



TikTok's Multifaceted Economic Impact on Pakistani Society: Analyzing the Interplay of Entertainment, Morality, and Market Dynamics

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ABSTRACT

This study scrutinizes the intricate economic and sociological nexus between TikTok, a prevalent social media platform, and evolving societal norms, values, and identities in Pakistan. Through a qualitative analysis of 685 videos from six renowned Pakistani TikTokers, a rich tapestry of interactions between entertainment, morality, and market dynamics emerges. The investigation delineates TikTok's palpable influence on various facets including gender dynamics, ethics, and consumer behavior, thereby encapsulating the complex relationship between technology, market forces, and Pakistani society. Examining elements like attire, language, and messaging themes, the study unveils the existing tensions between individual expression and societal expectations, intermingled with commercial pursuits and ethical concerns. It accentuates TikTok's role as a harbinger of socio-economic opportunities, fostering empowerment amongst marginalized communities, notably the intersex population. This research navigates the nuanced moral landscape inhabited by TikTokers, where a blend of social and material characteristics fosters authenticity in self-expression, albeit occasionally at odds with established societal and market norms. The study acknowledges TikTok as a potent influencer in moulding cultural identities through linguistic diversity and thematic discourse, portraying it as a dynamic space that simultaneously mirrors and reshapes societal values and economic practices. It transcends the understanding of TikTok as merely a digital entertainment platform, highlighting its profound impact as a socio-cultural and economic entity that heralds a transformative era of digital engagement. By unravelling TikTok's multifaceted influence, this study provides profound insights into the transformative capabilities of digital platforms in crafting modern society and market trends, thus augmenting the academic discourse on the confluence of technology, culture, human behaviour, and market dynamics, and adding a vital dimension to the understanding of digital culture and the economics of social media.



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1. Introduction

In the contemporary epoch characterized by pervasive digital interactions, social media platforms have emerged as instrumental arenas interfacing varied aspects of human existence, encompassing individuals from diverse age groups, gender backgrounds, business communities, and academic circles (Cents, 2021). The all-encompassing nature of these platforms engenders both opportunities for boundless connectivity and creative expression, alongside nurturing critical dialogues surrounding their societal repercussions and moral implications.

Within this digital pantheon, TikTok has rapidly gained prominence, transforming into a cultural behemoth with an expansive user demographic that mirrors a staggering diversity in terms of age, gender, and backgrounds (Zeng et al., 2021; Hayder, 2020). Pakistan's affinity with TikTok is markedly significant, as it occupies a prominent position among the top countries utilizing the platform, boasting 19.5 million users and clinching the title of the most downloaded application in 2019 (Geysler, 2022). Despite its facade of entertainment and avenues for self-expression, it has fostered a complex ecosystem that sometimes facilitates the dissemination of adverse content, engenders data vulnerability, and encourages unethical manoeuvres to attain celebrity status, igniting several concerns (Crawford, 2020).

To provide a more profound insight into TikTok's pervasive influence, it becomes imperative to invoke Durkheim's theoretical framework, which perceives morality as an amalgamation of social realities, providing a potent lens to scrutinize TikTok's role in shaping societal norms and practices (Longhofer & Winchester, 2016). Concurrently, drawing from the latest theories of energy growth performance, this study endeavors to decipher the intricate relationship between the booming digital platform usage and its implications on societal energy dynamics, where digital platforms act as catalysts fostering growth and evolution in various societal sectors.

TikTok's formidable presence in the digital landscape, with its user-centric content and features catering to a vast demographic, has orchestrated a significant shift in cultural phenomena, exhibiting an exponential growth trajectory with projections estimating a user base of 1.5 billion by 2022 (Geysler, 2022). Its advanced AI mechanisms adeptly discern user inclinations, promoting trending songs, hashtags, and filters, and categorizing content based on hashtag views (Knowledge, 2019; Geysler, 2022).

The thematic predominance of entertainment and dance content on TikTok raises deep-seated sociological queries regarding the construction of morality through individual content and self-projection (Geysler, 2022). Despite gendered usage patterns, its repercussions transcend these delineations, impacting a broader spectrum of society. Within the Pakistani milieu, this study endeavors to dissect the intricate interplay of morality, technology, and culture, offering a nuanced perspective on contemporary social realities, thereby contributing to a global discourse exploring the intersections of morality, media, and the digital age.

1.1. Objectives

- To analyze the relationship between TikTok's algorithmic dynamics and the construction of morality in the digital sphere.
- To explore the influence of TikTok on gender dynamics, consumer behaviour, and ethical considerations within the Pakistani context.
- To scrutinize the thematic elements prevalent in TikTok content, such as dressing, language, and messages, and how they echo or diverge from societal norms and market ethics.
- To investigate TikTok's role as a catalyst for socio-economic opportunities, particularly in

- empowering marginalized communities in Pakistan.
- To decipher the multifaceted impact of TikTok in shaping cultural identities and individual expressions amidst the evolving landscape of digital platforms.

1.2. Significance of the Study

In a rapidly digitizing global society, where virtual platforms are not just mediums of entertainment but substantial influencers of societal norms, values, and economic practices, this study holds immense significance. It embarks on a journey to uncover the complex intertwining of personal expression, societal influence, and commercial interests within the realm of TikTok, a platform that has rapidly cemented its place in the daily lives of millions in Pakistan. With its pulsating growth and pervasive reach, understanding the nuanced intricacies it brings to the societal forefront becomes vital. The research deepens the comprehension of how TikTok serves as a canvas for articulating contemporary social realities, providing a fertile ground for a rich academic discourse that intersects with global dialogues on media, morality, and the digital age.

Furthermore, the study is poised to make a seminal contribution to the burgeoning field of digital sociology, shedding light on the transformative role of social media platforms in shaping modern society and market trends. By dissecting TikTok's influence in the Pakistani context, it offers a window into the evolving dynamics of a society grappling with the intersection of traditional norms and the burgeoning influences of digital culture. This exploration holds the promise of not only enriching the existing literature but also providing policymakers, scholars, and practitioners with insights into the complex symbiosis between digital platforms and the societies they inhabit, thereby fostering informed dialogues and strategies to navigate the complex terrains of the digital era.

2. Research Methodology

The methodological framework of this research is anchored in a qualitative paradigm, focusing on a content analysis of videos produced by six prominent Pakistani TikTokers. The purposive sampling strategy enabled the curation of a robust sample size of 685 videos, thereby ensuring the depth and breadth of analysis necessary for uncovering the thematic discourse within the content. The selected videos span two months (April & March 2023), providing a temporal snapshot of trends, behaviours, and expressions.

2.1. Sample Size

The selection of 685 videos as the sample size ensures a comprehensive overview while maintaining a manageable volume for in-depth qualitative analysis. This particular number provides a rich and varied dataset that can reveal nuanced patterns and insights without overwhelming the analytical process.

2.2. Sampling Method: Purposive Sampling

Purposive sampling was employed as it allows for intentionally selecting videos most relevant to the research question. This method ensures that the videos chosen provide substantial information about the themes of interest, such as morality, cultural representation, and social norms. By targeting specific content and TikTokers, purposive sampling enhances the study's relevance and representation, ensuring the data analysed closely aligns with the research objectives.

2.3. Time Frame: April & March, 2023

The selection of a two-month time frame (April & March 2023) offers a snapshot that is

both temporally bounded and rich in content. This period may reflect specific socio-cultural dynamics, trending topics, or seasonal variations in TikTok content. By limiting the study to this timeframe, the research avoids the dilution of findings that might occur with a broader temporal scope while still capturing a substantial and relevant cross-section of TikTok activity.

2.4. TikTokers: Six Pakistani TikTokers

The six TikTokers selected (Jannat Mirza, Sehar Hayyat, Zulqarnain Sikandar, Usman Nasim, Mehak Malik, and Paroo Khanzadi) represent diverse followership ranges, content themes, and demographic characteristics. Their selection was based on popularity, influence, and the variety of content they produced. This ensures a comprehensive overview of the contemporary TikTok landscape in Pakistan, reflecting different facets of society, culture, and individual expression.

2.5. Thematic Categories

The analysis based on common features and themes such as dressing, makeup, fashion, language, and messages (genre) ensures a structured and focused examination. These categories were selected as they are prevalent in TikTok videos and resonate with broader social and cultural constructs. By aligning the analysis with these themes, the research can explore how TikTokers articulate and negotiate identity, aesthetics, communication, and morality within their content.

2.6. Comparative Analysis

The comparative approach, which identifies similarities and differences between TikTokers' videos, enriches the understanding of the predominant features or themes. It allows for recognising shared cultural norms and individual variations, thereby illuminating the complex interplay between collective values and personal expression. This methodological choice enables a multi-dimensional exploration of TikTok content, revealing patterns, contradictions, and unique insights that might be obscured in a more uniform analysis.

2.7. External Authenticity

The exploration of how authenticity is learned or internalized within TikTokers through their videos, followed by diffusion, is a critical component of the analysis. It probes the socio-cultural process through which TikTokers embody and disseminate specific norms, values, or styles. This aspect of the study recognizes that TikTok is not merely a platform for superficial entertainment but a space where complex processes of socialization, identity formation, and cultural transmission occur. By focusing on external authenticity, the research connects the micro-level behaviours of individual TikTokers with macro-level societal dynamics, thereby providing a profound understanding of the social fabric as mediated through digital platforms.

2.8. Demographic Information of TikTokers

A tabulated representation of demographic information was developed, elucidating details such as gender, marital status, age, followers, likes, and number of videos for each TikToker, as shown in Table 1.

The tabulated representation of demographic information serves multiple critical functions in the research methodology. By including details such as gender, marital status, age, followers, likes, and number of videos, the research provides:

Contextual Understanding: Knowing the demographic details of the TikTokers enriches the

context in which their content is created and consumed. Factors like age and marital status can influence the themes and styles of videos, reflecting different life stages, societal roles, and personal values.

Table 1
Demographic Characteristics/Information of the Tiktokers

Name	Gender	Marital Status	Age	Followers	Likes Overall	Number of Videos (2 months)
Jannat Mirza	Female	Single	23 yrs	20.0 M	544.4 M	114
Mehak Malik	Intersex	Single	27 yrs	10.8 M	281.2 M	119
Zulqarnain Sikandar	Male	Married	24 yrs	15.1 M	707.2 M	98
Sehar Hayat	Female	Single	24 yrs	9.4 M	295.7 M	135
Paroo Khanzadi	Intersex	Single	29 yrs	3.1 M	52.0 M	165
Usman Nasim	Male	Married	35 yrs	10.8 M	399.2 M	54

Diverse Representation: The selection of TikTokers of different genders, including intersex, and varying followings ensures that the study captures a wide spectrum of TikTok culture in Pakistan. This diversity enhances the robustness and applicability of the research findings.

Quantitative Insights: Metrics such as followers, likes, and number of videos provide quantitative insights that complement the qualitative analysis. These figures indicate the popularity, reach, and productivity of each TikToker, allowing for a more nuanced understanding of their influence and significance within the platform.

Basis for Comparative Analysis: The tabulated data facilitates comparative analysis across different TikTokers, revealing patterns or disparities that might be connected to their demographic characteristics. For instance, analyzing the correlation between age and content themes, or marital status and following, might uncover underlying social dynamics.

2.9. Analytical Approach

The analytical approach, consisting of content and diffusion analyses, is pivotal in achieving the research objectives. Here's why:

2.9.1. Content Analysis

Thematic Exploration: By focusing on themes such as dressing, makeup, fashion, language, and messages (genre), content analysis delves into the symbolic and expressive layers of TikTok videos. This approach allows for exploring the manifest content and the latent meanings, ideologies, and values embedded within.

Cultural Reflection: These themes are not arbitrary; they resonate with broader cultural norms, aesthetics, and communication practices. Analyzing them provides insights into how TikTok is both a reflection of and an influence on contemporary Pakistani culture.

Individual and Collective Insight: Content analysis bridges the individual creativity of TikTokers and the collective cultural patterns, offering a dual perspective that enriches the sociological interpretation.

2.9.2. Diffusion Analysis:

Transmission of Norms and Values: Diffusion analysis investigates how content, values, and norms are disseminated through TikTok videos. It recognizes TikTok as entertainment and an active agent in shaping social realities.

Interplay with External Authenticity: This analysis aligns with examining external authenticity, exploring how TikTokers internalize and then diffuse specific cultural expressions or moral constructs. It provides a dynamic view of cultural transmission in a digital age

Network Influence: Understanding diffusion also sheds light on how TikTok functions as a network, where content and influence flow intersect and shape user behavior and societal norms.

In sum, the incorporation of demographic information and the dual analytical approach of content and diffusion analysis construct a methodological framework that is both rigorous and reflective. It synthesizes the complexity of digital expression, cultural norms, individual identities, and social realities within the TikTok platform. It lays a comprehensive and context-sensitive foundation for the subsequent analysis and interpretation of the study's findings.

3. Findings

The following section elucidates the study's findings under four conceptual themes that emerged through an in-depth data analysis. The themes are grounded in the sociological examination of TikTokers in Pakistan, focusing on demographic information, thematic content, moral values, and motivational hierarchy.

3.1. Demographic Dynamics and Social Stratification

3.1.1. Gender Distribution and Marital Status

The demographic information (Table 1) reveals an equitable representation among the TikTokers, with two individuals from each gender category: male, female, and intersex. Interestingly, only the male TikTokers are married (Iqbal, 2022), possibly reflecting societal norms surrounding gender roles and marriage.

3.1.2. Followership and Content Creation

Jannat Mirza leads with 20.0 million followers, followed by Zulqarnain Sikandar and Usman Nasim. A stark contrast in content creation is observed, with Paroo Khanzadi uploading the most videos (165) and Usman Nasim the least (54). This discrepancy might illustrate various strategies in engagement and content dissemination.

3.1.3. Global Trends and Gender Preferences

Globally, females use TikTok more, and this is mirrored in the ranking of Jannat Mirza as the top Pakistani TikToker. The gender preference in followership might illuminate the intersection of gender, technology, and cultural appeal.

3.2. Thematic Discourse and Moral Ambiguity

3.2.1. Video Themes and Social Commitment

Analyzing video themes used by TikTokers, a predominant preference for lip-syncing (540 videos), avoidance of social issues, and limited political engagement was found, as reflected in Figure 1. The thematic division reveals a trend toward entertainment rather than a societal contribution, possibly reflecting a diversion from moral accountability.

3.2.2. Harassment and Promotional Content

Sehar Hayat's posts alleging harassment and the 51 promotional videos signify the dual role of TikTok as a platform for personal expression and commercial endeavours. Promoting

beauty items by "Famous TikTok maulvi" Usman Nasim adds complexity to the public persona and commercial interests.

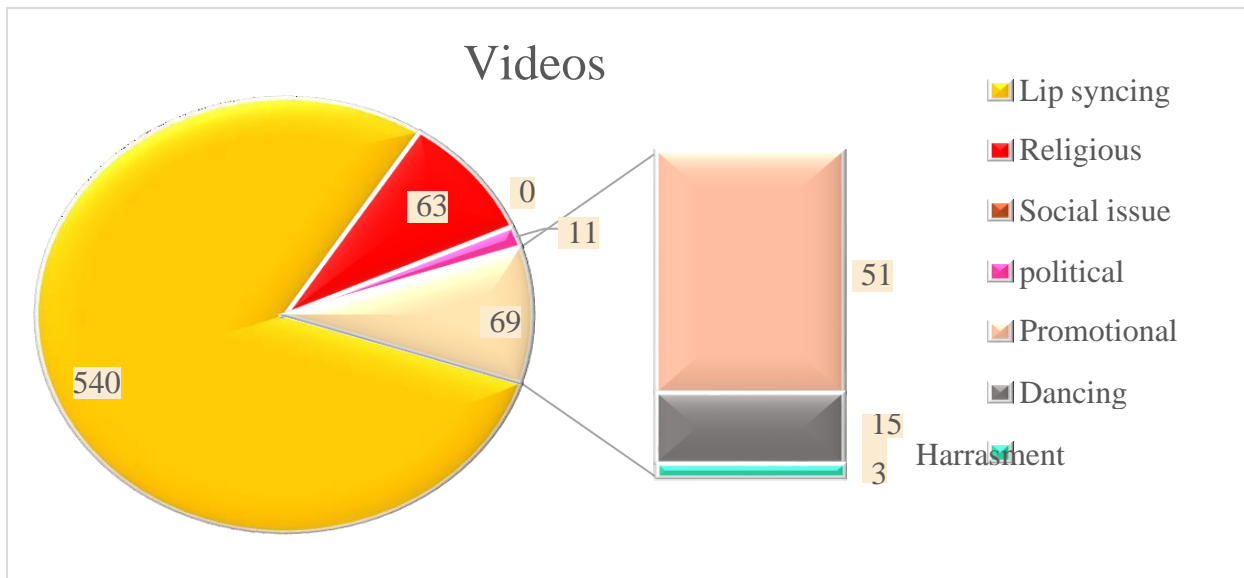


Figure 1: Thematic Analysis of videos used by TikTokers

3.2.3. Religious Divergence:

While intersex TikTokers Mehak Malik and Paroo Khanzadi posted 20-35 religious videos, others like Jannat Mirza refrained. This divergence may indicate a complex interplay between personal beliefs, public image, and societal expectations.

3.3. Cultural Expression and Sociocultural Defiance

3.3.1. Dressing as Cultural Markers

Most TikTokers' dresses were categorized into four themes: Eastern, Western, traditional, and immoral (Figure 2). Usman Nasim's adherence to Islamic dressing contrasts with Jannat Mirza and Sehar Hayat's revealing attire. Paroo Khanzadi's preference for Eastern clothing and Zulqarnain Sikandar's inclination toward feminine ideology showcase a spectrum of cultural expression and defiance against sociocultural dogma.

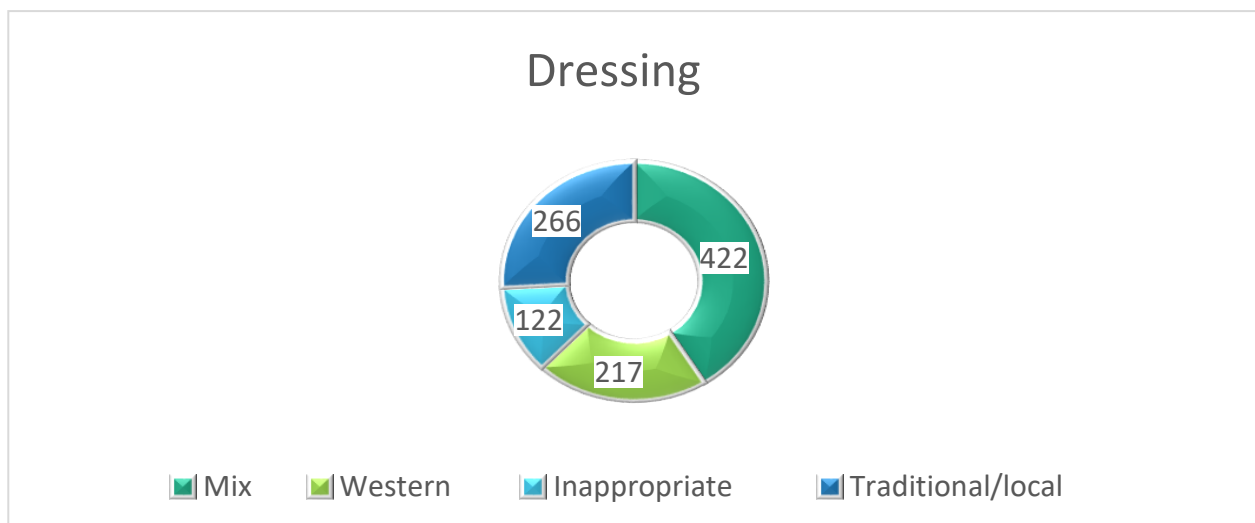


Figure 2: Operationalization of dressing by the TikTokers

3.3.2. Language as an Ideological Integrator

The use of various languages, including Urdu, Pashto, Gujarati, Saraiki, Punjabi, and Arabic (Figure 3), illustrates the integration of TikTokers into their ideology through language. This linguistic diversity echoes the multifaceted cultural landscape of Pakistan.

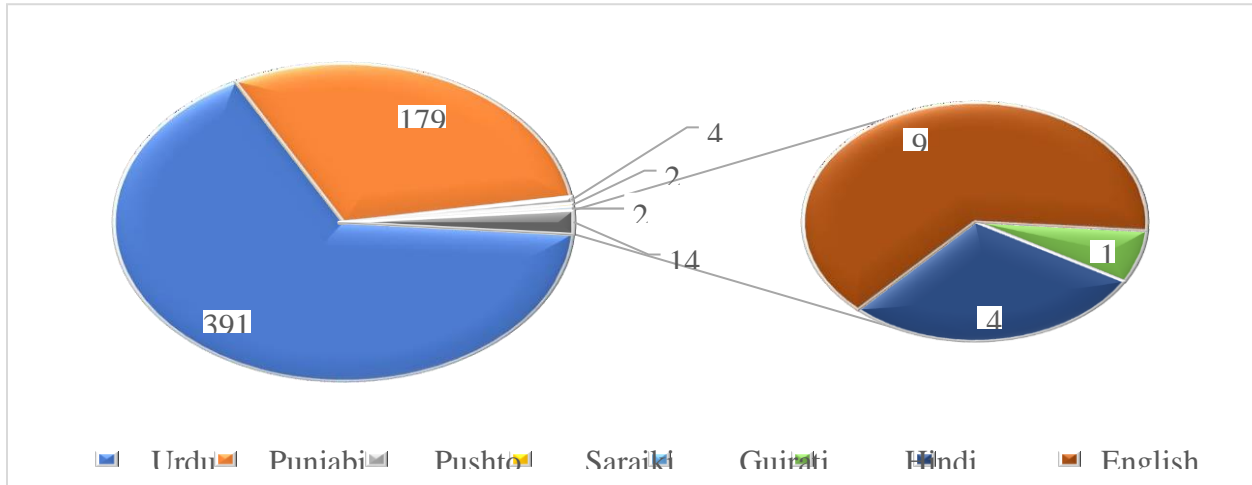


Figure 3: Language used by TikTokers

3.3.3. Authenticity and Morality

Authenticity in TikTok's content promotes self-expression and leads to uncontrolled self-presentation. The analysis of Jannat Mirza's content unveils a tension between social reward and the propagation of potentially immoral content, reflecting a complex moral landscape (Barta & Andalibi, 2021).

3.4. Motivation, Transformation, and Societal Impact

3.4.1. Motivational Hierarchy and Content Development

The revised Motivational Hierarchy Model (Ahlse, 2020; Figure 4.) reveals 'Personal Identity,' 'Socializing,' and 'Status' as key motivators. This study highlights how TikTok's motivation has shifted from information-seeking to personal gain and status, indicating a transformation in user behaviour.



Figure 4: Revised Motivational Hierarchy Model (Ahlse, 2020)

3.4.2. TikTok's Role in Social Transformation

The analysis of intersex TikTokers Mehak Malik and Paroo Khanzadi illustrates TikTok's potential in societal acceptance and socio-economic upliftment of marginalized communities (Afsheen & Ahmed, 2010). Their content, ranging from religious devotion to societal respect, marks a significant shift in societal perceptions.

3.4.3. Content Analysis of Individual TikTokers

The detailed analysis of TikTokers such as Sehar Hayat, Zulqarnain Sikandar, Usman Nasim, and others presents a kaleidoscope of themes, from comedy to political interest, feminine ideology, and societal norms. The nuanced examination of content, including themes of harassment, religion, culture, and politics, reflects a diverse platform that mirrors and moulds social realities.

These findings, rooted in demographic analysis, thematic discourse, cultural expression, and motivation, weave a complex tapestry of TikTok's role in Pakistani society. From reflecting gender dynamics to uncovering moral ambiguities, defying cultural norms, and transforming societal perceptions, TikTok emerges as a potent socio-cultural platform. The intricate interplay between personal expression, social influence, commercial interests, and societal impact underscores TikTok's multifaceted role in shaping contemporary digital culture in Pakistan.

4. Conclusion

As delineated in this study, the exploration of TikTok's influence within Pakistani society unravels an intricate and multifaceted socio-economic and cultural phenomenon. The findings not only showcase TikTok as a mere entertainment platform but also illuminate its profound impact on various societal and market dynamics aspects.

The study elucidates how TikTok sometimes reflects and transgresses societal norms and market expectations. From gender distribution, consumer preferences, and marital status to the thematic content, economic trends, and moral values, TikTok users in Pakistan navigate a complex web of social and market codes. The preference for entertainment over social or political engagement, the divergence in religious content, the alignment with consumer behavior, and the defiance against socio-cultural dogma in dressing and makeup all point to a platform teetering between conformity, rebellion, and market innovation.

Beyond entertainment, TikTok has emerged as a powerful agent of social transformation and market disruption. The acceptance and empowerment of intersex TikTokers like Mehak Malik and Paroo Khanzadi underscore TikTok's role in challenging stigmas, fostering inclusivity, and affecting consumer trends. The platform's facilitation of voices, even on the peripherals, marks a progressive shift in societal perceptions and market attitudes.

The tension between authenticity, morality, commercial interests, and market strategies paints a complex moral and economic landscape. TikTokers' pursuit of personal gain and status, their navigation of market trends, vulgarity, and the promotion of beauty standards illustrate a nuanced interplay between personal expression, societal influence, commercial interests, and ethical considerations. This complexity calls for critical engagement and reflection on the role of digital platforms in shaping individual and collective morality, consumer behavior, and market dynamics.

Language diversity, thematic discourse, motivational hierarchy, market segmentation, and individual content analysis reveal TikTok as a diverse platform shaping cultural identity and

market preferences. From linguistic integration to motivational transformation, cultural expression, and market innovation, TikTok is a dynamic space where personal, social, economic, and cultural identities are constructed, negotiated, and transformed.

This study contributes to the broader understanding of digital culture, social media's influence, market trends, and the intricate relationship between technology, society, and economics. It invites further exploration into the ethical dimensions, gender dynamics, consumer behaviour, and the potential of digital platforms in social change, empowerment, and economic development.

In conclusion, TikTok's influence in Pakistan transcends mere digital entertainment; it is an economic and sociological phenomenon reflecting, challenging, and shaping societal norms, values, market trends, and identities. The platform's role as a mirror to societal norms, an agent of transformation, a complex moral and economic arena, and a shaper of cultural identity underscores its profound impact. Through its in-depth analysis and thematic exploration, this study adds a valuable dimension to the discourse on digital culture, consumer behavior, and market dynamics, providing insights that resonate beyond TikTok, extending to the larger landscape of social media, digital expression, and economic structures. It is a testament to the intricate relationship between digital platforms, the markets they influence, and the societies they inhabit, highlighting the need for continued scholarly engagement with these dynamic and ever-evolving spaces.

4.1. Research Recommendations

- Longitudinal studies may be conducted to explore the long-term evolving influence of TikTok on societal norms and market dynamics.
- Comparative studies may be conducted to compare and contrast TikTok's impact on society and market dynamics.

4.2. Policy Recommendations

- Digital literacy programs can be run to initiate safe and secure access to TikTok's content and usage.
- Regulatory bodies must be established to appreciate the inclusion of marginalized communities.

Authors Contribution

Abida Sharif: initiated the core idea of performed data analysis and drafting

Fouzia Sadaf: reviewed and revised overall quality and writeup of the manuscript

Hira Shahzad Nai: provided guidance for data analysis, reviewed, supervised overall study

Conflict of Interests/Disclosures

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