



**TikTok: Social Media Surveillance – Whether
the Banning of TikTok is Justified and its Wider
Political Impact on Students**

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BACKGROUND

TikTok, known for its short-form video-hosting service, is a Chinese social media app founded in 2016 by the ByteDance company.¹ It is distinct from Douyin, TikTok's mainland Chinese counterpart, as TikTok is tailored for international users while Douyin is exclusively for mainland Chinese users, and users from the two platforms cannot interact with each other.² Since its launch, TikTok's market has expanded globally during the pandemic and has become especially popular among teenagers.³

Ever since the Trump Administration threatened to ban TikTok in 2020, TikTok has garnered significant attention in world politics, primarily due to its Chinese origin, whose government has a reputation for surveillance and propaganda, which many governments, especially those who mistrust the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), such as the USA, the United Kingdom, Canada and across Europe, consider a 'national security threat'.⁴ The primary concern revolves around the CCP potentially wielding its extensive authority over the app to surveil its foreign audience's activities, censor politically sensitive videos and inadvertently manipulate what TikTok's vast foreign audience can see.⁵ China is an emerging power, and it seems its ambition is to become a hegemony in Asia or even globally.⁶ From a Western perspective, it is tempting to conceive China utilising TikTok as a tool to expand China's political influence by

¹ Isaac, M. (2020). U.S. Appeals Injunction Against TikTok Ban. *The New York Times*. [online] 8 Oct. Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/10/08/technology/us-appeals-injunction-against-tiktok-ban.html>.

² Lin, P. (2021). *TikTok vs Douyin: A Security and Privacy Analysis*. [online] The Citizen Lab. Available at: <https://citizenlab.ca/2021/03/tiktok-vs-douyin-security-privacy-analysis/>.

³ Geysler, W. (2022). *50 TikTok Stats That Will Blow Your Mind in 2020 [Updated]*. [online] Influencer Marketing Hub. Available at: <https://influencermarketinghub.com/tiktok-stats/>.

⁴ Arbe, T. (2020). "Trump says he'll act to ban TikTok in US as soon as Saturday". *Associated Press*. [Online] Available at "[Trump says he'll act to ban TikTok in US as soon as Saturday](#)". Accessed on 8th July 2023

⁵ The Economist. (2023). *Both America's political camps agree that TikTok is troubling*. [online] Available at: <https://www.economist.com/united-states/2023/03/30/both-americas-political-camps-agree-that-tiktok-is-troubling>.

⁶ Mearsheimer, J. J. (2005) "The Rise of China Will Not Be Peaceful at All." *The Australian*, November 18. [online] Available at: <https://www.mearsheimer.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/The-Australian-November-18-2005.pdf>

collecting government official data and disseminating stultifying content in young Western minds through TikTok's embedded algorithms nurtured in Beijing.

Despite concerns about China's authority over TikTok, its escalating harmful manipulated content found in TikTok videos, which extends beyond mere entertainment, has the potential to exacerbate polarisation and erode users' discernment between reality and misinformation, further highlighting its potentially significant dangers to the more vulnerable underage users.⁷

⁷ Hsu, T. (2022). Misleading edits, fake news stories and deepfake images of politicians are starting to warp reality on the popular video platform. *The New York Times*. [online] Available at: <https://newsliteracymatters.commons.gc.cuny.edu/wp-content/blogs.dir/8164/files/2022/12/Worries-Grow-That-TikTok-Is-New-Home-for-Manipulated-Video-and-Photos-by-Tiffany-Hsu-The-New-York-Times.pdf>

INTRODUCTION

This research aims to examine whether the banning of TikTok is justified by analysing the political implications of TikTok's social media surveillance and the broader political impact on students. However, prior studies on justifying a TikTok ban predominantly focus on the national level, overlooking the significant impact on smaller stakeholders such as student TikTokers. Thus, the objective of the research is to investigate the political impact of TikTok's manipulated media on its users by gathering opinions from student TikTok users and the user's parents. The research takes a step further by analysing if banning TikTok violates its users' freedom to access their preferred media app. It also explores the unexplored area of this topic - the willingness of TikTokers to boycott the app. Additionally, the research considers the alternative solutions to mitigate TikTok's risks and examines the effectiveness of these approaches.

This topic holds significant importance within the boarder research field, as there is a lack of concrete evidence regarding TikTok's surveilling practices as a national security threat. However, many states employ this label to justify the banning of TikTok. Since the controversy surrounding TikTok strains relations between the CCP and Western governments, it is crucial to examine the degree of TikTok's national security threat. When evaluating the rationale behind the ban, it is imperative to delve into other factors and stakeholders that influence the decision. Hence, it becomes necessary to measure the wider political impact of TikTok on its users and assess the potential violation of freedom from a ban.

This research will begin by utilising existing literature to furnish a summary and analysis of the extent to which TikTok's social media surveillance poses a 'national

security threat' and its other concerns, such as the manipulated content on TikTok and the political impacts resulting from an outright ban. Following this, the methodology employed in this research will be explained. Subsequently, the research findings will be presented, followed by a discussion of the results. A conclusion on whether a ban on TikTok is justified will be drawn.

LITERATURE REVIEW

~ Summary and Analysis of relevant studies, theories and existing research

TikTok claims 150 million users in the USA alone.⁸ However, its popularity has put it under constant scrutiny due to alleged national security concerns regarding TikTok's social media surveillance, which refers to collecting and processing personal data from digital communication platforms through automated technology that allows real-time aggregation and organisation.⁹ Another accusation is that the CCP dictates control over TikTok's operation, potentially leading ByteDance to share the personal data of foreign nationals, promote Chinese propaganda and censor politically sensitive videos. For example, in 2021, there was censorship of posts tagged with #BlackLivesMatter, with TikTok explaining it away to be a 'technical glitch'.¹⁰

An article by *The New York Times* underscores that manipulated content such as 'deepfake AI' on TikTok can have real-world consequences, influencing public perception and even contributing to propaganda and misinformation in presidential elections.¹¹ This article criticises TikTok as a platform prone to synthesised manipulating content; it, however, does not convey the idea that the ByteDance company or the CCP has the power to imbue TikTok with polarising content.

⁸ The Economist. (2023). Both America's political camps agree that TikTok is troubling. [online] Available at: <https://www.economist.com/united-states/2023/03/30/both-americas-political-camps-agree-that-tiktok-is-troubling>

⁹ Shahbaz, A. and Funk, A. (2019). *Social Media Surveillance*. [online] Freedom House. Available at: <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-on-the-net/2019/the-crisis-of-social-media/social-media-surveillance>.

¹⁰ Pappas, V. (2019). *A message to our Black community*. [online] Newsroom | TikTok. Available at: <https://newsroom.tiktok.com/en-us/a-message-to-our-black-community>.

¹¹ Hsu, T. (2022). Misleading edits, fake news stories and deepfake images of politicians are starting to warp reality on the popular video platform. *The New York Times*. [online] Available at: <https://newsliteracymatters.commons.gc.cuny.edu/wp-content/blogs.dir/8164/files/2022/12/Worries-Grow-That-TikTok-Is-New-Home-for-Manipulated-Video-and-Photos-by-Tiffany-Hsu-The-New-York-Times.pdf>

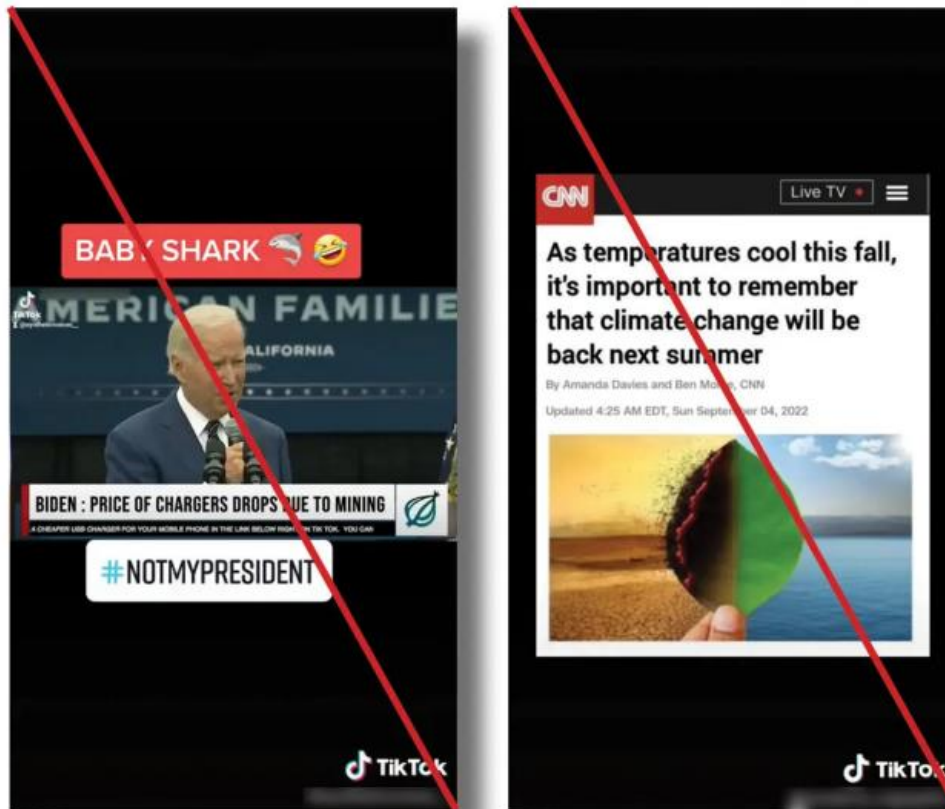


Figure 1. Two examples of manipulated content and disinformation on TikTok. The left one uses deepfake AI technology, so President Joe Biden appears to be singing ‘Baby Shark’. Right, a screenshot from a TikTok video which faked a CNN story about climate change. Source: The New Yorks, 2022 <https://newsliteracymatters.commons.gc.cuny.edu/wp-content/blogs.dir/8164/files/2022/12/Worries-Grow-That-TikTok-Is-New-Home-for-Manipulated-Video-and-Photos-by-Tiffany-Hsu-The-New-York-Times.pdf>

However, a report by the Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI) speculates that TikTok does not carry out malicious activity akin to spyware.¹² It documented some of

¹² Ryan F., Fritz, A., Impiombato, D. (2020) TikTok and WeChat: Curating and Controlling Global Information Flows, Australian Strategic Policy Institute.

TikTok’s targeted global censorship by ByteDance due to its increasingly localised guidelines for individual countries, as the app strives to be more apolitical. Yet, despite the company’s claim that ‘the platform is not influenced by any foreign government, including the Chinese Government,’¹³ there was an incident where TikTok permanently censored a viral video about China’s treatment of Uighur Muslims.¹⁴ The TikTok spokesperson rebutted that ‘TikTok does not moderate content due to political sensitivities.’¹⁵ This reveals a contradiction in TikTok’s censorship practice, as its professed apolitical ultimately lead to political implications.



Figure 2. A screen grab from a viral TikTok video where Ms Aziz accused China of putting Muslim Uighurs into ‘concentration camp’ Source: BBC, 2019. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-50559656>

¹³ Newsroom | TikTok. (2019). *Statement on TikTok’s content moderation and data security practices*. [online] Available at: <https://newsroom.tiktok.com/en-us/statement-on-tiktoks-content-moderation-and-data-security-practices>.

¹⁴ Kelion, L. (2019) Teen’s TikTok video about China’s Muslim camps goes viral. *BBC News*. [online] 26 Nov. Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-50559656>.

¹⁵ Kelion, L. (2019) Teen’s TikTok video about China’s Muslim camps goes viral. *BBC News*. [online] 26 Nov. Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-50559656>.

Similarly, an evidence-based technical analysis of TikTok by The Citizen Lab unravels that the cybersecurity risk of TikTok has been exaggerated.¹⁶ This comparative analysis of security and censorship issues in TikTok and Douyin discloses that neither of the apps appears to exhibit overtly malicious behaviour. Though, Douyin contains algorithms that raise privacy and security concerns, while TikTok does not. The fact that they are two separate platforms without cross-interaction implies that TikTok is not prone to security breaches.

On the other hand, a country's decision to label TikTok's social media surveillance as a 'national security threat' can be analysed through the lens of international relations (IR) theories. For example, realism underscores the competitive and conflictual nature of international politics.¹⁷ This theory is particularly relevant to the topic, as TikTok's extensive global user base represents a form of soft power and cultural influence for China. The TikTok controversy can thus be viewed as a broader competition for influence between China and the United States. Realist scholars, such as Mearsheimer, argue that a state's foremost goal is ensuring its survival, asserting that survival necessitates power maximisation in the pursuit of hegemony, fraught with potential for conflict.¹⁸ Much like former President Trump, Mearsheimer perceives China's rise, as evidenced by tensions between China and Taiwan, as potentially unpeaceful.¹⁹ This perspective aligns the Western perception that China may exploit TikTok for social

¹⁶ Lin, P. (2021). *TikTok vs Douyin: A Security and Privacy Analysis*. [online] The Citizen Lab. Available at: <https://citizenlab.ca/2021/03/tiktok-vs-douyin-security-privacy-analysis/>

¹⁷ Goodin, R. E. (2010). *The Oxford Handbook of International Relations*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. pp. 132–133.

¹⁸ Mearsheimer, J. J. (2001) *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*. New York: W. W. Norton. Pp. 10

¹⁹ Mearsheimer, J. J. (2005) "The Rise of China Will Not Be Peaceful at All." *The Australian*, November 18. [online] Available at: <https://www.mearsheimer.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/The-Australian-November-18-2005.pdf>

media surveillance or media manipulation. Therefore, states take measures against TikTok to safeguard their interests and security in the face of perceived threats.

Meanwhile, one could argue that TikTok's classification as a 'national security threat' is a socially constructed concept. This is explained by constructivism, another prominent IR theory, which asserts that when an identity is collectively branded a 'security threat', it is essentially 'what state makes of it'.²⁰ For instance, Patrick Jackson, the Chief Technology Officer at Disconnect, notes that the volume of TikTok's collected data was comparable that gathered by American-based social media firms and even fell short of what Facebook collects.²¹ Intriguingly, Facebook has faced legal action, yet it has never been officially designated as a security threat.²² Even in the absence of concrete evidence, the idea that TikTok could be a national security threat gained traction and influenced policy decisions. This suggests that the USA holds the power to shape TikTok as a security threat through prevailing ideas and beliefs in the US political context, instead of by objective factors.

Some freedom pressure groups have expressed their concerns about the limitation of freedom and argue that banning TikTok is unjustifiably paternalistic. Paternalism typically involves three elements: interference with an individual's choice; against their will; and ostensibly for that individual's own benefit.²³ If the banning of TikTok appears to be paternalistically infringing TikTokers' freedom, perhaps the ban is unjustified. For example, Sarah Cook, the research director of Freedom House, criticises that Trump's

²⁰ Wendt, A. (1999) *Social Theory of International Politics*. Cambridge University Press. pp. 1-4

²¹ Fowler, G. A. (2020) Is it time to delete TikTok? A guide to guide to the rumors and the privacy risks. *The Washington Post*. [online] Available at: "[Is it time to delete TikTok? A guide to the rumors and the real privacy risks](#)".

²² Campisi, N. (2023). *Facebook Privacy Settlement: How To Claim Your Share Of \$725 Million – Forbes Advisor*. [online] www.forbes.com. Available at: <https://www.forbes.com/advisor/legal/facebook-class-action-lawsuit/#:~:text=After%20a%20four%2Dyear%20battle>.

²³ Dworkin, G. (2014) 'Paternalism', in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. E.N. Zalta

proposed TikTok ban would undermine free speech and 'set a very problematic precedent' for banning apps in the US.²⁴ Other organisations, such as the Electronic Frontier Foundation (EFF), also condemn the banning of TikTok as an infringement on the First Amendment rights of TikTok users.²⁵

In essence, the research has offered an examination of existing literature revolving around the extent and reasons behind TikTok's perceived impact on national security, as well as the political issues surrounding its potential ban. These studies highlight the complex yet intricate relations between technology, security, international politics and individual autonomy in this topic.

~ *Gaps in the existing literature*

Despite previous attempts to analyse the TikTok controversy, one essential element of the topic is often overlooked: the willingness of users to boycott the app. Much of the existing literature and ongoing debates center on how banning TikTok would violate TikTokers' freedom but fail to explore whether TikTok users would voluntarily boycott the app even before their government imposes a ban. If it is discovered that TikTokers are unwilling to or opposed to boycotting TikTok, this research can contribute to our understanding of whether a state's decision to ban TikTok would undermine individuals' freedom to access their preferred social media platforms.

²⁴ Jarvis, J. (2020). *Trump's Proposed TikTok Ban May Threaten Free Speech: Experts*. [online] Newsweek. Available at: <https://www.newsweek.com/trump-tiktok-ban-free-speech-1517125>.

²⁵ Opsahl, E.G., David Greene, and Kurt (2020). *TikTok Ban: A Seed of Genuine Security Concern Wrapped in a Thick Layer of Censorship*. [online] Electronic Frontier Foundation. Available at: <https://www.eff.org/deeplinks/2020/08/tiktok-ban-seed-genuine-security-concern-wrapped-thick-layer-censorship>.

METHODOLOGY

~ Explanation of the research design

To gain insight into the perspective of TikTok users on this topic, qualitative methods have been employed to illuminate how they perceive the political implications and government intervention within TikTok. The research focuses on university students who actively use TikTok or Douyin as one of their social media platforms. The participants are mainly recruited at Durham University. Forty-seven students participated in the research. The selection of participants is based on their race, specifically targeting British and mainland Chinese students.

Since the existing research discloses a different level of privacy issues between the two apps, and Douyin is only accessible to mainland Chinese users, there are separate questionnaires for TikTok and Douyin users to understand the respective opinions. This approach thus gathers opinions from individuals of different backgrounds to produce a qualitative report that highlights contrasting viewpoints on this topic. To ensure the representative sample of university students' perspectives, samples are randomly selected to mitigate bias.

Another group of participants are parents of teenage TikTokers. Using qualitative results, five parents from five different families will be interviewed. The objective is twofold: to understand whether they are worried about TikTok's censorship and misinformation, particularly given young children are more vulnerable to media manipulation; and second, to explore their suggested solutions. Interviewing with those parents enriches the analysis of the research as their perspectives and recommendation

offer valuable discussions into this topic. The sample is representative, encompassing a diverse range of ages and educational levels among the participants' children.

~ *Description of the data collection methods*

Questionnaires have been constructed in a five-point Likert scale format to understand students' opinions. The participants are asked to rate the statements from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree'. There are separate questionnaires for TikTok users and Douyin users. Both questionnaires investigate users' willingness to boycott the app and their apprehension of TikTok's media manipulation. The questionnaire for TikTok users also explores their viewpoint on the paternalistic nature of restricting TikTok as a violation of one's freedom. Whereas the parents would be interviewed by the researcher virtually. They will be asked to further elaborate their viewpoint. The interviews are audio recorded and transcribed by the researcher.

~ *Ethical considerations*

Since this research involves human participants, ethical clearance has been requested and approved by the researcher's academic supervisor from the School of Governments and International Affairs at Durham University. The research has obtained participants' informed consent, where their anonymity and confidentiality have been guaranteed.

~ *Limitations of the methodology*

Due to the complexity of obtaining informed consent from vulnerable individuals, the research has narrowed the sample size to individuals aged 18 or above. While the perspectives of teenage TikTok users are relevant to this topic, collecting data from underage children requires extreme care to ensure that no distress will occur. It is

crucial to note that the participants' opinions may not precisely reflect the broader opinions of the general population due to the limited sample size imposed by time constraints. Nevertheless, the diversity of the sampling from the collected data should provide an accurate representation for further analysis and examination of the TikTok controversy.

RESULTS

The research reveals several key findings regarding student TikTok and Douyin users' perspectives. Using a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 indicating 'strongly disagree', 2 indicating 'disagree', 3 indicating 'neutral', 4 indicating 'agree' and 5 indicating 'strongly agree', TikTok users express a willingness to boycott the platform only if it is proven to engage in illegal data collection (average score of 3.97), but they are less likely to boycott if it's merely labelled a national security threat by the government (average score of 3.28). They disagree that TikTok's surveillance poses a national security threat (score of 2.67). Whereas Douyin users are less committed to boycotting even in the face of malicious behavior (average score of 3.33) but strongly believe that ByteDance can collect their personal data unauthorisedly (score of 4.23).

Regarding the paternalistic nature of banning TikTok, TikTok users partially agree that the platform is harmful (average score of 3.78) but do not prefer an outright ban (average score of 2.53). However, they are inclined to believe that the government should increase the scrutiny of TikTok (score of 3.83). TikTok users are relatively neutral about the violation of their freedom if TikTok is banned (average score of 3.19).

Both TikTok and Douyin users use these platforms as news sources, with more trust in its credibility by Douyin users (average score of 3.17) than TikTok users (score of 2.14). Compared to Douyin users (score of 3.17), more TikTok users believe that some TikTok content is manipulative and potentially corrupting younger minds (average score of 4.23) but both have partial distrust in information provided by ByteDance (scores of 2.52 for TikTok users and 2.75 for Douyin users).

Conversely, all five parents of TikTok users express genuine concerns about TikTok's accused censorship and media manipulation. These concerns extend beyond TikTok to encompass other social media platforms. For example, one parent highlights concern about social media algorithms that create a very biased perspective, deliberately influencing users to align with content creators. Most parents disagree with their children using TikTok as a news source, viewing TikTok primarily as entertainment. One of them supports their child to use TikTok as a news source to stay attuned to the world but would also educate her child about the potential disinformation in those contents. Most of them believe that ByteDance should intensify its content scrutiny. However, a parent suggests that this responsibility lies with the government, due to his mistrust of TikTok's Chinese origin. They all advocate for enhanced government regulations on TikTok, with half of them recommending that these regulations should extend beyond TikTok to other platforms.

DISCUSSION

The results indicate that TikTok users are willing to boycott the app if concrete evidence of social media surveillance emerges, but less inclined to do so solely based on government designating it as a national security threat. This also suggests that student TikTok users would not blindly boycott the app; they value solid evidence over their government's portrayal of TikTok. Their readiness to boycott reflects that student TikTokers are not overly dependent on the app. Additionally, this implies that government intervention may not be necessary, as users are willing to act if concrete evidence emerges. However, existing technical analyses of TikTok's operations suggest that the app does not engage in overtly malicious activities. Therefore, banning TikTok due to national security concerns would be counterproductive, as it contradicts users' preferences and lacks concrete evidence to support the label.

In contrast to Douyin, ironically, the existing study reveals a higher rate of malicious activity in Douyin and Douyin users are more inclined in believing that ByteDance can unauthorisedly collect their personal data, however, their willingness to boycott is less committed compared to TikTok users. This might be attributed to their reliance on Douyin, both as a social media platform and a news source.

Both TikTok users and their parents share a common sentiment favouring increased regulations and scrutiny of ByteDance's activities and TikTok's content when addressing its manipulated media and security concerns. This preference leans towards more nuanced approaches rather than an outright ban, leading to the emergence of several strategies. One such strategy is known as 'Project Texas', an unprecedented data localisation arrangement between TikTok and the US Data Security (USDS), which aims

to protect users' ability to use TikTok safely by mitigating its security risk and strengthening its data security programme.²⁶ However, linking back to research findings and existing studies, skepticism persists regarding TikTok's status as a national security threat, with some even debunking this claim. Consequently, Project Texas faces criticism for addressing what many argue is a non-existent threat.²⁷

The results indicate that the idea of banning TikTok may not be entirely unjustly paternalistic, as TikTokers do express their concerns about the platform's potential harm to its users and hold a relatively neutral stance regarding the violation of freedom resulting from a ban. However, accumulated with the fact that many consider the app as news source, perhaps an outright ban, a form of hard paternalism, is not the most preferable. Therefore, a 'soft paternalistic' approach might be more advisable.²⁸ This approach suggests that we should not directly interfere with one's voluntary self-regarding choices but focuses on educating users about TikTok's potential surveillance and censorship risks, which can be done by teachers and parents. By doing so, it respects the autonomy of TikTokers while addressing their concerns without resorting to a ban that infringes on their freedom. Additionally, this education is particularly beneficial to the younger users, as the results indicate partial distrust and concern about the potentially manipulated information in TikTok videos.

²⁶ Perault, M. and Sacks, S. (2023). *Project Texas: The Details of TikTok's Plan to Remain Operational in the United States*. [online] Default. Available at: <https://www.lawfaremedia.org/article/project-texas-the-details-of-tiktok-s-plan-to-remain-operational-in-the-united-states>.

²⁷ Farhat, K. (2023). *TikTok's Project Texas: The wrong template for tomorrow's digital economy*. [online] Internet Governance Project. Available at: <https://www.internetgovernance.org/2023/03/09/tiktoks-project-texas-the-wrong-template-for-tomorrows-digital-economy/> [Accessed 14 Sep. 2023].

²⁸ Dworkin, G. (2020). *Paternalism*. Fall 2020 ed. Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy.

On the other hand, the EFF advocates a comprehensive consumer data privacy law that would encompass all apps, rather than singling out TikTok for restrictions.²⁹ The underlying principle is that banning TikTok alone would not prevent ByteDance or other entities from purchasing location data brokers, which clandestinely collect information about individuals' precise movements of people without their consent.³⁰ Since many social media platforms such as Meta or Google also monetise and harvest users' personal data, it might be more effective to enact privacy legislation that regulates how all digital businesses gather personal data. Such legislation would help curtail the data supply that adversaries could potentially access.³¹

²⁹ Greene, A.S. and D. (2023). *Government Hasn't Justified a TikTok Ban*. [online] Electronic Frontier Foundation. Available at: <https://www.eff.org/deeplinks/2023/03/government-hasnt-justified-tiktok-ban>.

³⁰ Electronic Frontier Foundation. (n.d.). *Location Data Brokers*. [online] Available at: <https://www.eff.org/issues/location-data-brokers> [Accessed 15 Sep. 2023].

³¹ Germain, T. (2022). *How TikTok Tracks You Across the Web, Even If You Don't Use the App*. [online] Consumer Reports. Available at: <https://www.consumerreports.org/electronics-computers/privacy/tiktok-tracks-you-across-the-web-even-if-you-dont-use-app-a4383537813/>.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this research sheds light on the complex debate surrounding TikTok's role in politics, particularly its practices in social media surveillance and its wider political impact on students and their parents. Through the analysis of research findings, it highlights the importance of evidence-based decision-making and considers more nuanced approaches to address TikTok's social media surveillance and manipulated media concerns while respecting users' autonomy.

Ultimately, this research suggests that a ban on TikTok might not be the most preferable solution. Skepticism persists about TikTok's classification as a national security threat due to its origin in China; and the research findings underscores the discernment of TikTok users, who are unwilling to boycott the app solely based on government labels unless there is concrete evidence of security risks associated with TikTok. Consequently, naming TikTok as 'national security threat' to argue for a ban lacks sufficient justification. In essence, even if TikTok were proven to be surveilling its foreign users, an outright ban would not be the most appropriate, despite users' willingness to boycott. Alternative solutions such as education or the implementation of data privacy legislation might offer more effective means of addressing legitimate concerns about manipulated media and cybersecurity in the era of social media for young adults, all while upholding their freedom to access to their preferred social media platform.

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