

Regulating Social Media: Surveying the Impact of Nepali Government's TikTok Ban

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Presented by Prerana Khatiwada



Content



1 Motivation and Background



2 Research Goals



3 Methodology



4 Key Findings



5 Design Implications



6 Contributions



Global Platform, Local Impact



Social media platforms like TikTok are not just entertainment tools — they've become critical infrastructures for connection, education, and economic opportunity, **especially in low-resource and transitional societies like Nepal.**

Global Platform, Local Impact



Yet, most existing research focuses on **high-income or geopolitically dominant regions (e.g., U.S., China, India)**, overlooking how bans or restrictions affect everyday users in smaller nations.

Nepal: A Transitional and Underrepresented Context

Political & Economic Transition

Post-civil war instability; 14
prime ministers since 2006

Centralized governance with
limited local authority

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Low-Resource Infrastructure

Limited technological access,
especially in rural and
Indigenous areas

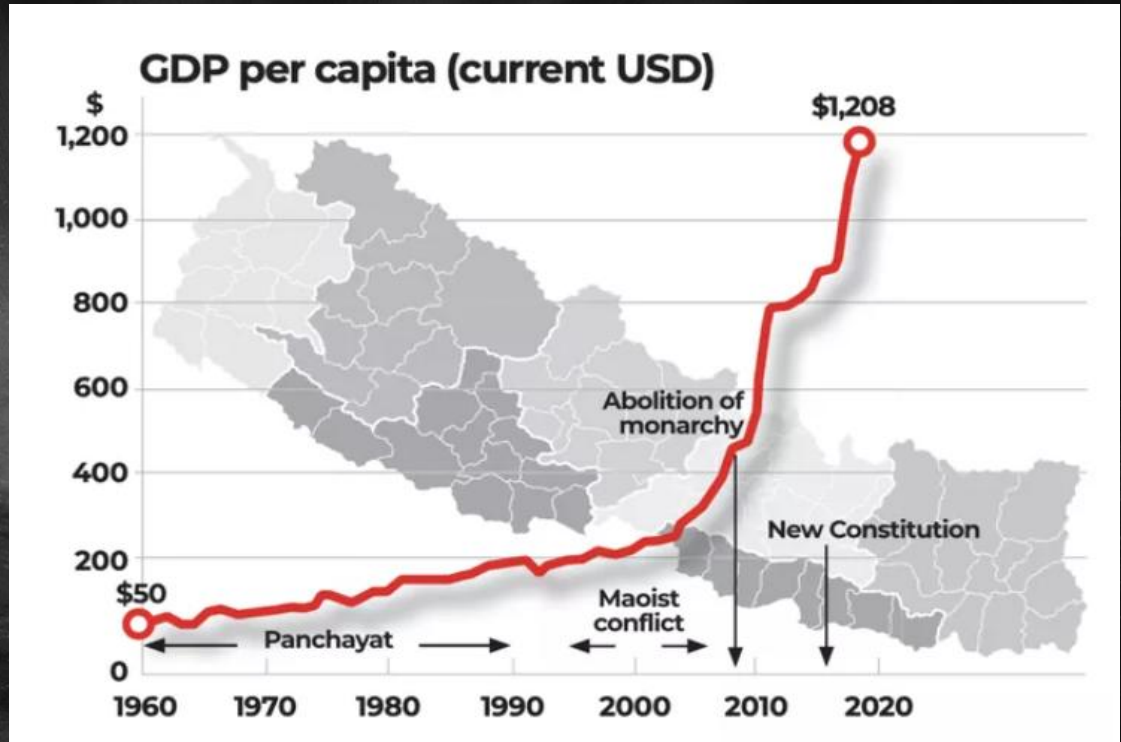
26.6% of GDP from remittance
(2023)

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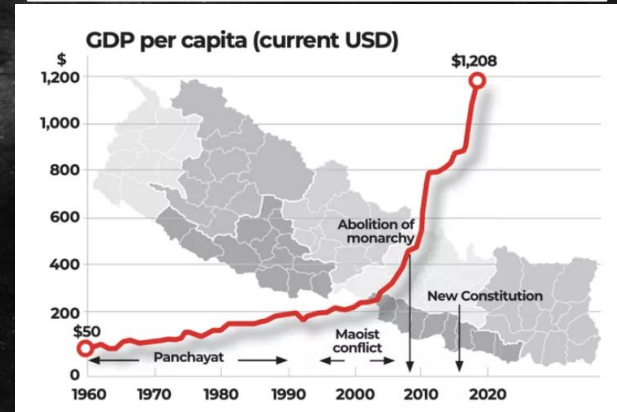
Structural Constraints

No domestic social media alternatives

Limited power to negotiate with global corporations (e.g., ByteDance)

Tension between state control and digital freedom

Nepal: A Transitional and Underrepresented Context



Rising Governmental Regulation and Uncertainty




The Nepali government's TikTok ban in **November 2023** — justified under the pretext of maintaining "**social harmony**" — reflects a growing global tension between state control and digital freedom.

NP TikTok Ban Timeline

Banned: Nov 13 2023

Lifted: Aug 23 2024

 Source: Kathmandu Post (2024), Wikipedia

Rising Governmental Regulation and Uncertainty

However, the **ban's vague reasoning and inconsistent enforcement** highlight policy opacity and citizen uncertainty, raising questions about how users **interpret and adapt to such top-down** decisions.



Nepal Bans
TikTok, Says It
Disrupts Social
Harmony

Suggested accounts

selenag
Selena G

karol
Karol G

ther



Understanding User Adaptation and Collective Agency

Studying these user behaviors provides new insights into **collective governance, policy responsiveness, and cultural negotiation** in digital spaces, informing both platform design and equitable regulatory frameworks.

Understand TikTok's Role in Everyday Life (Pre-Ban)

Examine how Nepali users initially adopted TikTok — the purposes it served in their social, cultural, and economic lives — and what values or community practices the platform enabled.

RQ1



How did people in Nepal adopt TikTok before the ban and for what ends?

Explore Public Perceptions of the Government Ban

Investigate how people interpreted and reacted to the Nepali government's TikTok ban — including their sense of trust, legitimacy, and fairness regarding state regulation of digital platforms.

RQ2



How do they perceive the government's TikTok ban?

Examine User Adaptation and Digital Resilience (Post-Ban)

Analyze how users navigate and re-shaped their online behaviors during and after the ban — whether by shifting to other platforms, finding creative workarounds, or renegotiating their digital identities.

RQ3



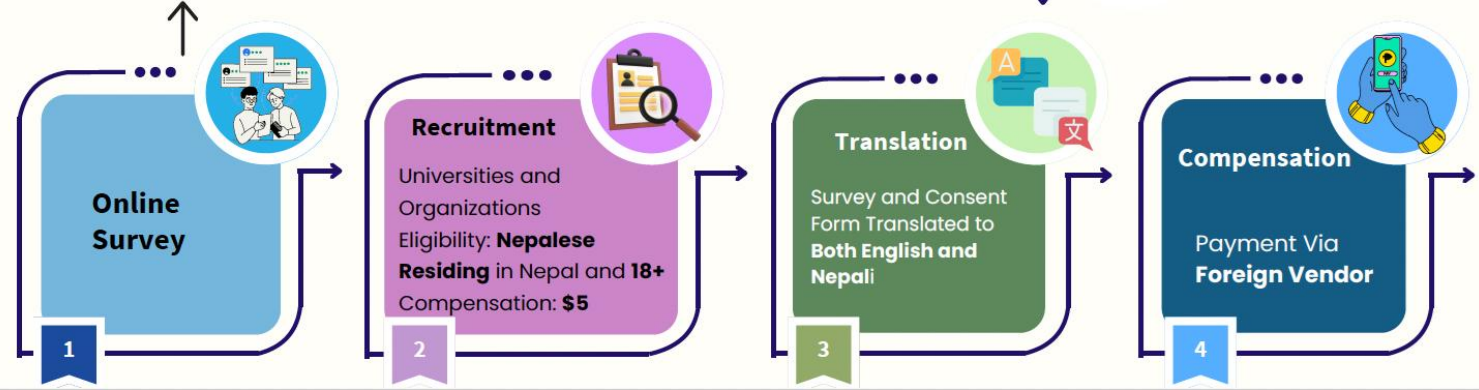

How did they navigate on social media after the ban?

Study Overview

- 1 Eligibility Questions
- 2 Demographics
- 3 TikTok Usage and Creation
- 4 Importance and Perceived Value
- 5 Awareness of TikTok Ban Reasons and Impact
- 6 Other Values and Cultural Influence

3.1 Cultural Sensitivity
Partner with **local groups** to align survey with cultural norms

Review for **Language and Tone** to avoid misinterpretation



Methodology

1

Study Design & Translation

Designed the survey in Qualtrics, informed by digital rights reports and policy documents (Body & Data, Centre for Social Change).

Iteratively translated from English → Nepali, refined by native speakers to ensure accuracy and cultural resonance.

2

Cultural Sensitivity and Expert Review

Partnered with Centre for Social Change (Nepal) for a cultural sensitivity analysis to ensure respectful, context-appropriate phrasing.

Revised terms like "small business" and added bilingual question display for clarity.

3

Pilot Testing & Refinement

Conducted a pilot test with Nepali and non-Nepali participants. Revised confusing or biased questions, simplified language, and refined conditional logic for better flow.

4

Recruitment & Data Collection

Recruited 108 participants (age ≥18, residing in Nepal) through social media, local colleges, and word-of-mouth.

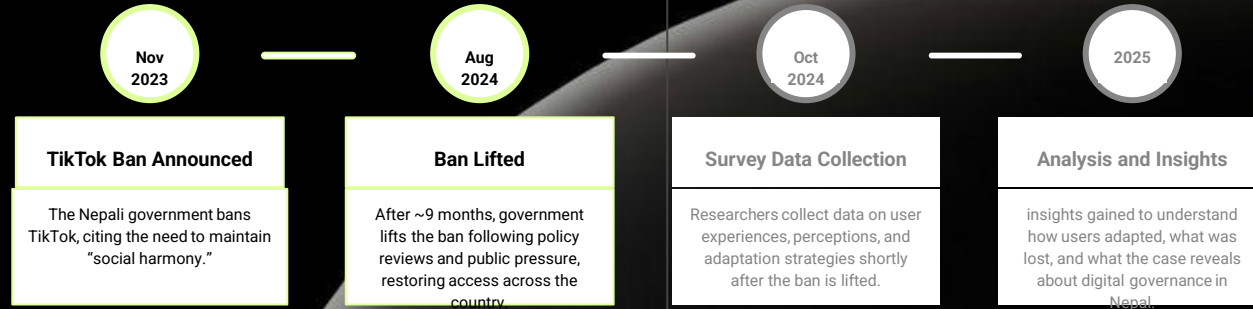
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Data Quality & Analysis

Implemented attention checks, pilot testing, and conditional logic to improve data reliability. Performed quantitative (Likert-scale) and qualitative (open-ended thematic) analysis to identify user perceptions and adaptations.

Approved by IRBs at the University of Delaware and University of Pittsburgh.

Data Collection



Age	N (%)
18-24	58 (53.7%)
25-34	49 (45.37%)
54+	1 (0.93%)

✓ We collected survey data over **three** weeks during the key period after the **TikTok ban was lifted**, capturing participants' immediate reactions, behavior changes and coping strategies as they re-engaged with the platform

Key Findings

94%

used TikTok daily for entertainment and connection

52%

as passive viewers rather than creators.



Positives: Entertainment, creativity, business use.

Negatives: Distracting youth, exposing minors, misinformation.

Behavior During the Ban

Usage Drop:
36% stopped using TikTok after the ban.

Continued Use:
13.88% kept using it despite restrictions.

Return: 23% resumed once the ban was lifted.

Those who kept using Bypassed restrictions using VPNs or DNS changes

17% reported changing how or why they used TikTok

Post Ban Adaptation

Women and small creators were disproportionately impacted by the ban, revealing inequities in digital access.

Content Experiences

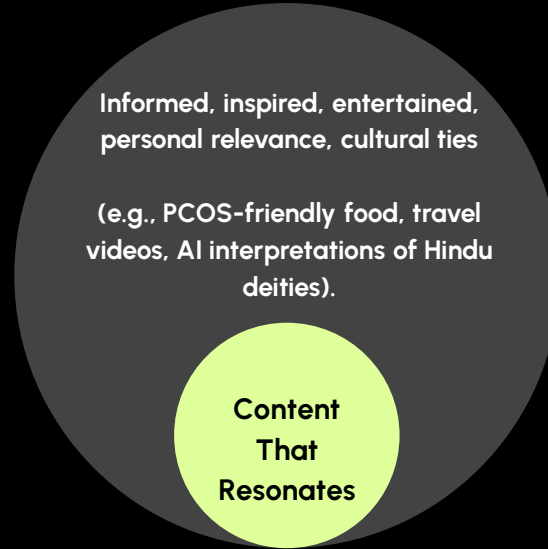
1. Users with favorite content
2. Users encountering inappropriate content.

Top Concerns Reported:

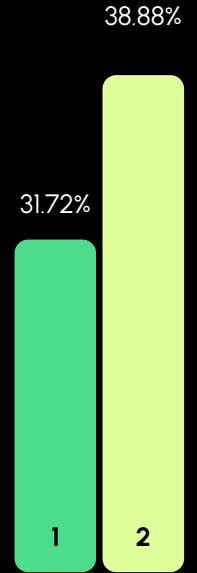
Fake News / Misinformation: 25.09%

Hate Speech & Sexual Exploitation: 15.55% each

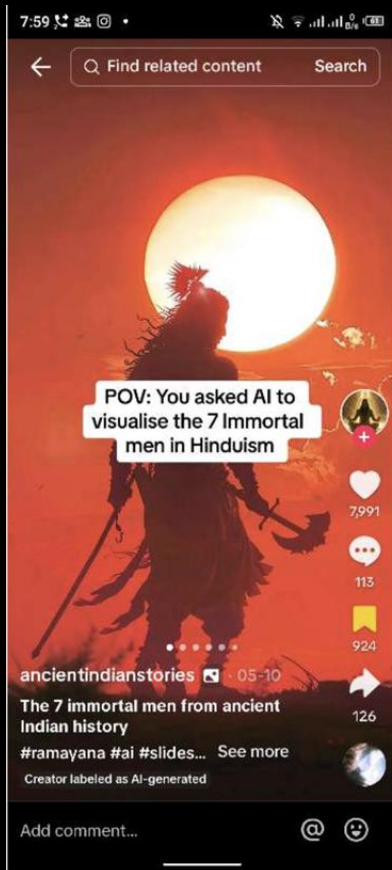
Content Against Nepali Societal Values: 11.66%



Why Users Save Content



Content Engagement & Concerns



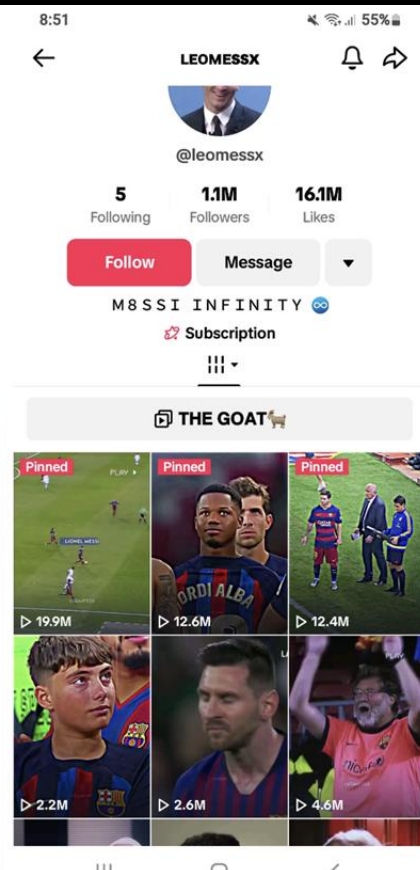
A



B



C



D

Results | Motivations and Actions Surrounding the Ban

Stopping TikTok Usage Pre-Ban

"I wasn't creating anything—just endlessly consuming content. I found myself glued to the screen and putting off my responsibilities. At first, it was entertaining, but eventually, I felt drained and realized the videos offered little value."

Results | Motivations and Actions Surrounding the Ban

A Step Back for Small Creators

“TikTok was a very welcoming app for women creators in the sense that there were a lot of women creators in the app [app], which I think has been reduced when transitioning from TikTok. The transition has cut a lot of small creators like small business owners, less digital-savvy users, and women as well.”

Results | Motivations and Actions Surrounding the Ban

Circumventing the Ban

“ . . . After the ban, I switched to Instagram for my fix of reels, but I missed the fun and creativity of TikTok. So, I found a way around the ban and continued to enjoy, even if I don't spend as much time there anymore.”

Results | Motivations and Actions Surrounding the Ban

Resuming Engagement Post-Ban

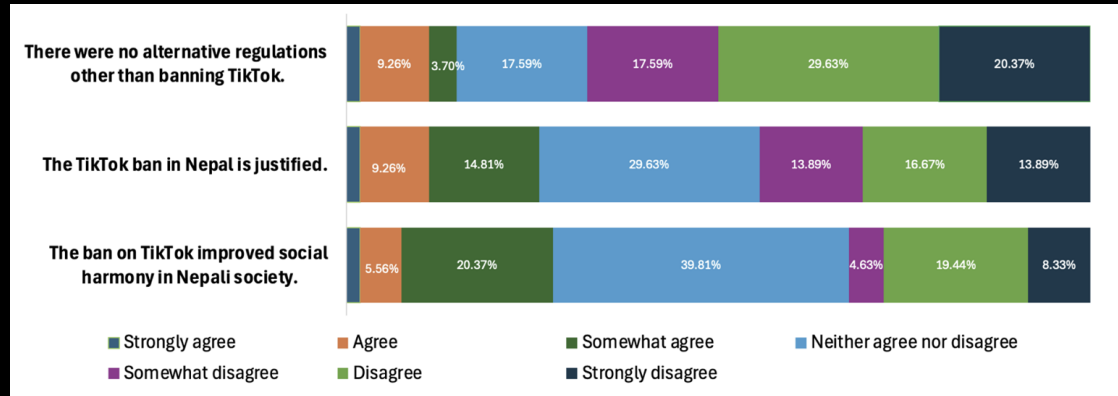
"I started using Tik Tok after the government lifted the ban, and my reasons were influenced by a mix of curiosity, social pressure, and a desire to connect with a wider cultural moment. When the platform became accessible again, I couldn't help but feel intrigued by all the buzz surrounding it. Throughout the ban, I had heard about Tik Tok rise in popularity. Friends and social media platforms often discussed the trends, viral challenges, and creative content that Tik Tok was known for, which made me wonder what I had been missing. As soon as the app was available to me again, I decided to dive in and explore it firsthand."

Public perceptions of Nepal's TikTok ban: Motives, impacts and regulatory alternatives

Overall, participants expressed **skepticism** about the ban.

63.89% felt it violated freedom of expression, while many questioned whether banning was the only solution. Around 30% disagreed with the ban's justification.

Only a **small 1.85%** believed that the ban improved social harmony, felt it was justified, or viewed banning as the only solution.





Nepali TikTok Users Transitioning to Alternative Platforms

Needs and motivations

- Users seek **short-video platforms** like Instagram and Facebook Reels that mirror TikTok's features.
- They value **content variety** (31.86%), **privacy** (30.88%), and **ease of use** (18.14%).
- TikTok's **simple tools**, quick editing, and community features fostered creativity and small business growth across age groups.

What is Lost In Transition?




- Users felt that other platforms **lacked TikTok's creativity, collaboration**, and viral algorithm.
- Some found other apps "**less chaotic and calm**" but missed TikTok's sense of community and reach.

Instagram (81% pre-ban / 86% post-ban)

Facebook (76% pre-ban / 58% post-ban)

YouTube (frequently mentioned for education and news)

Alternative Platforms

-  Instagram
-  Facebook
-  Youtube



Results | Alternative Platform Usage, Before and After Ban

Losing a Digital MarketPlace

In Nepal, mostly, people used TikTok to grow their businesses. Even where my dad used to work [at a cloth shop], they used TikTok to promote and advertise their product. They were generating good source of income. People used to visit the store by watching videos and ads in TikTok. But, after that ban it impacted their business a lot. People were learning to do E-commerce. E-commerce is still growing in Nepal..."

Results | Alternative Platform Usage, Before and After Ban

Why TikTok Feels Irreplaceable

Alternatives to it really are just not as great in my opinion. Sure, they might have all the functions of TikTok, like video sharing, but its algorithm is special and really works so well for the user's wants. TikTok really focuses on short, fun videos and has a great sense of community that really inspires creativity not found in most alternatives."

Move from Reactive Bans → Collective Governance



Design socio-technical systems that empower local communities to participate in rule-making and moderation rather than enforcing top-down restrictions.

Support plurality and dialogue instead of blanket censorship.

Embed Participatory & Transparent Oversight



Establish hybrid governance councils (users + civil society + technical experts) to mediate among platforms, the state, and citizens.

Enable public moderation dashboards and algorithm audit tools for transparency and accountability.

Build Structural Safeguards for Digital Rights



Prioritize data transparency, appeals processes, and algorithmic accountability over punitive or opaque regulatory control.

Align design practices with global human-rights frameworks to ensure equitable governance.

Strengthen Community-Driven Digital Literacy



Integrate localized, multilingual, and culturally relevant literacy initiatives that help users understand moderation, privacy, and algorithmic influence.

Treat education as an ongoing, co-designed component of governance not an afterthought.

Our work contributes to diversifying design research beyond Western contexts by centering voices often excluded from global platform studies, while highlighting power dynamics in how communities with limited control over technological infrastructures navigate and govern social media systems.

1



Empirical Insights

Provide real-world evidence on how people adapt to and continue using digital platforms following a government-imposed ban.

2



Community Dynamics

Highlight how online communities reorganize, shift behaviors, and form alternative spaces for connection and expression.

3



Policy & Design Guidance

Offer actionable recommendations for policymakers and social media platforms to support user needs in collectivist and low-resource contexts through better governance, moderation, and digital literacy initiatives.



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Full paper →
Scan here



Matthew Louis Mauriello



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Let's Talk

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This work was carried out in collaboration with students and faculty from the University of Pittsburgh, whose insights and partnership greatly enriched the project.