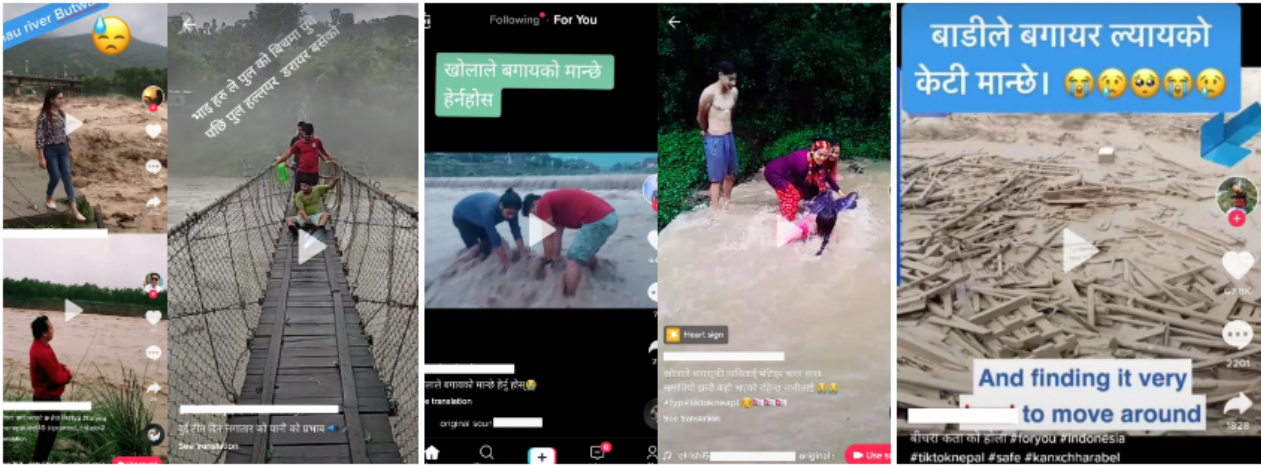


In Such Stressful Times of Natural Disasters, Why is Tiktok Becoming Another Cause for Concern in Nepal?

kathmandutribune.com/flood-tiktok



Heavy rainfall since the 15th of June has caused flooding and landslides in many parts of Nepal. According to Government officials, the suspected cause for the floods in the Sindhupalchowk district is the glacial outburst in a high lying area bordering Tibet.

“Reason behind this flash flood is attributed to heavy rainfall in upper lying areas. Shaken by the 2072 (Nepali date of 2015 earthquake) earthquake, creeks on the inner areas of the hills are suspected to be swept by large masses of ice and muds contained by it. We have suspected it to be a reason for flooding,” Rudra Prasad Dulal, Chairperson of ward number 11, Sindupalchowk, said.



Photo Credits: ANI (Prakash Mathema / AFP)

The effects of the floods can also be seen in the Manang district, where many families have been displaced as well. Several people have been displaced due to floods, while many have lost their houses, property, and belongings. The landslides and flash floods have claimed the lives of 11 people, including one Indian and two Chinese workers, at a development project. Numerous people have also been missing. *“The foreign nationals were working for a Chinese company that is building a drinking water project,”* district official Baburam Khanal told Reuters. These numbers are not definite as there is bound to be an increase due to not being able to conduct proper searches.

The Government has mobilized security forces for rescue operations. The Nepal Army, along with the Armed Police Force and the Nepal Police, have been seen conducting rescue and search operations.



Photo Credits: (Navesh Chitrakar / REUTERS)

Hundreds of families have been taken to shelters. This is also a cause for concern considering the ongoing pandemic throughout the world, and with Nepal having one of the highest coronavirus test positivity rates in the world. John Jordan from the U.S.-based charity World Neighbors stated that *“this forced density raises risks for a community that has been recovering from COVID-19.”*

Laxmi Prasad Shrestha, a flood victim, stated, *“We are yet to think about making a new start. All the riches which we earned lies in that house which is now covered in mud and is not accessible. We don’t have anything now and we are clueless where to go and how to go, a complete state of numbness reels over mind.”*

One of the epicenters of the 2015 earthquake was in the Sindhupalchowk district. This district has seen rising levels of floods and landslides ever since. With the early onslaught of monsoon this year, the incidents could rise further.



While the situation has been grave for the citizens of these districts, and the Government and the forces are trying to help aid the community, a portion of society has been rather insensitive towards this issue. There is this ongoing trend on Tiktok, where people are seen making videos of them dancing in the flooded river or posing around it. Some people are even replicating flood scenarios by encouraging their family members and friends to swim in fast-flowing or flooded waters. We can also see videos capturing people's suffering and them getting hurt in the floods. Such a trend risks not only the lives of the people making the video but it also progressively worsens the mental health of the people watching it. There are frequent instances of people using obscene videos and photos from previous natural disasters and referring to them as the recent flood incidents to make people watch their videos and seek their attention. People have been seen posting parts of videos like part 1, part 2, and so on to make people visit their profile more often for such content. Moreover, using disturbing audio tracks that completely contradict the video and writing insensitive clickbait messages grabs a lot of attention from the viewers, and hence content creators have been posting such misleading content for the mere sake of post engagement and views.

No matter how often the viewers try to report such posts or mark them as “not interested”, they seem to pop up every now and then. The audience of Tiktok ranges from small kids to elderly people, and such content can desensitize people to violence and suffering in the real world. Similarly, it can affect people's mood and worsen symptoms of depression, anxiety, and stress.

The Tiktok community guidelines include a warning screen for possible sensitive content, but it seems to be irrelevant here. With the lack of media and information literacy amongst the public and the geographical location plays a key role in video

recommendation, content such as these keep populating the Nepalese platform. There has been no study to determine the sensitivity of social media, nor is there any legislation to address punitive measures for uploading such obscene content.

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