

TIK TOK, A TICKING POLITICAL TIMEBOMB?

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ABSTRACT

This abstract explores the several complex aspects related to the extensive prohibition of TikTok, a widely influential social media network. The rapid and significant increase in popularity of TikTok has not only transformed the digital environment but has also triggered heated discussions about issues of privacy, data protection, and cultural ramifications. Authorities in several nations have implemented measures to limit or prohibit the application, citing concerns such as potential risks to national security and safeguarding user data. This abstract investigates the underlying reasons behind these prohibitions, analyzing the geopolitical, technological, and socio-cultural aspects that have influenced the decision-making of governments. Furthermore, it examines the repercussions of TikTok's prohibition on the platform's user population, content producers, and the wider social media environment. The study employs a blend of qualitative and quantitative research methodologies, such as content analysis and user surveys, to offer a thorough comprehension of the consequences of prohibiting TikTok. This case enhances the existing discussion on the regulation of social media platforms and their influence on global digital culture by presenting many viewpoints on this prohibition.

1 Introduction

In the vast landscape of social media platforms, TikTok has emerged as a global phenomenon, captivating millions with its short-form videos and creative content. Since its inception, TikTok has gained immense popularity, especially among the younger demographic, transforming the way people engage with and consume digital content (Williams, 2020). However, this meteoric rise to fame has not come without its fair share of controversies, with TikTok finding itself embroiled in scandals around the world. TikTok, owned by the Chinese company ByteDance, quickly gained immense popularity worldwide after its launch in 2016. Its user-friendly interface and algorithm-driven content recommendation system made it a go-to platform for users of all ages to create and consume engaging content. As the app gained momentum, it also attracted the attention of governments, leading to increased scrutiny (Zhang, 2021). One of the most pressing issues surrounding TikTok, and the focus of this study, revolves around its alleged threat to national

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security in the United States. While the app has become a cultural powerhouse, it has faced severe scrutiny and accusations from policymakers, security experts, and the public alike.

2. TikTok, a Timebomb of Trouble

TikTok is the first non-US social media network to challenge Silicon Valley giants. TikTok has been criticized and banned by governments worldwide since its emergence in the short video market (Press Information Bureau Delhi, 2020). Lawmakers have questioned whether ByteDance, which owns TikTok, adequately protects user data from Chinese state access. However, TikTok's data procedures are like those of its US peers (Fowler, 2020), therefore the company's rise in the US cannot be explained by its technology, rules, or practices. This geopolitical case study analyzes the national political and economic disputes over TikTok between the US and China from April to August 2020.

TikTok's Chinese ownership raises data privacy and national security issues, especially given geopolitical tensions between China and other states. This has affected some markets (Zhang, 2021). The world's most downloaded app was TikTok. It has over 1 billion users and is the fastest-growing social media site since 2020. Following the US, EU, and New Zealand, the UK announced late last week that it will prohibit it on government equipment. TikTok's popularity means many people have watched its videos on other sites. Western governments have cited TikTok as a security threat in addition to its addictive nature, cryptic algorithm, and shop-relevant business (Zhu, 2019). This case study examines the U.S. TikTok incident and its potential national security effects.

3. The Geopolitics of TikTok's Controversies in the United States

The geopolitical tensions underpinning the TikTok controversy are reflected most strongly in the debates over TikTok's national security implications. On 6 June 2020, national security advisor to the US government, Robert O'Brien, spoke at the Arizona Commerce Authority on the topic of the Chinese government's "ideological and global ambitions" (O'Brien, 2020). On 6 July 2020, US Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo, confirmed the Trump administration was considering banning TikTok on national security grounds (Bella, 2020). Pompeo expressed that TikTok might pose a national security threat if Bytedance were compelled to provide information about US citizens to the Chinese government and implied TikTok should be treated like Huawei, the Chinese telecommunications company that is effectively banned in the US (Keane, 2020). Evidently, it was the Trump administration's position that TikTok is not simply a platform for connection and entertainment but a tool the Chinese state might wield for strategic security and ideological influence within the US. In other words, TikTok might be used to further empower China in geopolitical relations between the two states. Here is an extract from the Trump declaration on daily journal of the United State Government in 2020. It states:

The spread in the United States of mobile applications developed and owned by companies in the People's Republic of China continues to threaten the national security, foreign policy, and economy of the United States. At this time, action must be taken to address the threat posed by one mobile application, TikTok. TikTok, a

video sharing mobile application owned by the Chinese company ByteDance Ltd., has reportedly been downloaded over 175 million times in the United States and over one billion times globally. TikTok automatically captures vast swaths of information from its users, including internet and other network activity information such as location data and browsing and search histories. This data collection threatens to allow the Chinese Communist Party access to Americans' personal and proprietary information potentially allowing China to track the locations of Federal employees and contractors, build dossiers of personal information for blackmail, and conduct corporate espionage.

Unlike other Chinese apps, TikTok's data policies don't concern national security and give better privacy. The corporation processes government requests for user data properly and without legal process in emergencies. Since December 2019, TikTok has collected global government requests for user data, with India and the US leading the way. The Chinese government has not requested data, and a 2020 CIA investigation identified no intercepted data. In a globalized culture, balancing technology, national security, and international relations is difficult. The dispute has generated domestic worries and heightened US-China tensions.

Platform	Global monthly active US users (2022)	Rate of change from last year
TikTok	94 million	+45%
Instagram	123 million	+4%
Facebook	239 million	+2%
Twitter	77 million	-0.6%

Adapted from TikTok and US national security (Chen, 2022)

TikTok, a famous social media network, is a venue for the creation of information that has been forbidden in China due to the restrictive censorship that exists there. Users of the app come from a wide range of backgrounds, including anticommunists, communists, woke progressives, and religious conservatives. The app features thousands of local comedians, cartoonists, political analysts, and other content. Beyond the realm of national security, the strategic competition discussion between the United States and China raises policy issues that have implications for free expression, platform regulation, and international trade in the digital economy. Some users have compared TikTok's data collection techniques to those of Facebook or Twitter, which has led to criticism of the platform.

Data collection fear is connected to the concern that it is not well known what the data would be used for. This relates to the concept of threat that is not well defined and that is not specific. Hypothesis have been made, in a CNN article:

The information could be used to identify intelligence opportunities for example, by helping China uncover the vices, predilections or pressure point of a potential spy recruit or blackmail target. Even if TikTok's users are young teens with seemingly nothing to hide, it's possible that those Americans may grow up to be government or industry official.

On 5th August 2020, the US Department of State expanded its Clean Network program to protect people' and companies' sensitive data from Chinese intrusions. Limited Chinese telecommunication carriers, applications, cloud services, and undersea cables were among the five new policies to reduce China's position in the US. Huawei and other Chinese digital corporations were targeted by the Trump administration through worldwide alliances and partnerships. The next day, the Trump administration issued an executive order to sell TikTok to a US business and ban Bytedance transactions after 45 days. The injunction stated that TikTok and Bytedance's acquisition of Musical.ly threatened US national security, foreign policy, and economics.

It has been suggested that China's gathering of personal data on TikTok users could result in extortion or espionage for the country. This data could be used by the Chinese government to harass or blackmail people in the United States. The utilization of this data is highly unknown, which raises worries about the possibility of harm. There is a substantial amount of influence that the Chinese government has over its businesses, and China has stated that the engagement of the United States government in the negotiations between Microsoft and ByteDance is a violation of the principles that govern market economies. As a response, China referred to the language and actions of the United States government on TikTok as economic nationalism. Within the context of a larger conversation regarding digital strategic capacities and policy aims, the United States' stance on TikTok is a component.

2 The Critical Success Factors of TikTok in its Quest in Globalisation

TikTok, a short-form video software, is recognized for its unique features and easy design. Despite global government condemnation, TikTok's rise in the short video market is not primarily attributable to its technology, policy, or practices. In 2016, Chinese technology company ByteDance established a platform for watching, creating, editing, and sharing 15-second videos. Rich content forms like filters and background music make the site widespread worldwide. TikTok was one of the fastest-growing apps worldwide, with 800 million active users by 2020. With 17 million UK users in 2021, Social Commerce has grown. TikTok's popularity is due to its concentration on engaging short-form videos, unique features, and ability to consume more information quickly. TikTok's success is attributed to its diverse content, featuring celebrities like Gordon Ramsay, Will Smith, and Ariana Grande, as well as relevant content for various interests like humor, music, sports, travel, cooking, dance, and photography, as well as educational and business-oriented content.

3. Theories of political challenges in international business

When considering the potential for international expansion, entrepreneurs must determine the most effective method of entering a foreign market. The literature on internationalization identifies five fundamental strategies for entering the worldwide market: export, licensing, franchising, joint venture, and wholly owned subsidiary. To accomplish this job, these methods might be referred to as internationalization strategies, as they rely on the attitudes and activities of the entrepreneur and the organization, which involve decision-making and allocating resources as events unfold.

Root (1994 apud GARRIDO et al., 2009) states that joining an international market requires an institutional framework that facilitates the entry of a company's products (such as technology, human skills, management, or other resources) into international markets. The strategies encompassing objectives, targets, resources, and policies serve as a guiding framework for a company's international business operations, aimed at achieving sustainable growth in the foreign market over a significant length of time. The author proposes a classification of the modes of entrance into three categories: (i) export (including indirect export and direct export), (ii) contract (such as licensing, franchising, technical agreements, service contracts, management contracts, production contracts, among others), and (iii) influx of investments (including individual investments through new ventures or acquisitions, and joint ventures through new undertakings or acquisitions). Blomstermo, Sharma, and Sallis (2006) observed that American corporations commonly employ franchising or joint venture strategies while operating in culturally diverse regions.

Experience plays a significant role in the internationalization process. Blomstermo, Sharma, and Sallis (2006) discovered that when firms gain more experience in foreign markets, their reliance on tools, processes, and routines to establish control decreases. The establishment of informal relationships reduces the necessity for the entrepreneur to engage in more rigorous monitoring due to the implementation of routines, processes, and systems. These authors believe that the method of entry would be directly correlated with the degree of oversight over the company's global operations. Control plays a crucial role in assessing risks and returns, managing friction between buyers and sellers, evaluating the performance of foreign investments, ensuring the quality of service over time, and safeguarding the company's reputation with international customers. The risk factor associated with internationalization should also take into account uncertainties and political instabilities in the host country, limited understanding of the local market, uncertainty regarding demand and competition intensity, legislation, and contractual agreements with public agencies in the area. According to Heniszs (2013), when assessing the thesis of Buckley and Casson (1976) in the power sector's service business, some factors, such as peculiarities, were taken into account. If well handled, these factors can create a competitive edge for the international expansion of services. The quirks pertain to the government sector can be summarized as:

- Identifying the institutional arrangements that present potential risks or opportunities through the interaction between regulatory and political factors, examining the entry of new players into the industry as well as existing ones in the host country, and recognizing the involvement of international institutions (such as the World Bank, IFC, etc.) and government officials with diverse roles.

- The capacity to advocate for (or hinder) modifications in (dis)advantageous public policies, prioritize local collaborators, conduct an extensive on-site investigation, and evaluate the efficacy of decisions in influencing regulators or politicians.
- Enhancing the capacity to impact public policy by hands-on learning in foreign nations and evaluating the usefulness of its current talents in a certain market relative to other rivals.

These factors may prompt the corporation to acquire the skills necessary to effectively handle political risk. When a corporation faces political risk, it is necessary to implement measures to protect its position. Mortanges and Allers (1996) provide three alternatives: conforming to the policies of the host government, refraining from entering the market, or discontinuing operations if already established, or aligning a competitive advantage with the host government's requirements based on the company's capabilities. After examining both national and international literature, the aim was to determine the factors that influence the perception of political risk during a company's process of expanding internationally. To successfully enter an unfamiliar market in a country with diverse cultural and political conditions, Bernstein (1997) emphasizes the need of decision makers' ability to effectively handle risk by opting to pursue new endeavors. The author highlights that the energy that propels the economic system relies heavily on individuals' readiness to undertake risks and make audacious decisions. In the process of internationalizing enterprises, Datta (1988) proposed that three actors - the multinational company, the local company, and the host country's government - have distinct objectives that are directly impacted by external environmental forces, encompassing diverse cultural, economic, and political systems. Therefore, prior to progressing further in the discussion, it is important to scrutinize the fundamental conceptual definition of the term.

4. TikTok's Chronological Expansion

TikTok, the widely renowned social media site, has undergone dynamic and adventurous growth since its creation. Founded by Alex Zhu and Luyu Yang in 2014, Musical.ly (now known as TikTok) was introduced in Shanghai, China. It allowed users to create and share little music videos. Chinese software firm Byte Dance acquired Musical.ly in November 2017 and smoothly incorporated it into its current app, TikTok, in a significant strategic maneuver. The strategic combination established the foundation for TikTok's worldwide growth. It was first introduced as "Doyin" in China in 2016 and subsequently rebranded as TikTok for international markets in 2018. Between 2018 and 2019, the platform experienced significant popularity in the United States, especially among teens, leading to its status as a cultural phenomenon.

Nevertheless, TikTok faced difficulties during this time, grappling with questions surrounding data privacy and potential effects on adolescent users. In 2020, the app encountered the possibility of being prohibited in the United States due to an executive order issued by former President Donald Trump, resulting in legal disputes. Concurrently, TikTok had significant expansion in India; however, in June 2020, the Indian government prohibited the platform and other Chinese applications due to apprehensions over national security.

Unfazed by obstacles, TikTok persisted in its worldwide growth starting in 2020, capturing users and content creators from all languages and cultures. During this period of growth, the platform encountered continuous regulatory examination in multiple countries, including addressing issues around data privacy, content review, and its influence on users. TikTok has established collaborations with celebrities, influencers, and companies, further cementing its position as a central platform for artistic self-expression through concise videos.

TikTok implemented e-commerce features in 2021 as part of a strategic effort to diversify, enabling users to make purchases directly within the app. This advancement not only broadened the capabilities of TikTok, but also enticed advertisers and organizations eager to utilize its extensive user base for promotional endeavors. TikTok remains at the vanguard of social media innovation, adapting to changing restrictions and engaging consumers with its dynamic and diversified content.

5. The Barriers and Challenges TikTok Encounters

TikTok has faced much scrutiny and conjecture on the ethical aspects of the platform, its goals, and its social ramifications. The platform has faced allegations of engaging in extensive data extraction and analysis methods, such as unwarranted data replication from users' mobile devices (Al-Heeti, 2020) and gathering data that might potentially be utilized to ascertain and monitor the whereabouts of users (Misty Hong v Bytedance Inc, 2019). TikTok has faced allegations of hosting detrimental content. In July 2020, the BBC revealed that extreme libertarian organizations in the US had a significant presence on the site (Clayton, 2020). Simultaneously, some individuals contend that TikTok unjustly capitalizes on user-generated content and copyrighted materials without adequately compensating creators and intellectual property holders (Alexander, 2020). However, the majority of the concerns underlying these accusations are not exclusive to TikTok or novel in the realm of short-form video industry. These issues are indicative of the long-standing political dynamics of online platforms, which involve disputes on the protection of data and user privacy (Isaak & Hanna, 2018), the management of content (Gillespie, 2018), and the control of speech (Balkin, 2017). YouTube, Facebook, Google, Twitter, Instagram, and other American platforms have faced critiques and problems akin to those associated with TikTok (Suzor, 2019). The TikTok controversy exposes the deep entanglement of platform politics inside the geopolitical tensions between the United States and China.

The TikTok debate is part of an escalating competition between the United States and China on the strategic importance of the digital realm (Cartwright, 2020). The geopolitics of the digital environment, particularly regarding platforms, revolves around the competition for extracting economic value from the platform economy (Cartwright, 2020). It also involves determining the laws and norms and exerting ideological influence through large sociotechnical systems (DeNardis & Hackl, 2015; Tusikov, 2019). Additionally, it encompasses the strategic political power derived from controlling or accessing digital data and infrastructure (Mann & Warren, 2018). Thus far, the realm of geopolitics has closely resembled the physical environment where the US has exerted economic and cultural dominance over extensive areas of the digital sphere (Gray, 2020). Chinese technology enterprises have experienced significant growth in recent times, contributing to the expansion of China's economic and strategic capabilities. This growth has also led to increased competition and tensions with the United States. With the increasing economic significance of

the digital realm, it is likely that there will be more competition among countries aiming to gain value and exert control in this domain. Understanding the geopolitical factors behind platform controversies is crucial for accurately assessing the necessary legal or public policy actions. According to Sickler, it is crucial to analyze our world from a geopolitical and geostrategic standpoint. This analysis helps us understand the true significance of many situations and allows the public to evaluate the decisions made by the government on their behalf (Sicker, 2019). Examining the current dispute surrounding TikTok in its geopolitical context enhances comprehension of the primary political incentives fueling this platform debate and the subsequent policy reactions.

TikTok, the social media phenomenon renowned for its concise video content, has swiftly garnered widespread acclaim since its inception. Nevertheless, like other platforms, it has diverse obstacles and difficulties that influence its expansion and long-term viability (Donzelli, 2019). This essay will examine the challenges TikTok faces, offering insights into the intricate environment it operates in. TikTok has faced regulatory hurdles globally, specifically related to issues of user data privacy and national security apprehensions. Numerous governments, including as the United States and India, have implemented prohibitions or limitations on TikTok because of concerns around data exploitation and its Chinese ownership. TikTok has been compelled to reassess its activities and cultivate confidence with regulatory entities (Favaro Corvo Ribas, 2020). In 2020, the Trump administration tried to prohibit TikTok in the United States, claiming it posed national security risks. TikTok encountered legal problems and engaged in negotiations with prospective American purchasers to resolve these concerns.

Effectively managing and filtering content on TikTok poses a formidable task due to the platform's extensive user base. Maintaining material that adheres to community norms and is appropriate for all audiences is a continuous challenge. TikTok has been subject to scrutiny for its insufficient efforts in curbing the dissemination of detrimental content, misinformation, and cyberbullying. Instances of inappropriate challenges or trends that are becoming popular, even if they have the potential to do harm, have led to TikTok being closely examined (Jia, 2020). The site has had to consistently improve its content moderation algorithms and standards. TikTok faces fierce competition from well-established platforms such as Instagram, Snapchat, and YouTube in the saturated social media market. Continuously distinguishing and sustaining user involvement is an ongoing difficulty, given the quick evolution of trends and preferences in social media. Instagram launched the feature called "Reels" as a direct competitor to TikTok's short-form video format, hence increasing the battle for user engagement and content creators.

Although TikTok has many users, finding ways to make money from the network has been difficult. Securing advertising and developing viable revenue streams is crucial for achieving long-term success (Lenway, 2018). TikTok must navigate the challenge of maintaining a harmonious balance between user satisfaction and generating income, all while avoiding the risk of distancing its user base. TikTok's advertising platform is relatively nascent, and it needs to demonstrate its efficacy to advertisers in comparison to more established options.

TikTok, given its global user base, must effectively manage cultural sensitivities and cater to varied audiences. Different regions may have varying perspectives on what is considered acceptable or popular, leading to potential controversy or misunderstanding. Achieving a harmonious

equilibrium between worldwide attractiveness and cultural sensitivity is a subtle and intricate task. TikTok has received criticism for obstacles or patterns that were seen as culturally insensitive or objectionable in specific areas, necessitating the platform to take action to deal with these issues. TikTok's trajectory is characterized by remarkable triumph, although it is also punctuated by the ongoing necessity to surmount obstacles and difficulties. TikTok's growth plan encompasses crucial elements such as effectively managing regulatory frameworks, efficiently filtering material, maintaining a competitive edge in the market, generating revenue from the site, and guaranteeing cultural sensitivity (Lijian, 2020). The platform's ability to effectively handle and overcome these problems will ultimately decide its durability and continued success in the ever-changing realm of social media.

6. Coping Strategies

TikTok sought to leverage the criticisms of its data practices to open up a dialogue about the issues of transparency and accountability that exist across the broader global digital platform market. TikTok has proposed that instead of solely concentrating on TikTok's connections to China, it would be more beneficial to utilize this opportunity to initiate more extensive discussions regarding algorithms, transparency, and content management, and to establish more stringent regulations. Mayer acknowledged the scrutiny faced by the corporation due to its Chinese origins and expressed a willingness to address this by promoting transparency and accountability, hence providing reassurance. Furthermore, we firmly think that our entire sector should be subjected to an incredibly rigorous standard of quality and performance. The authenticity of TikTok's commitment remains uncertain based on these claims. They could perhaps serve as a provocative rhetorical strategy in a continuing political conflict. However, TikTok seems to have used the attention on its data laws and practices to start a wider discussion about the politics of platforms and the underlying issues faced by most market participants.

TikTok countered the actions taken by the Trump administration by asserting that there was insufficient evidence to substantiate the administration's stance, and that the executive orders were deficient in terms of due process (TikTok Newsroom, 2020b). According to the company, it made efforts to negotiate in good faith to address security concerns. However, the US government disregarded information, imposed terms of an agreement without following standard legal procedures, and attempted to interfere in negotiations between private companies (TikTok Newsroom, 2020b, para. 2). TikTok claimed that the executive order demonstrated the US government's dependence on unattributed reports lacking evidence, speculations about the app's potential use for spreading misinformation without any supporting proof, and worries regarding data collection, which is a common practice for numerous mobile apps worldwide.

In response to the possibility of a forthcoming ban on TikTok in the United States, the company has taken a proactive approach. It has released multiple accounts highlighting the ways in which TikTok has benefited American businesses and contributed to the overall American economy. Additionally, TikTok is engaging in discussions with important advertising partners, providing them with explanations and written materials to address any concerns regarding its alleged connections to the Chinese Government. It seems improbable that the app will have an impact on the decision-making of US leaders and lawmakers. Nevertheless, these are challenging circumstances. TikTok seems to have intensified its lobbying efforts shortly before Chew's

appearance before the House Committee on Energy and Commerce (CNBC, 2023). Prior to the event, the business arranged for TikTok influencers to be transported by air to Washington. The firm also enjoyed support from a small number of Democratic congressmen, including Rep. Jamaal Bowman, D-N.Y. Prior to the hearing, he and prominent content creators on the application convened a press conference to express their opposition to a potential prohibition. However, during confidential negotiations, certain influential individuals conveyed to Bowman the necessity of implementing restrictions to safeguard personal data on all social media platforms, including TikTok, while preserving the functionality of the application, as reported by a knowledgeable aide. Irrespective of their influence on legislators, the entreaties of creators to preserve their ability to use TikTok in the United States have been documented (CNBC, 2023). The software appears to have struck a chord with numerous American users who saw it as a means of amusement, knowledge, and potentially even financial gain. Amidst and after the hearing, TikTok users disseminated excerpts of politicians posing elementary inquiries to the CEO, ridiculing Congress for what they perceived as a deficiency in comprehending technology.

7. Tik Tok's Answer to Security Threat Accusations

During a committee hearing, US lawmakers questioned Shou Zi Chew about data security and hazardous content. They expressed doubt and skepticism over his claims that the widely used video-sharing app prioritizes user safety and should not be prohibited based on its Chinese affiliations. Here are some excerpts from the hearing of TikTok's CEO. TikTok asserts its autonomy by the geographical distribution of its top executives: the CEO is in Singapore, the COO in the US, and the global head of trust and safety in Ireland.

I understand that there are concerns stemming from the inaccurate belief that TikTok's corporate structure makes it beholden to the Chinese government or that it shares information about US users with the Chinese government...This is emphatically untrue. Let me state this unequivocally: ByteDance is not an agent of China or any other country.

TikTok officials have issued comments detailing their data procedures, which including establishing a dedicated U.S. Data Security division and directing all U.S. traffic through servers located in the United States, utilizing Oracle Cloud Infrastructure. TikTok currently utilizes data centers in Virginia and Singapore to store user data as a contingency measure. However, it anticipates eliminating these backups after it completes the complete migration to cloud services based in the United States.

At a recent Harvard Business Review conference, attended by executives, professors, and artists, who gave presentations on corporate leadership and emotional intelligence, Shou Chew made a concerted attempt to save his company. In his address, Chew, the CEO of TikTok, categorically affirmed that the social network will refrain from divulging any data pertaining to its US users to the Chinese government. Additionally, he asserted that TikTok has never been subjected to any such request (CNBC, 2023). Chew highlighted the precautions that TikTok has taken to protect the privacy of its American consumers. Chew emphasized four times that the platform's goal was to "encourage creativity and provide joy" to its users. Chew has recently garnered significant media attention, including his participation in the Harvard event, amidst growing criticism directed

towards both TikTok and him. Chew is slated to give testimony on Thursday, marking their inaugural appearance before a Congressional committee. The committee announced that the testimony will primarily address "TikTok's consumer privacy and data security practices, the platform's influence on children, and its connection with the Chinese Communist Party." Presently, federal authorities are demanding that the Chinese proprietors of the application relinquish their ownership in the social networking platform, under the threat of the app being banned in the United States. Chew has participated in meetings with members of Congress, while TikTok has recently offered invites to scholars and professors to visit its offices in Washington, D.C. The objective of this endeavor is to enhance comprehension of the actions undertaken by TikTok, a subsidiary of ByteDance, in response to the concerns expressed by legislators regarding its affiliations with China. OpenSecrets' data compilation reveals that the parent corporation of the referenced entity experienced a substantial surge in its federal lobbying endeavors, dedicating more than \$5 million in expenses during the previous year (CNBC, 2023).

8. Conclusion and the Way Forward

TikTok, a widely popular social media site, has experienced remarkable and unparalleled expansion in recent years. Nevertheless, like any swiftly growing endeavor, there is perpetually space for enhancement. This essay aims to analyze several strategies that TikTok could implement to optimize its global operations, so ensuring long-term success and user contentment (Zhuang Chen, 2019). TikTok has been under scrutiny because to concerns over the presence of inappropriate content and insufficient safety protocols. To tackle this issue, TikTok should allocate resources towards implementing sophisticated content moderation technology, such as artificial intelligence and machine learning algorithms, to actively detect and eliminate bad content. In addition, the implementation of more stringent community norms and punishments for infractions can help foster a more secure online environment. Instagram's effective content control, achieved by utilizing a blend of automatic algorithms and human moderators, has the potential to be emulated by TikTok (Zhuang Chen, 2019).

TikTok should prioritize localization techniques to accommodate the diverse cultural preferences and sensitivities of its user base. This encompasses not just the process of translating language, but also modifying content suggestions, popular trends, and advertisements to align with the preferences of specific regions. This method promotes a feeling of inclusiveness and connects more efficiently with consumers from diverse backgrounds. Example: Snapchat has achieved success by customizing content for several countries through collaborations with local influencers and integrating features that are distinctive to each place.

Given the current emphasis on data privacy, it is crucial for TikTok to prioritize transparency in its data policies (Zhuang Chen, 2019). By enacting transparent and succinct privacy policies, granting users enhanced authority over their data, and consistently informing users about the utilization of their information, trust may be fostered and apprehensions over data security can be alleviated. Data privacy, however, pertains to the protection of an individual's authority over their personal data. The concept includes the authority to decide which information is gathered, the way it is utilized, and the individuals who are granted permission to access it (Zhuang Chen, 2019).

Privacy is not only a legal obligation, but also a fundamental entitlement of every individual, recognizing the significance of safeguarding personal autonomy in the digital domain.

To maintain the confidentiality of data, strict legislation such as the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) in the European Union and the California Consumer Privacy Act (CCPA) in the United States have been implemented. These regulations provide criteria for safeguarding data, granting individuals entitlements over their data, such as the ability to access, rectify, or even delete their information (Zhuang Chen, 2019). Organizations encounter the issue of striking a balance between openness and the necessity to safeguard sensitive information at the point where transparency and data privacy collide. Although transparency fosters trust, excessive openness might possibly jeopardize privacy. Achieving this intricate equilibrium necessitates adherence to rules as well as ethical deliberations in the conception and execution of data systems.

An effective strategy is to adopt privacy by design method, which involves integrating privacy considerations into the development process right from the beginning. This proactive strategy guarantees that privacy is not treated as an afterthought but rather as an essential component of the system (Bresnick, 2019). Technologies such as differential privacy, encryption, and decentralized identity solutions enhance both transparency and data privacy through intentional design. Apple's App Tracking Transparency feature empowers users to regulate the tracking of their activities across various apps and websites by other organizations.

To effectively traverse the intricate regulatory environment, TikTok needs to proactively establish communication and collaboration with regulatory authorities on a global scale (Diakopoulos, 2020). Engaging in cooperation with authorities to design and strictly follow comprehensive standards guarantees conformity with local laws and regulations, promoting favorable relationships with governments and reducing the occurrence of legal disputes. Illustration: Google's expertise in cooperating with regulatory authorities to tackle antitrust issues and develop standards for equitable competition.

Enhancing worldwide operations entails not only optimizing the platform but also instructing users on appropriate and secure utilization (Abidin, 2021). TikTok should allocate resources towards implementing extensive user education initiatives, including a wide range of materials and instructions to enhance users' comprehension of potential hazards and enable them to make well-informed choices regarding their online engagements. For instance, YouTube's Creator Academy provides instructional resources to assist video creators in effectively using the site and enhancing their abilities.

Ultimately, the worldwide triumph of TikTok depends on its ongoing enhancement and adjustment to meet the ever-changing demands of its varied range of users. TikTok can enhance its standing as a prominent social media platform by focusing on content moderation, localization, data protection, regulatory compliance, and user education. This will help create a favorable and safe atmosphere for users globally.

In summary, TikTok's data rules and practices do not present a higher security risk to its users compared to its competitors. Most of the most utilized digital platforms pose a risk to the privacy and security of users, possess significant potential for ideological manipulation, and exploit user data for financial benefit. Geopolitical research reveals that TikTok has become embroiled in a battle over the significance of the digital realm, with the US being determined to safeguard the economic and strategic benefits it has long enjoyed. However, this is a common economic narrative in several aspects: established market leaders endeavoring to maintain their advantageous positions, authorities aiming to safeguard strategically significant sectors. However, if policymakers were to adopt platform competition instead of dismissing it based on traditional geopolitical reasons, there is the possibility for increased innovation and a reduction in the dominance of power in the global platform market. Attaining a market that promotes competition and avoids traditional geopolitical power relations is an immense undertaking. Highly ambitious public policy interventions will be necessary. However, it is a worthwhile endeavor. The consolidation of private power in the digital realm undermines democratic nations, necessitating the exploration of remedies that transcend the dominant influence of both the United States and China.

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