

Session 4

Public Broadcasting in the Digital Era: Challenges and Opportunities



Moderator

Maria Ramos, Presenter, TRT World

Keynote Speaker

Fahrettin Altun, Communications Director, Republic of Türkiye

Speakers

Noel Curran, Director General, European Broadcasting Union (EBU)

Alex Stuart Aiken, Executive Director, Government Communications for the UK

Ahmed Nadeem, Secretary-General, Asia-Pacific Broadcasting Union (ABU)

Dana Al Suyyagh, CEO, Al Mamlaka TV

Key Takeaways

- The importance of narrative and contextualization emerged as central themes in the discussions. Public service broadcasters must focus on crafting compelling narratives and providing context to enhance audience understanding and engagement.
- Acknowledgment of the need for public service broadcasters to adapt to the digital age was emphasised. This includes being present on mobile phones, social media platforms, and embracing technological advancements to remain relevant and accessible to audiences.
- Understanding and engaging with the audience were highlighted as essential. Leveraging digital tools for audience interaction and feedback is crucial for tailoring content and services to meet audience preferences effectively.
- Public service broadcasters have a vital educational role, particularly in addressing issues such as media literacy, misinformation, and cyberbullying. They serve as platforms for informing and educating the public, fostering critical thinking and informed citizenship.
- Strategic communication is essential for public service broadcasters to communicate their value proposition effectively and garner support. Articulating their role in society and the benefits they provide, especially to younger generations, is crucial for sustaining their relevance and impact.
- Rather than viewing public service broadcasting as outdated, there's a need to embrace evolution and actively engage with ongoing conversations. By staying responsive to audience needs and evolving with the media landscape, public service broadcasters can continue to fulfil their mission effectively.

Summary of the Session

The session on “Public Broadcasting in the Digital Era: Challenges and Opportunities” delved into several crucial aspects of the current media landscape after a Keynote Speech delivered by Prof. Fahrettin Altun, Communications Director of the Republic of Türkiye, in which he emphasised the pressing issue of combating disinformation, a topic that has gained immense importance in recent years.

The moderator engaged with speakers to explore various dimensions of the challenges faced by public service broadcasters. They addressed the expansive reach and influence of organisations like the European Broadcasting Union (EBU) and the critical battlegrounds for public broadcasters amidst the digital age's turbulence. Moreover, they touched upon the significance of trust in media, reminiscing about past relationships with news outlets and anchors, and highlighting the

current struggle to regain that trust in today's media landscape.

The discussion also delved into the impact of technology, particularly AI, on media dynamics. Concerns were raised about AI exacerbating misinformation issues, further complicating the already challenging task of fact-checking and navigating digital spaces. Additionally, the session touched upon the phenomenon of digital bullying, which has intensified alongside the proliferation of misinformation and disinformation, affecting journalists and social media users alike.

Overall, the session provided valuable insights into the evolving challenges and opportunities confronting public broadcasters in the digital era, emphasising the critical need for adaptation, trust-building, and ethical considerations amidst the changing media landscape.

Keynote Speech by Fahrettin Altun

Communications Director, Republic of Türkiye

It is my pleasure and honour to participate in this panel. We are gathered here to discuss a very important topic “Public Broadcasting in the Digital Era: Challenges and Opportunities” Today’s world is characterised influence of rapid technological developments and ever ever-increasing pace of digitalisation in all spheres of life. Journalism in general has been under intense pressure from these developments. The news business has also been impacted in a way that has fundamentally reshaped this sector. Public broadcasters are no exception as they confront a host of new challenges, but also opportunities. Vast amounts of digital information and viral content aimed at maximising the profits of private broadcasting entities pervade our lives. However, these are often geared toward engaging viewers rather than cultivating a more knowledgeable audience. Public broadcasters have an advantage as they are not immediately motivated by big ratings. Although we want the best ratings, to be frank, and large audiences. Public broadcasters cannot produce and push content just to increase engagement for the sake of engagement. While this might seem like a disadvantage, I believe it’s an advantage that can distinguish us if we can build trust and credibility with our audiences through meaningful engagement.

The evolving media environment has profoundly influenced audience behaviour. Audiences around the world rely on a variety of sources for information, including social media, which is often open to misinformation, disinformation, fake news, etc. Conventional media channels which have difficulties due to financial problems finding issues face immense competition from technology giants. I believe these challenges not only impact public broadcasting, but also present unique opportunities. The question is whether public broadcasting can adapt to these conditions and reinvent itself through flexible approaches. The pervasive nature of digitalisation has long been a fact of life for news professionals for a while now. We are already in a phase where we need to address the challenges emanating from the potential consequences of artificial intelligence, which is gradually eroding human agency in media and journalism, even in all social spheres. We must be concerned about its



implications for journalism, as audiences around the world cannot even distinguish the work of humans and robots. Public broadcasters have an opportunity to distinguish their work from that of algorithms by showing the audiences the value and depth of authentic content.

AI also enables organised groups with dubious motives to attempt to manipulate the masses through disinformation. AI systems deepen the disinformation problem by rapidly amplifying specific messages. They can search the internet for information in seconds, and produce content that is virtually impossible for the public to distinguish from human-created content. Yet again, public broadcasters can expose misinformation and disinformation by leveraging their journalistic training, using the same digital technologies, and employing adaptive strategies. Facing all these challenges and countering their detrimental effects is absolutely no easy task. However, we have no choice but to embrace digitalisation in such a way as to create opportunities for public broadcasters. As public broadcasters, we need to leverage digital tools to provide high-quality content that has staying power and qualitative longevity. We need to maintain our commitment to fulfilling the public’s right to accurate and speedy information, while educating them about contextual knowledge. We cannot leave the public

at the mercy of so-called journalists who are not trained properly, not working ethically, and who are only seeking the next viral content, and sensation. Nor can we allow AI to aggregate information using prejudice and suspicious algorithms, only to feed it back to us as content.

As indispensable sources of information, public broadcasters play a crucial role in combating disinformation and the lack of context. They must effectively serve as an agent, relaying accurate information free of private interest and manipulation for commercial aims. Public broadcasters are navigating the complex terrain created by the impact of digital transformations in all aspects of our lives. The opportunity here, I see for them, is to transform their approach to content production and consumption within the broader media ecosystem by utilising their uniquely human qualities.

Knowledge and expertise still matter and will continue to matter in the future. The digital world continues to push the boundaries of human knowledge and expertise in ways we cannot even imagine today. However, it is still the job of humans to educate one another and connect at a level that only they can truly, truly comprehend and feel.

Ladies and gentlemen, as we navigate these turbulent digital waters, it is important that we recognise the dual nature of our journey. Of course, challenges are great and they often appear insurmountable. The easy way out is to just join the crowds and search for the next big viral content. It is the easy way out. However, it's clear to me that this kind of journalism has no impact. It will not serve humanity in the long run. Through understanding, adapting and innovating new modes of connecting with audiences, public broadcasters can make a crucial difference in this digital era. In the era of hybrid threats. Safeguarding the integrity of information, accumulating true knowledge and expanding our understanding are difficult yet uniquely human activities. When public broadcasters are truly committed to these values, they will be perfectly positioned as the standard defenders of truth. We must not forget that our efforts are meant to serve the public interest. The tools and capabilities available to us will continue to change, but our goal will remain the same. If we remain clear-eyed about the challenges and pitfalls of the digital age, public broadcasting will continue to be relevant, functional and beneficial for the public. In fact, we must recognise that public broadcasters are the last castles of the news business, of the news

industry, free from private and commercial interests. As opposed to private broadcasters who seek revenues by engaging large audiences and attracting advertisers, we have an educational, informational and cultural mandate to inform the public. National and international audiences are increasingly bombarded by sensationalist and algorithm-driven content, which mainly spread disinformational content. Public broadcasters must remain relevant to fast-changing interests and pleasures while maintaining high standards of quality at the same time. It is not an easy task. They must do this while also adapting the new broadcasting formats, which are becoming increasingly fragmented. We are talking about narrowcasting today, not broadcasting.

We, as the directorate of communications, have been well aware of these trends and set out to invest heavily in our flagship public broadcaster, TRT. We believe it is possible and necessary for us to remain relevant at home, but also

As we navigate these turbulent digital waters, it is important that we recognise the dual nature of our journey. Of course, challenges are great and they often appear insurmountable. The easy way out is to just join the crowds and search for the next big viral content. It is the easy way out. However, it's clear to me that this kind of journalism has no impact. It will not serve humanity in the long run. Through understanding, adapting and innovating new modes of connecting with audiences, public broadcasters can make a crucial difference in this digital era.

abroad. Our commitment to delivering the truth to both national and international audiences, combined with our investments in digital tools and platforms, will ensure our collective success. We must always remember that we have a mandate to provide educational, informative and enriching content to audiences. We can achieve this only through acquiring new digital skills and training our workforce. We need to develop our digital content creation, data analytics and digital marketing skills. We need to remain competitive with other broadcasters by attracting new talents. The only way to do that is through investment in capacity buildings. This is exactly what we have set out to do over the past several years. Our investments in TRT have already yielded great results. Domestically, our content is often superior to that of private broadcasters, and our programs are always at the top of the ratings charts. Our international programs in English, Arabic, and other regional languages often compete with well-established broadcasters. We are proud to have received so much international recognition thanks to our breaking news and other unique programs. All this success is just the beginning of our journey to thrive in the digital age.

As the Directorate of Communications, we will continue to work to innovate and keep up with these emerging trends in broadcasting. Indeed, we aspire to not only keep up, but also lead at multiple fronts. We have confidence in our capacity and support of our President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Without his unique vision and leadership, we wouldn't be able to push the boundaries that we have. The digital age has presented us with a seemingly much more complex world, yet this complexity has presented unique opportunities for us to take advantage of. We just must be brave and daring enough to change, adapt, and transform ourselves along the way. If we do so, we will not only succeed, but also lead the way in the digital age.

Finally let me touch upon another issue which is very much important to us I believe. Public broadcasters should invest in strategic communications. The field of strategic communication is an area in which those who want to defend truth and accurate news against the virtual terrorism and anarchism produced by social media should invest. The field of strategic communication is not limited to constructive efforts such as public diplomacy, public relations, informative communication campaigns and investigative

journalism. Today, the field of strategic communications also includes combating disruptive elements such as hybrid threats, disinformation, cyber-attacks, and other systematic smear campaigns. In fact, today, a significant part of strategic communication efforts all over the world consists of combating destructive activities that are escalating with new communication technologies with new social media realities. These destructive activities, on the one hand, try to directly activate social faultlines and on the other hand, fuel polarisation and conflicts in the international arena. Especially in times of crisis, where destructive activities, especially disinformation, gain a quality that triggers violence and fights hate crimes.

Today, we all discuss hybrid threats, lies becoming commonplace, the hegemony of fake news, truth becoming unimportant, and manipulations of democracies along with new media technologies. As we realise that disinformation directly threatens human life, public health, democracies and economies, we are trying to develop national combat strategies and campaigns. It should be the responsibility of public broadcasters to protect these valuable efforts and to defend the truth. In the post-truth era we live with, the main actors who will fight for the truth, I believe, are public broadcasters, and so they should do. I hope this panel will contribute to the fight for truth among public broadcasters.



Highlights

Noel Curran

Director General, European Broadcasting Union (EBU)

Noel became Director General of the EBU in September 2017. He was formerly the Director General, Managing Director of Television and Editor of Current Affairs of RTÉ. A strong and long-time advocate of public service media, Noel's investigative documentaries won numerous awards in Ireland and internationally. He was Executive Producer on a range of live television events, including General Elections, European Elections and the Eurovision Song Contest in 1997. Noel graduated from Dublin City University with a degree in Communication Studies and later attended a postgraduate course at Trinity College Dublin in European Studies, where his research was specifically on European Broadcasting Policy.

- In the digital realm, the sheer magnitude of competition posed by technology conglomerates is staggering. The top ten technology companies boast a turnover that surpasses that of all public service organisations in Europe by a staggering 47-fold. Their influence extends to smart TVs, where they embed subsidiary apps, further solidifying their dominance. The unprecedented scale of this competition presents a formidable challenge unlike anything we've encountered before.
- The persistent challenges of disinformation and misinformation remain significant, with no sign of abating. As a member of the European Commission expert group on fake news, I can attest to the minimal cooperation and genuine engagement from tech companies during our efforts. Their involvement only seemed to materialise under the looming threat of regulation. Moreover, the proliferation of AI further complicates the battle against falsehoods. However, despite these obstacles, there are proactive steps, which we can discuss later, that we, especially as public media entities, must undertake. These include investing in robust fact-checking mechanisms, bolstering journalism, and promoting media literacy to empower the public and counter misinformation effectively.
- Let's face reality—trust in institutions worldwide is on the decline, and this includes the media. Political polarisation and the proliferation of sophisticated disinformation and misinformation have only



exacerbated this trend. So how do we restore trust? Public media, fortunately, remains the most trusted form of media globally, surpassing commercial and social media platforms by a significant margin, particularly in Europe. However, this trust is not invulnerable and is currently under strain. To rebuild it, we must prioritise investments in journalism, fact-checking, and fostering stronger connections with our audience. Additionally, we must address broader societal issues, such as ensuring diversity and representation within our workforce, encompassing various social classes, genders, and age groups. It's imperative that our media organisations reflect the communities they serve, fostering a reciprocal relationship of trust and understanding.

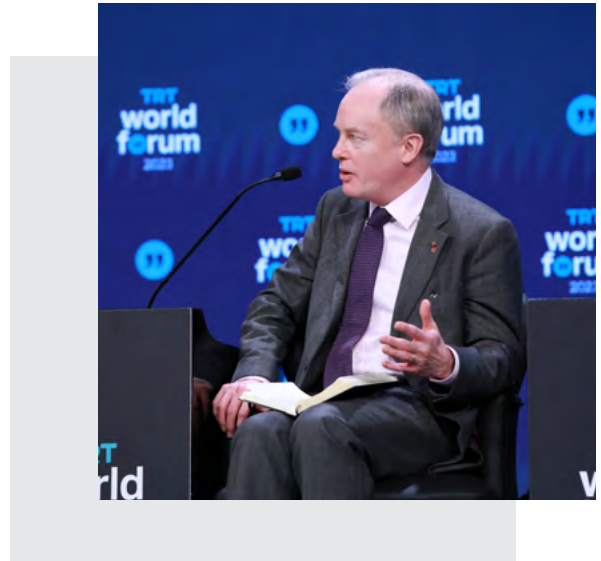
- The landscape of journalism is undergoing significant transformations, with AI poised to play a substantial role in content generation. Rupert Murdoch's recent announcement regarding News Corporation's utilisation of more AI in response to poor results underscores the increasing importance of cost efficiency. While this trend presents challenges, there are also numerous positives to consider. However, it's crucial to prioritise ethics, regulation, and maintaining human editorial control. Without proper oversight and safeguards, there are legitimate concerns about the ethical implications and potential loss of human interaction in the editorial process. Despite these apprehensions, there's undeniable potential for innovation and efficiency within our industry if we navigate these challenges prudently.

Alex Stuart Aiken

Executive Director, Government Communications for the UK

Alex Stuart Aiken is an Executive Director for Government Communication. He is part of the senior leadership team in the Cabinet Office, responsible for developing communication capability and campaigns in international and national security, and the nations and regions. His role supports the Chief Executive in leading and managing the GCS including, advising on the development of the service, undertaking professional development activities for the profession, training, speaking and advising at events and writing on matters of communication practice domestically and overseas. He has trained and advised politicians and officials in countries and states around the world on communication strategy and practice.

- Upholding the truth is paramount regarding platform accountability and the necessity for platforms to fulfil their responsibilities. In the UK, the introduction of the Internet Safety Act underscores this commitment. Donna also highlighted the significance of narrative, echoing the sentiments of leading sociologists who stress the importance of social capital and shared narratives for societal success. Establishing a collective understanding through shared stories is crucial for fostering cohesion and comprehension of societal dynamics. Throughout tumultuous events such as the COVID-19 pandemic and conflicts like those in Russia-Ukraine and Israel-Gaza, government leadership in storytelling has been indispensable. Disinformation thrives in the absence of coherent narratives from public institutions and broadcasters. Therefore, it is imperative for governments to provide guidance and articulate the story behind events, elucidating the reasons and motivations, to counter the spread of misinformation effectively.
- Reflecting on my experience during the Libya crisis in 2012, I recall relying on newspaper headlines for insights during government crisis meetings. However, today, I entered the room armed with sophisticated data analytics, including digital metrics and social media sentiment analysis, which offer invaluable insights to decision-makers and inform public service broadcasting with prevailing trends and opinions. This wealth of data underscores the evolving landscape and the need for adaptability. As Noel aptly questioned,



it prompts us to consider whether public service broadcasting has a viable future.

- There are concerns about the viability of public service broadcasting, with GPT outlining eight potential obstacles to its success, including digital transformation, fundraising challenges, and shifting audience behaviours. However, as a member of the UK Government Communications Service, I remain optimistic about collaborating with our counterparts in Türkiye. While AI is utilised for initial drafts of press releases and speeches, it's essential to maintain human oversight. Discussions are ongoing between the UK government and entities like the BBC to address risks and capitalise on opportunities presented by AI in public service broadcasting.

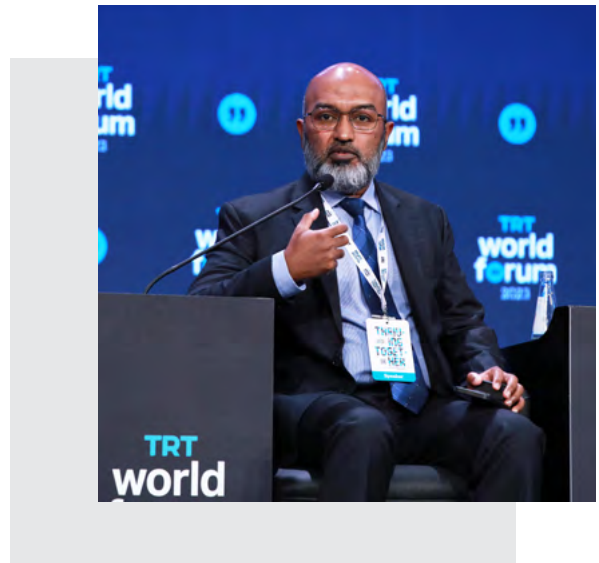


Ahmed Nadeem

Secretary-General Asia-Pacific Broadcasting Union (ABU)

Mr Nadeem's tenure with the ABU Technology Department began in 2008. Before his appointment to the post of Secretary-General, he served as the Director of Technology and Innovation at ABU from May 2018 until March 2023. With a career spanning over 25 years in broadcasting and telecommunications, Mr Nadeem is an accomplished engineer specialising in electronic and information technology. From 2007 to 2008, Mr Nadeem lent his expertise to LSV Enterprises in Singapore, fulfilling the role of Project Engineer. Before this, he was the Head of Engineering at Television Maldives, a position he held from 1996 to 2007. Born in K. Malé, Maldives, in April 1974, Mr Nadeem's academic credentials include a BTEC Higher National Diploma (HND) in Electrical and Electronic Engineering from Nottingham Trent University, United Kingdom, as well as an Honours Degree in Electrical and Electronic Engineering from the University of Hertfordshire, United Kingdom.

- Our primary challenge as broadcast members is the erosion of our connection with the public. Despite identifying as public service broadcasters, the intensifying competition, particularly in the digital realm, has led to a disproportionate focus on rivalries, overshadowing our obligation to serve the public interest. What the public truly desires from us is authenticity and truth. In this era inundated with information from myriad sources, our responsibility is to navigate this landscape and guide our audience with accurate and reliable journalism.
- The proliferation of news sources through social media has exacerbated the prevalence of echo chambers, where individuals selectively consume information aligned with their beliefs. This phenomenon amplifies the threat of disinformation and misinformation, underscoring the critical role of public service broadcasters in guiding the public towards truth and accuracy. A compelling illustration of this occurred during the recent pandemic, particularly in our region, where the public gravitated towards public service broadcasters for reliable information. This surge in trust and viewership reaffirmed the indispensable role of public service media, as people sought out trustworthy sources amid the deluge of misinformation.
- Public broadcasters have been sluggish in adapting and innovating to compete with digital platforms, prompting inquiry into the underlying reasons for this inertia. Primarily,



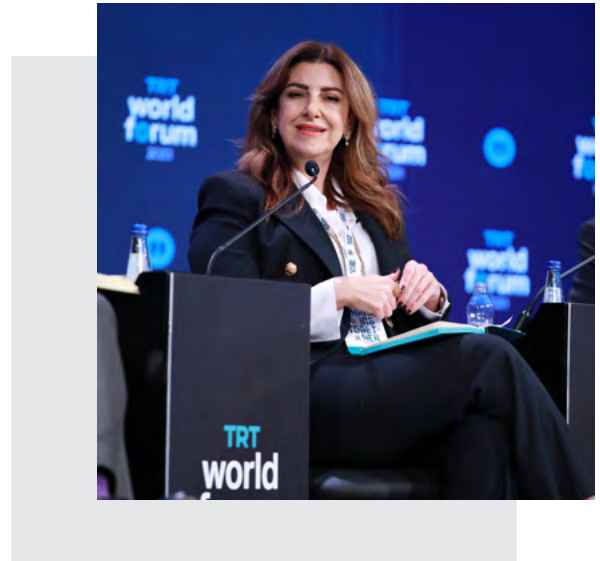
this hesitancy stems from the constraints imposed by policies governing national and state broadcasters in our region. These policies, often shaped by decision-makers, hinder the agility and responsiveness needed to navigate the rapidly evolving digital landscape effectively. Consequently, public broadcasters find themselves constrained by bureaucratic hurdles that impede their ability to evolve and remain competitive in the digital sphere.

- It's imperative that we undergo a transformative process, awakening to the necessity of reaching out to the people where they are. If the public demands our presence on mobile phones or social media platforms, we must respond promptly and proactively, positioning ourselves as pioneers in these spaces. By adopting such an approach, traditional media can not only survive but thrive, harnessing newfound strength and resilience. Our legacy as compelling storytellers remains intact, providing us with a foundation upon which to reinvent ourselves and continue crafting captivating narratives in the digital age.

Dana Al Suyyagh

CEO, Al Mamlaka TV

Dana Suyyagh is the CEO of Al Mamlaka TV, Jordan's first 24-hour public service news channel launched in 2018. Before joining Al Mamlaka TV, she was the Executive Editor of AL Arab News Channel in Bahrain. Suyyagh graduated from the University of Toronto and started her career in journalism at Al Jazeera, she left in 2003 to join the launch team of Al-Arabiya where she set up and launched several of the channel's flagship shows. In 2005, she joined ATV, Jordan's first privately-owned TV station, as Head of News and Current Affairs. She was also Her Majesty Queen Rania Al Abdullah's Director of Media and Communication until 2012.



- Reflecting on our recent coverage of events like Gaza, it's crucial to acknowledge the lessons learned, particularly regarding narrative. As broadcasters and journalists, we've come to realise the paramount importance of shaping and conveying narratives effectively. However, despite this awareness, we've been remiss in taking concrete actions to strengthen our narratives. It's disheartening to witness how easily our narratives can be co-opted or marginalised, highlighting the urgent need for us to assert our narrative presence more assertively.
- Another crucial lesson drawn from our coverage of Gaza pertains to the significance of context. As public service broadcasters, we often fall short in providing adequate contextualization for our audiences. It's essential to recognise that our audience demographics vary, encompassing diverse generational perspectives and historical understandings. Where educational systems may have faltered in conveying this context, public service broadcasting assumes a vital role in filling these gaps and fostering a deeper comprehension of events and issues.
- It's essential to acknowledge that understanding your audience has evolved significantly in the digital age. While traditional methods like audience panels and patterns remain valuable, the accessibility of engagement tools has revolutionised audience interaction. Actively listening to and incorporating feedback from our target audience is paramount, ensuring that their voices are heard and represented accurately. With the ease of engagement facilitated by digital platforms, grasping audience preferences and sentiments has become more accessible than ever before—provided we are attentive and responsive.
- Strategic communication is imperative for public service broadcasters to effectively convey their mission and contributions. As Noel highlighted, the potential loss of public service broadcasters underscores the need to articulate their value proposition more effectively. This is particularly crucial in engaging younger generations and addressing challenges such as media literacy and misinformation. Public service broadcasters have a unique opportunity to not only inform but also educate the public, playing a vital role in shaping critical thinking and informed citizenship. The disappearance of public service broadcasters would not only be a loss of a vital institution but also a potential loss of an entire generation's access to reliable and educational content.
- Cyberbullying has emerged as a significant challenge in our increasingly interconnected online world, catching many off guard with its prevalence and impact. Unlike face-to-face interactions where disagreements can be addressed with time and patience, navigating online discourse, especially as public figures, presents unique challenges. Handling a barrage of comments and expectations to respond swiftly while also verifying information within the confines of limited characters can be overwhelming. However, we have an opportunity now to better equip ourselves to deal with these issues. By educating ourselves on effective strategies to address cyberbullying, we can mitigate its harmful effects and foster healthier online interactions.