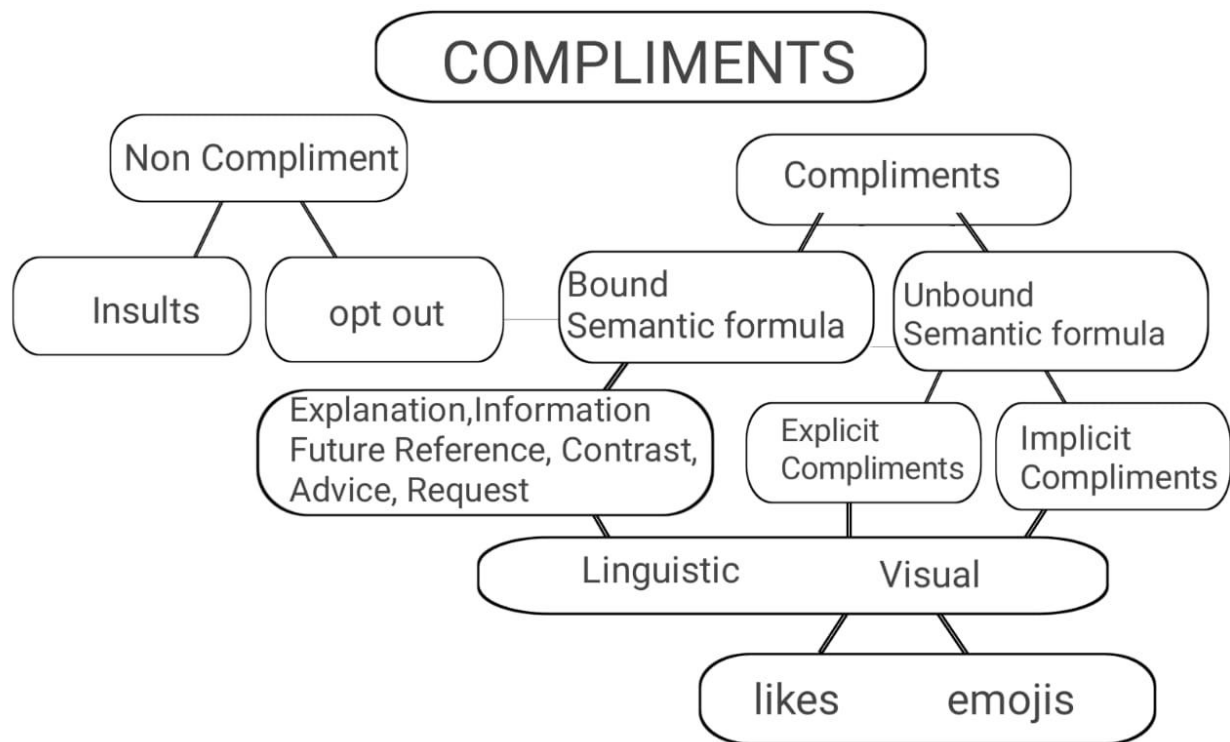
Examples include, ‘why are you so stupid? Always thinking about others’

‘You are too tolerant. You always give room to everybody!’

Opt-out: This is a situation where an informant says nothing when a compliment is expected. However,

Yuan (2002, Ibid) classification of compliments is not problem free because it does not cater to online contexts such as ‘liking’ as well as ‘emojis’. Therefore, it was modified to include emojis and ‘likes’ which are very important features in online interactions. Emojis are used in digital communication platforms, ‘such as online interactions, to act arose primarily to address the absence of paralinguistic cues inherent in face-to-face exchanges, including nonverbal gestures, tonal nuances, and immediacy of engagement’ (Wagner et al., 2020, p.306). They amplify the expressiveness of compliments and indicate the attitude of the user towards the content or the recipient of the compliments. For example a compliment like ‘ you sing so well’ followed by a heart eyes emoji (😍) or a fire emoji (🔥) shows the warmth, sincerity or intensity of the person giving the compliment.

Likes, on the other hand, serve as digital nods of approval or acknowledgment and when combined with textual compliments, ‘likes’ validate the compliment or reinforce positive feedback for example, numerous likes on a compliment serve as social proof, validating the compliment and implicitly encouraging others to also express positive feedback. The more likes a compliment receives, the greater its perceived authenticity and social endorsement. These features are added to Yuan’s taxonomy of compliments for better analysis



*A modified taxonomy of Yi Yuam 's semantic formula*

#### **Placencia et al (2016) Compliment response strategy**

Placencia et al (2016) Compliment response strategy is a taxonomy which modified Holmes 1988's taxonomy of compliment responses to place features of social media 'like' and 'emoticons/emojis. They divide it into four major categories: Acceptance, Rejection, Evasion and No Acknowledgment. Appreciation token is further divided into:

1. **Appreciation Token (acceptance):** These are responses which express gratitude, e.g., 'thanks,' 'thank you,' 'LOL,'. It also includes 'Like' (when accompanied by further comments), or emoticons (😊❤️) with additional verbal context.
2. **Agreement Token:** These are direct agreement statements which agree with the compliment, e.g., 'Your dress is nice'. 'Yes,' 'I think so too,'
3. **'Like' or Emoticon with No Further Comment:** Clicking 'Like' or using an emoji (e.g., 😊) alone.
4. **Downgrading Utterance:** This is accepting the compliment while shifting credit or qualifying the compliment, e.g., 'Thanks, I can't take credit...'
5. **Return Compliment:** Accepting by complimenting the giver in return. 'Your car is lovely'. 'Yours too'

The second major category Rejection is further divided into

1. Disagreement Utterance: Here the recipient disagrees with the compliment., e.g., I loved your performance 'I don't like it.'
2. Challenging Sincerity: This questions or implies the compliment giver isn't sincere, e.g., 'You sound so sweet when you lie.'

**Evasion**, the third major category is divided into

1. Shift Credit: This is when praise is redirected to a third party.
2. Informative Comment: The recipient provides additional or explanatory details about the complimented item/topic without directly acknowledging the compliment.
3. Ignore: This is responding with an unrelated comment or topic shift.
4. Legitimate Evasion: The recipient shifts the conversation to a previous topic without directly addressing the compliment.
5. Request Reassurance: The recipient allows the complimenter to reaffirm or clarify the compliment, indirectly prompting further affirmation.

**No Acknowledgement:**

**Non-response:** Compliment receives no reply whatsoever.

| Main Category      | Subcategories                 | Examples                                            |
|--------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|
| Acceptance         | Appreciation Token            | "Thanks!", "Thank you!", "LOL", ":)" (with comment) |
|                    | Agreement Token               | "Yes", "I think so too", "You're right"             |
| S                  | Like or Emoticon (no comment) | Clicking "Like" or ":)" only                        |
|                    | Downgrading Utterance         | "Thanks, but I can't really take credit..."         |
|                    | Return Compliment             | Complimenting back                                  |
| Rejection          | Disagreement Utterance        | "I don't think so", "Not really"                    |
|                    | Challenging Sincerity         | "You're sweet when you lie!"                        |
| Evasion            | Shift Credit                  | Redirecting credit to someone else                  |
|                    | Informative Comment           | Additional information without direct response      |
|                    | Ignore                        | Changing topic without acknowledging compliment     |
|                    | Legitimate Evasion            | Returning to previous topic without response        |
|                    | Request Reassurance           | Prompting reaffirmation of the compliment           |
| No Acknowledgement | Non-response                  | No reply                                            |

*Palencia et al (2016) taxonomy of Compliment Responses*

## Methodology

This study is based on a corpus of compliments on the TikTok handle of a professional dancer, brand influencer and Tiktok star Crispdal (<https://www.tiktok.com/@crispdal>). Crispdal, whose real name is Chinye Elijah, is a Nigerian content creator and dancer. He hails from the Igbo tribe in the southeastern region of Nigeria. Crispdal gained fame through his dance videos on TikTok, where he has amassed a significant following. His content often features slow-motion and break dance routines.

Our analysis is focused on compliments given by fans to dance videos posted by the social media celebrity. This study used purposive sampling as it allows for deliberate selection of data that is informative and relevant to the subject of study. The compliments and the compliment responses are textual; they are written mostly in Nigerian Pidgin English or slangy expressions which are in current use. This study used purposive sampling as it allows for deliberate selection of data that is informative and relevant to the subject of study. 70 compliments and compliment responses taken from multiple videos were analysed based on the exploratory nature of research and the number is deemed representative and sufficient because it was observed that additional data did not yield new categories or significant variations.

## Results

### Compliments

This section presents the categorisation of compliments from the fans of Crispdal by using Yi Yuan's (2002) framework to analyse compliments. There were forty-four (44) explicit compliments accounting for the majority of the type of compliments used. Eighteen of them are implicit compliments, eight (8) semantically bound compliments and one (1) non-compliment. The explicit compliments were marked by clearly positive semantic indicators such as "love," "beautiful," "sweet," and other similar affirming terms.

E.g

(C27) *Damn this is too good, good for mankind* 😊❤️❤️❤️.

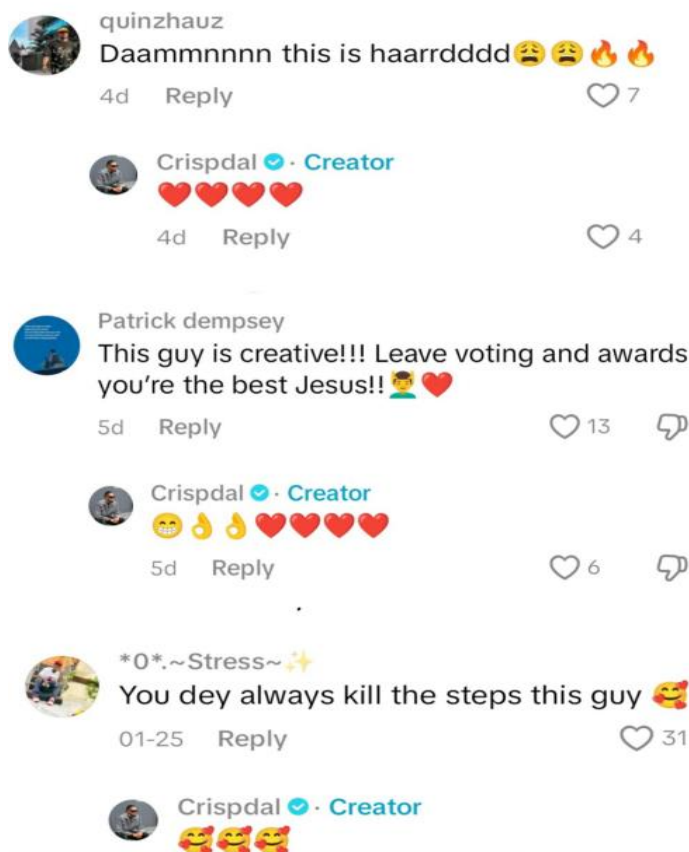
Several slangy expressions like 'hot', 'nailed', 'steeze' are used to connote positive markers. Also words like 'bad', 'kill' have taken new positive meanings in contemporary context and are used as compliment markers.

E.g: (C25) *That's dope* 🔥🔥🔥 *you nailed it*

(C55) *You dey always kill the steps this guy*

(C14) *Daammnnnnn this is hard* 😊😊🔥🔥🔥

(C39) *This guy is creative!!! Leave voting and awards you're the best Jesus!!* 🙌🙌



These words are used to express the admiration of the subject's skills as an accomplished dancer. The use of elongated words are used to compliment with an intensity

(C14) Daammnnnnn this is hard 😞😞🔥🔥🔥.

(C43) Youuuu are toooooo gooodddddd 😊

The word 'damn' is elongated to show the intensity of the admiration that the complimenter has for Crispdal. In (C43), 'you', 'too' and 'good' are elongated to show how intensely the fan feels about Crispdal's performance as dancer.

Eighteen (18) of the compliments are implicit compliments, they did not carry an overt positive semantic marker but because of the context, they were deduced to be complimenting the Crispdal's skills as a dancer.

Examples include:

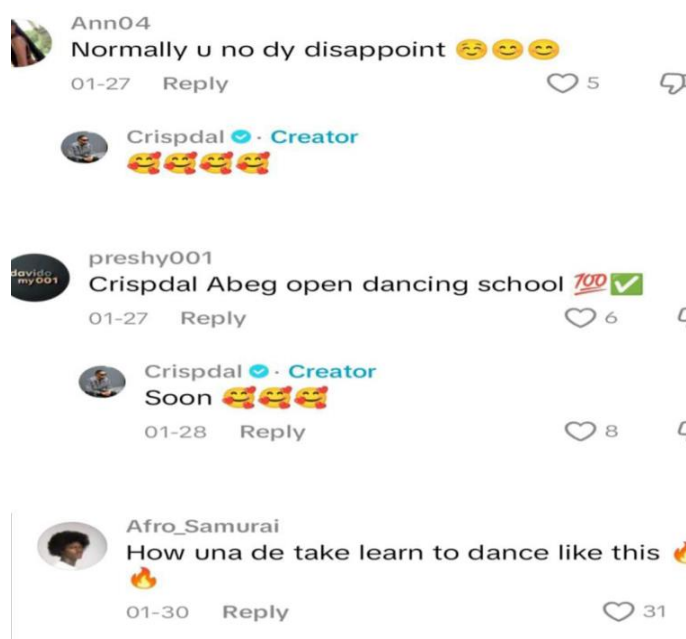
(C59) Normally u no dy disappoint 😊😊😊 (

(C57) Crispdal Abeg open dancing school 100

(C18) How una dey 🎵 take learn to dance like this 🧡❤️

Without overtly complimenting Crispdal's skill as a dancer, (C59) implies that the fan has confidence in Crispdal's ability to always and consistently deliver quality content and is complimenting it.

(C57) while the fan does not outrightly compliment his skills as an exceptional dancer, the plea(*abeg*) for his to open a dancing school, implies Crispdal's exceptional skill and the need to pass it on to others. (C18) The fan frames his compliment as a question, implying that the recipient is an excellent dancer and he is impressed with it.



There were eight (8) semantically bound compliments. They function to give information and also show contrast

(C7) *I've watched this thrice* 😊🤔ATE 🤔🤔

(C17) *I kept watching this all over and over, you guys are too good.*

(C29) *You sure say you no be robot?* 🤔🤖You're too goooooood 🤔👉

The statements 'I've watched this twice', 'I kept watching this all over and over' and 'You sure say you no be robot?🤖You're too goooooood 🤔👉

are bound to the statements 'ATE' (which is a social media expression to say one has done or spoken well) and 'you guys are so good', if spoken alone, cannot be considered as compliment.

There is also the presence of one non-compliment which is structurally an accusation but in reality, it is complimenting the subject's success in executing some dance moves in a way that is unbeatable.

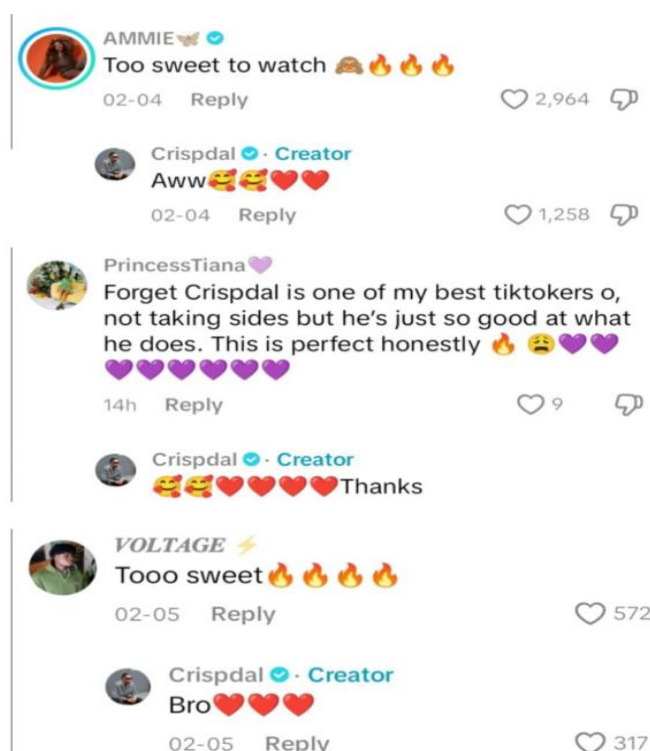
(C69) *Him don thief the challenge* 🤔🤔👊

## Visual Strategies

On TikTok, the comments themselves can receive 'likes' (in the case of Tiktok, the 'like' icon is a heart emoji) from other viewers. Many fans decide to simply 'like' a well-articulated compliment rather than write theirs and this is for the sake of convenience (Placencia & Lower 2017) because it already expresses their sentiments. In the compliments, it was noted that there was total of 5894 'like' reactions on the compliments. This shows that for each written compliment, there are numerous silent approves. In this way, the compliments that were analysed not only reflect individual voices but also often carry the agreement of others (engagement by proxy via the 'likes' ). An example was seen below:

The three compliments above have 2964, 9 and 572 likes showing the number of people who shared the same sentiments with the complimenter.

In this study, out of the 70 compliments, 67 verbal compliments were accompanied with emojis that express love, appreciation, admiration for the subject while the remaining three compliments had no accompanying emojis. In this study, emojis plays a critical role in clarifying the situational and emotional subtexts of compliments, thereby aiding comprehension. This is seen in this compliment



*C9: Una sure say crispdal na human being 🐱💖?*

Even though the person complimenting is asking if Crispdal is human, the cat with a smile emoji and the heart shape shows the humour and the admiration for Crispdal's . This is seen in implicit compliments.

Yus (2014, p. 518) asserts that emojis act as amplifiers because they are capable of reinforcing the tone and intent of a message. This is seen in explicit compliments where emojis are used to

amplify or show the intensity of the feeling of the complimenter towards Crispdal's performance.

| Compliment Type            | Description                                                                                          | Example(s)                                                                               | Frequency out of 70 | Emoji/Visual Pattern                                   |
|----------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|
| Explicit Compliments       | Direct praise using overt positive words (e.g., 'dope,' 'nailed'). These stand alone as compliments. | (C25) That's dope 🔥🔥🔥 you nailed it (C55) You dey always kill the steps this guy         | 44 (≈63%)           | High emoji use (e.g., 🔥, 😊) to amplify the compliment. |
| Implicit Compliments       | Praise is implied through context without direct positive adjectives. Often humorous or clever.      | (C59) Normally u no dy disappoint 😊😊😊 (C57) Crispdal Abeg open dancing school <u>100</u> | 18 (≈26%)           | Emojis like 😊 and <u>100</u> clarify tone.             |
| Semantically -Bound        | Compliments tied to surrounding descriptive statements. Praise emerges from combined phrases.        | (C7) I've watched this thrice 😊🥰 ATE 🥰🥰 (C17) I kept watching... you guys are too good   | 8 (≈11%)            | Emojis support evaluative context (e.g., 🥰).           |
| Non-Compliments (Ironic)   | Framed as jokes/accusations but meant as compliments. Emojis clarify intent.                         | (C69) Him don thief the challenge 😊😊❤️                                                   | 1 (≈1%)             | Use of 😊, 😊, ❤️ clarifies ironic tone.                 |
| Emoji as Compliment Tool   | Emojis function as standalone or support for compliments.                                            | (C9) Una sure say Crispdal na human being 🐱❤️? (C2) Creativity 🔥🔥🔥🔥                      | 67 of 70            | Clarifies emotional subtext.                           |
| Likes as Visual Compliment | Likes indicate alignment with a compliment, often more frequent than comments.                       | General observation                                                                      | 5894                | Acts as engagement by proxy.                           |

For example:

(C2): *Squid game Geeeee mhan this is impressive asf. Creativity 🔥🔥🔥🔥*

The fire emoji (🔥🔥🔥🔥) communicates a heightened sense of enthusiasm and admiration, intensifying the emotions that the complimenter has towards the dance.

## Compliments

Crispdal responded to 13 compliments explicitly with words that were combined with emoticons. In addition, he uses the platforms 'like' function, showing clear acknowledgment and positive appreciation

of the compliments. Out of the 12 compliments, 10 of the responses were appreciation tokens (acceptance) with the recipient explicitly appreciating and agreeing the compliments.

Examples include:

C42: Priscilla 🍀 This video has me hooked! You're seriously one of the most creative people on TikTok ❤️

R: Crispdal 🥰🥰 Thanks ♥♥

C44: Lollipop 🍭👉 You sure say you no be robot? 🥰🍭 You're too goood 🥰♥♥

R: Crispdal 🥰🥰♥♥♥♥ Thanks

Other compliment responses found include Appreciation token (agreement), where Crispdal humorously agrees with one compliment which was in form of an appeal asking him to go easy on his fans because of the breath taking dance he had performed.

C24: Dfw-Sammie 🍷👉 Easy on us crispdal ♥🥰🔥🔥🔥

R: Crispdal Okay 🥰

Appreciation tokens (Return) the recipient was returning the compliment back to a fan (who created the dance that he Crispdal was recreating)

C51: TEECEE: 🥰👉 My broski e too sweettttt 🥰🔥♥♥🥰

R: Crispdal: Dope dc brother ♥♥ (dc here meaning dance challenge)

Crispdal commonly uses emoji-only responses and likes without textual acknowledgment. These responses fit into the category of 'Acceptance: Emoticon-only responses' from Placencia's taxonomy. Examples include:

(C69) "He don thief the challenge 🥰🥰🍷"

(R) "🥰🥰"

(C66) "the way he dances with so much ease and steeze👉🔥🔥🥰🍷🥰"

(R) "🥰🥰🥰🍷🍷"

Crispdal's emoji responses-only may be attributed to several reasons, which includes the need to manage overwhelming online engagement. TikTok celebrities often receive thousands of comments daily, and it makes it difficult to write personalised replies to each compliment. Scholars like Marwick (2013) argue that social media platforms demand a form of 'micro-celebrity,' where public figures must balance accessibility with the scalability of their interactions. Emojis serve as efficient, low-effort tools to acknowledge fans without expending excessive time or energy. Gillespie's (2018) also observes that social media platform algorithms reward frequent engagement, this makes creators prioritise speed over depth. Emojis also function as tools for emotional connection and make celebrities appear more human. By responding with emojis, celebrities can show warmth and accessibility and still maintain some distance. Senft (2013) notes that digital influencers engage in 'performative intimacy,' where interactions are staged to simulate closeness without genuine vulnerability.

Another reason for emoji responses-only is to mitigate risk. Textual responses carry a higher risk of being misinterpreted or misunderstood due to varying linguistic and cultural nuances. Clark (2020) emphasises that public figures increasingly avoid text-based engagement to sidestep controversies, such as accusations of insincerity or unintended offense. Emojis

| COMPLIMENT RESPONSES |                                                    |                                                                                             |                                                                                              |                       |
|----------------------|----------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Response Category    | Subcategory                                        | Explanation                                                                                 | Examples from Crispdal's Data                                                                | Frequency (out of 70) |
| Acceptance           | Appreciation Token (explicit appreciation)         | Recipient explicitly expresses gratitude verbally, often combined with emoticons and likes. | "🤔🤔Thanks ❤️❤️", "😊😊❤️❤️❤️ Thanks"                                                           | 10                    |
| Acceptance           | Appreciation Token (agreement/humorous acceptance) | Recipient explicitly agrees or humorously accepts compliment, often minimal but positive.   | C: "Easy on us Crispdal 😏🔥"<br>R: "Okay 😊"                                                   | 2                     |
| Acceptance           | Return Compliment                                  | Recipient accepts by returning a compliment to the giver.                                   | C: "My broski e too sweetttttt 🤔🔥❤️🤔"<br>R: "Dope dc brother ❤️❤️"                           | 1                     |
| Acceptance           | Emoticon-only responses                            | Acceptance indicated through emojis without textual comments (often combined with likes).   | C: "He don thief the challenge 😏😊❤️"<br>R: "😊😊"<br>C: "The way he dances..."<br>R: "😊😊😊❤️❤️" | 27                    |

sustain parasocial relationships i.e one-sided connections where fans feel intimately bonded to celebrities despite limited reciprocity. Media figures maintain fan loyalty through gestures that simulate intimacy, such as personalised autographs or waves to cameras. (Abidin & Lee 2023). On TikTok, emojis fulfill this role digitally.

Out of the 70 compliments about 32 of them were not responded to, this is a departure from face-to-face conversation where the recipient is expected to respond in some way. (Cirillo, 2012) presents a lack of response as a proof of how the online environment frees users from accepted norms of behaviour (i.e., impoliteness carries no social penalty). Not responding in an online setting is not considered inappropriate or offensive since most of the conversation happens asynchronously.

## Conclusion

This study has examined the nature of compliments and compliment responses on Nigerian TikTok, with a focus on Crispdal's interactions with his audience. By applying a modified framework of Yi Yuan's (2002) and Placencia et al.'s (2016) framework for compliment responses, the research has demonstrated that digital compliments extend beyond traditional linguistic structures, incorporating paralinguistic elements such as emojis and 'likes' as core communicative tools. While explicit compliments remain dominant, the study highlights the use of implicit, bound semantic compliments and non-compliment shaped by Nigerian digital culture and slang expressions.

The findings indicate that Crispdal's primarily accepts compliments, predominantly employing emoji-only responses, aligning with Placencia's 'emoticon-only responses.' This is also in tandem with broader patterns of influencer engagement, where likes and emojis serve as efficient acknowledgment tools in place of detailed textual responses. This reflects the need for scalability in digital interactions, as influencers must balance accessibility with audience management. Crispdal also does not respond at all, demonstrating substantial use of non-

responses, this also agrees with online communication norms where non-responses carry minimal social consequences.

The study contributes to the evolving understanding of digital discourse by modifying Yi Yuan's framework to account for online affordances, thereby making it more applicable to contemporary social media interactions. Additionally, it confirms that social media platforms reshape traditional speech acts, requiring an expanded sociolinguistic perspective to capture the complexity of digital communication.

While this study provides valuable insights, further research is needed to explore how different cultural groups within Nigeria and beyond employ compliment strategies in digital spaces. Future studies could also examine cross-platform differences, comparing complimenting behaviours on TikTok versus other social media platforms. By continuing to investigate these evolving communicative practices, scholars can better understand the role of technology in shaping language, identity, and social interaction in the digital age.

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