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Fanaticism-as-Performance: Social-Media "Styled Experts" and Politics of Nostalgia in Nepal

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Abstract

Nepal's social media sphere is crowded by short videos and reels - a country with increasing internet access and low digital literacy. This article attempts to study the operation of 'fanaticism-as-performance' in this contentious environment. Employing a qualitative model drawing from information disorder and performative expertise theories, the study manually analyses publicly available short videos from TikTok, YouTube and Facebook with interpretive coding of narrative and viewer interactions. The study's finding includes six repetitive rhetorical devices, together, structuring political persuasion: heroic salvation, moral emotional language, certainty posturing, nostalgia activation, conspiracy insinuation, and call-to-action. These findings illustrate that self-styled experts employ these rhetorics to theatricalize authority, revoke nostalgia, and link moral outrage and institutional distrust. In conclusion, Nepal's political environment is largely mediated through performance-driven epistemics, intensified by low civic and digital literacy, weak platform governance, and polarization, which ultimately transforms nostalgia into a moralized substitute for democratic trust.

***Keywords:** Fanaticism-as-performance, information disorder, Nepal, nostalgia politics, styled experts,*

Introduction

The characteristics of modern-day political communication and the everyday meaning-making process is largely shaped by the increasing and changing nature of social media (Stieglitz & Dang-Xuan, 2012). Nowadays, social media platforms such as TikTok, YouTube and Facebook are such critical spaces where people of all ages engage with political ideas, analyse public events, and conclude collective beliefs (Chadwick, 2017). This highly unregulated but participatory critical information space has blurred the distinction between knowledge producers and consumers. Information disorder, which incorporates misinformation, disinformation, and malinformation as concepts are also the prominent feature of the contemporary digital age (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017). Circulation of huge volumes of unsubstantiated and emotionally provocative content across various social media platforms has profound implications for political cognition, shaping citizens' perception of authority, truth, and legitimacy, as well as democracy (Abidin, 2021).

The dissemination of false or manipulative information is a major challenge, but also the changing ecology of content expertise and performances, especially in the political domain, has huge repercussions. This has given rise to something called "styled experts, where these [pseudo] experts undertake an authoritative persona and speak theatrically on any burning issues irrespective of their knowledge or expertise (Turner, 2013). They substitute evidence with their dogmatism and emotional ardency for the audiences who are seeking relatable and use effective communication rather than empirically grounded analysis. This performative turn in political expression through spectacle and affect has brought a significant methodological shift (Lacatus et al., 2023). To study this phenomenon, Nepal is an interesting case. According to the Annual Report (FY 2022/23) by Nepal Rastra Bank, while around 91% of the Nepalese population have internet access, only 31% of them are digitally literate (Nepal Rastra Bank, 2023). This clearly shows the unmatched ratio between increased diffusion of digital connectivity and digital literacy in Nepal. By capitalizing on these fragile grounds, there has been a proliferation of self-styled experts. Not only have their numbers increased, but their influential roles have also grown in the fertile and fragile political and institutional environment in Nepal, marked by failed republican governance, unending corruption scandals implicating political elites, political instabilities, as well as pro-monarchical and Gen-Z protests recently.

With this, there has been an emergence of "fanaticism-as-performance" in Nepal's digital platform, entangled with political memory of nostalgia, particularly for the monarchy. Hence, there have been resurfaces of the royalist narratives with claims of stability, unity, and moral order in social media spaces (Pulami, 2023). The "styled experts" with their dramatised explications, emotional fabrication, and moralistic storytelling have branded monarchy as a lost but only anchor to national integrity and identity. This leads to the questions on how impactful these rhetorical cues are in shaping political cognition among youngsters and the digitally illiterate masses across the country. Moreover, it depicts the ways populist and polarizing tendencies are facilitated not only by political elites but also by

digitally empowered commentators with raw (or no) knowledge who mimic expertise and moral authority.

The study examines how performative social-media content contributes to the production and diffusion of royalist or monarchist sentiments in Nepal. It, specifically, looks for theatrical and affective techniques employed by "styled experts" to interacting present levels of Nepalese citizens' digital literacy, institutional trust, and polarization. Much global research has drawn strong links between social media, misinformation, and populism. Moreover, few empirical studies have also assessed how these dynamics particularly operate in small, post-conflict democracies where technological reach outpaces regulatory and educational capacity. By combining a manual analysis of reels across TikTok, YouTube, and Facebook related to monarchical nostalgia, this study aims to illuminate how fanaticism functions as performance, how nostalgia becomes a communicative resource, and how digital illiteracy mediates the relationship between exposure and belief.

This study contributes to three supplementary debates: first, the scholarship on disinformation disorder and performative expertise; second, research on political psychology/sociology and effect on digital spaces; and third, regional scholarship on the political nexus of nostalgia, populism, and digital rise. For this purpose, the study employs a conceptual and empirical framework for understanding how social media "fanaticism" works as an epistemic failure as well as a performative and effective practice which reconfigures political imagination in present-day Nepal.

Operational Concept

This paper attempts to study unresearched domains of Nepal's contemporary media ecology, its vulnerabilities and sensitivities, away from the traditional public conversation about "fake news", "influencers", and "political reels". This study adopts Wardle & Derakhshan's (2017) "information disorder" framework of: (1) misinformation (false information but without malicious intent), (2) disinformation (false information with malicious intent), (3) misinformation (genuine information shared with malicious intent often via distortion, de-contextualization, or doxing). This typology is used not to moralize users, nor to guide observable and symbolic regulations about content claims, rhetorics to intentionality, and harm framings; however, acknowledging that intent is often inferential and demands conservative operationalization. The agenda put forward by UNESCO (2013) as media and information literacy (MIL) motivates the study's analysis of user capacities, not as abstract "skills" but as task-level proficiencies (accreditation, source triangulation, and manipulation recognition) that reasonably moderate the attitudinal effects of exposure to low-epistemic, high-affect content. When the paper uses the term "styled experts," it designates a performance of authority that is orthogonal to credentialed expertise (Turner, 2013). These creators—ranging from political figures and ex-bureaucrats to religious leaders, astrologers, and self-branded "analysts"—traffic in performative certainty and moral-emotional narration more than in verifiable evidence. Drawing on research in political communication and affect, the research narrows six fanaticism cues (Table 2) that are both theoretically grounded and operationally visible in short videos: (1) Hero-saviour framing (a revered leader—often the monarch—depicted as singular solution); (2) Moral-emotional loading

(anger, disgust, sanctification) that heightens arousal; (3) Certainty posturing ("undeniable truth," "proven") substituting for warrant; (4) Conspiracy insinuation (shadowy elites, foreign puppeteers) supplying causal closure; (5) Nostalgia activation (golden-age stability, moral order) that licenses restorative politics; and (6) Call-to-action (attend rallies, share/subscribe, boycott) that funnels affect into mobilization. These cues are not mutually exclusive and often co-occur together (e.g., hero + nostalgia + moral outrage).

The outcome that concerns the study is the royalist (monarchist) sentiment, operationalized as sympathy for monarchical restoration, perceived desirability/legitimacy of a monarch's political role, and belief that monarchy uniquely guarantees stability and moral order. It theorizes that this sentiment is shaped by exposure to fanaticism-as-performance and induced or amplified under contextual conditions such as low institutional trust and affective polarization—two attitudinal environments in which heroic solutionism becomes especially attractive. In practice, these constructs sit on a pathway where performative cues increase engagement and credibility via affect and nostalgia, then act as a cognitive shortcut that aligns grievances (corruption, fragmentation, "moral decay") with a single organizing symbol (the King).

Table 1

Information Disorder Typology and Clip-Level Characteristics

Term	Definition	Intentionality	Typical Formats	Clip-Level Character
Misinformation	False or misleading content shared without intent to harm	Absent	Rumour, mistaken claim, miscaption	False factual claim *without* accusatory/ harm framing
Disinformation	False contents shred *with* intent to harm	Present	Fabrication, deepfake, conspiracy package	False claim *with* cues to malign a person/group/ institution; repeated callouts of 'foreign agent'
Malinformation	Genuine content used to harm (distorted or de-contextualized)	Present	Doxing; old footage as current; selective leak	True/old content reframed to inflame or endanger; mismatch between stated and verifiable time/place

Note. The table represents the Information Disorder Framework categorizing the social media manipulated contents as misinformation, disinformation, and misinformation. Adapted from "Information Disorder: Toward an Interdisciplinary Framework for Research and Policymaking" by Wardle, C., & Derakhshan, H., 2017, Council of Europe. https://rm.coe.int/information-disorder-toward-an-interdisciplinary-framework-for-researc/168076277c.

Literature Review

Early work often treated "misinformation" as a problem of false beliefs corrected by factchecking (Lewandowsky et al., 2012; Nyhan & Reifler, 2010). Subsequent research demonstrated both the diffusion advantage of false over true content (Vosoughi et al., 2018) and the limited durability of corrective efforts when messages are identity-congruent or emotionally arousing (Flynn et al., 2017; Thorson, 2016). Wardle and Derakhshan's (2017) information disorder framework consolidated distinctions among misinformation (false but not malicious intent), disinformation (false and malicious intent), and malinformation (true content maliciously shared)—a typology that better maps the intentions, repertoires, and social effects observed across platforms. This literature helps new research on how information is generated, packaged, and disseminated in a political environment with a shift from narrow concerns with information accuracy.

The sociological studies on "expertise" have long emphasized that epistemic authority is socially negotiated rather than purely based on credentials (Collins & Evans, 2007; Eyal, 2019; Gieryn, 1999). In today's hybrid media ecosystem, the "experts" are constructed or perceived through visibility, interactional alignment, and recognizable performance (Chadwick, 2013). Building on Goffman's (1956) dramaturgical lens and media-rituals scholarship (Couldry, 2003), scholars explain how performance cues—confidence, moralized certainty, and insider affect—substitute for evidentiary warrants in competitive attention markets (Farkas & Schou, 2019; Nichols, 2017). The study delineates the "styled experts" not as "pseudo-experts" but as strategic actors manifesting signs of expertise (authoritative tone, visual branding, claim templates), capturing and retaining audience attention. This literature review is focused on the reasons for information formulation and dissemination, and the degree of recognizing credibility judgments even in the absence of traditional proof. A significant number of work links emotional language to virality (Berger & Milkman, 2012) and document the specific force of moral-emotional expressions in diffusing political content (Brady et al., 2017, 2021). Social media affordances (visibility metrics, frictionless sharing, algorithmic ranking) preferentially amplify high-arousal material (Kearney, 2019; Kramer et al., 2014), while homophilous networks and threat-based appeals intensify affective polarization—the out-party as disliked and distrusted beyond policy disagreement (Iyengar & Westwood, 2015; Lelkes, 2016). Experimental evidence suggests that cross-partisan exposure can backfire under certain conditions (Bail et al., 2018), and that accuracy-salience nudges yield modest improvements but do not rewire incentive structures (Pennycook & Rand, 2019; Greifeneder et al., 2021). Together, these findings explain why affect-heavy, identity-congruent content—precisely the register favoured by performative "styled experts"—travels farther and sticks longer than drier, evidence-heavy discourse.

Research on TikTok/short-video cultures shows that brevity, audio-visual remix, and repeated stylistic templates (hooks, jump cuts, on-screen captions) reward theatricality and narrative compression (Abidin, 2021; Zulli & Zulli, 2022; Klug et al., 2021). As a result, certainty posturing ("100% proof," "undeniable facts") and conspiracy insinuation co-travel with highly legible aesthetics (emphatic sound design, meme formats) that lower cognitive load while signalling insider competence (Bhandari & Bimo, 2022; Marwick & Boyd, 2011). The platformization literature further argues that recommendation systems optimize for engagement proxies, not veracity, thereby structurally advancing content that blends affect and confidence over source-rich, slow-to-consume analysis (Gillespie, 2018; Caplan & Boyd, 2018). For our purposes, this line of work motivates measuring message features (the cues) rather than relying on platform labels or channel provenance.

Psychological studies of conspiracy belief identify needs for control, uniqueness, and causal closure as key drivers, especially under uncertainty and institutional distrust (Imhoff & Lamberty, 2018; van Prooijen & Douglas, 2017). Linguistically, epistemic certainty (dogmatic modal verbs, categorical claims) functions as an authority cue that can increase perceived credibility when audiences lack domain knowledge (Fast & Funder, 2010; Hahn & Oaksford, 2007). Petty & Cacioppo (1986) put forward the Elaboration Likelihood model analysed rhetorics (confidence, moral languages, aesthetics) takes precedence over ability or knowledge in shaping attitudes; these short videos are platforms cultivating such low-elaboration environments. This model suggests how styled experts exert persuasive force irrespective of evidentiary strength.

Moreover, nostalgia is not only an emotion or sentiment but political force instigating memory and desire, especially towards restorative projects (Boym, 2001; Davis, 1979). Comparative work links nostalgic frames to populist and authoritarian appeals, translating diffuse grievances into a promise of moral order (Lammers & Baldwin, 2020; Turner, 2013). In South Asia, scholarship shows how royal symbolism and sacralised authority have historically anchored claims about unity and guardianship, even as constitutional transformations reconfigure political legitimacy (Deo, 2016; Hansen, 2001). Nepal-focused histories document the monarchy's entanglement with national identity and modernization narratives (Hutt, 2002; Whelpton, 2005), while political science accounts trace how crises (insurgency, royal coup, transition) re-activate monarchical imaginaries in public discourse (Hachhethu & Gellner, 2010; Lawoti & Pahari, 2009; Pulami, 2023). Although rigorous, real-based studies on contemporary royalist nostalgia are sparse, adjacent ethnographies of mediated Hindu-national symbolism and crisis storytelling illuminate the persuasive grammar that experts draw upon (Copeman et al., 2023). This literature justifies our focus on hero-saviour and nostalgia-activation cues and their hypothesized association with royalist sentiment.

Therefore, these literatures suggest a consistent picture: (1) information disorder foregrounds the form and intent of political communication, not only its truth value, (2) the sociology of expertise and dramaturgical media theory explain how performative authority substitutes for institutional vetting in hybrid media systems, (3) affective and platform studies identify why moral-emotional, certain, and conspiratorial messages systematically out-compete measured discourse, (4) political-psychology and nostalgia research show how

such messages resonate where institutional distrust and identity threat are salient, offering restorative imaginaries—like a monarch—capable of simplifying complex crises. This synthesis underwrites the study's operational choice to code fanaticism-as-performance at the message level (hero, moral-emotion, certainty, conspiracy, nostalgia, call-to-action), and its substantive expectation that exposure to such cues will be associated with royalist sentiment in the Nepali context.

Methodology

The study employs qualitative research design analysing *fanaticism-as-performance* in Nepal's digital-political communication ecosystem. This approach helps the study to focus on meaning-making, performative authority, and affective persuasion. As primary data, approximately 150 publicly available short videos were analysed from YouTube Shorts, TikTok, and Facebook reels. They were manually curated employing purposive sampling to include high-visibility political commentary related to national governance, corruption, religion, and morality, foreign influence, and monarchy, while purely entertainment or non-political clips were included.

The analysis was conducted via a structured qualitative codebook developed from literature related to information disorder, performative expertise, and affective politics. The codebook identified six core rhetorical use presented in Table 2 alongside markers of epistemic quality and theatricality. In addition to digital content analysis, the comment threads were examined to contextualize how polarization, institutional trust, and monarchist sentient were articulated in relation to short videos.

Data Presentation

The qualitative analysis of the social media short videos reveals fanaticism-as-performance. This section focuses on three important aspects: categorising performative cues directed towards the monarchical sentiments, the actors or styled experts in the social media videos, and the impact of those social media products leading to polarization, trust issues, and enticing royalist sentiments.

What the Videos are—and How They Persuade: Fanaticism-as-Performance

Table 2 crystallizes the communicative grammar of the short-form political videos under study, not as a count of attributes but as a map of recurring rhetorical bundles. Across items, persuasion sustains less on verifiable claims than on a stable repertoire of cues: a heroic solution figure, moralized indignation, categorical certainty, conspiratorial closure, nostalgic evocation of an orderly past, and direct invitations to act. These cues rarely appear in isolation. It shows that the persuasive power of styled-expert videos lies not in their informational content but in their dramaturgy.

First, the hero-saviour frame operates as the emotional core: a singular figure—often the monarch—is projected as Nepal's moral and political redeemer. This prompt translates structural crises into personal ability, prioritizing faith in a leader's charisma over altering political dissatisfaction. In this regard, King Mahendra and King Birendra's short reels

activate nostalgic remembrance of the golden age of order and unity. Together, these digital signals transform political disappointment into a restorative yearning, making monarchy more than a political option into an emotional prerequisite.

Additionally, the moral-emotional loading intensifies this appeal through sharp affect—resentment, dishonour, egotism, and inviolability—that involve audiences by moralizing disagreement. The delivery by styled-experts depended on vehemence, sacred symbols, and emotional replication that substitute emotion for evidence (Collins & Evans, 2007). Similarly, certainty posturing emphasizes reliability through categorical proclamations forming the imprint of epistemological conclusion even in the absence of verification. This logic of total belief by styled-experts functions as a public proof of expertise (Collins & Evans, 2007). While conspiracy insinuation stipulates causal rationality by transferring responsibility in unknown elites, foreign actors, or corrupted politicians. These implications connect personal anxiety among Nepalese to external-unseen enemies and improve in-group solidarity. Lastly, call-to-action cues translate affect into behaviour—urging viewers to engage via sharing posts, commenting, and attending rallies. Through these directives, symbolic engagement becomes political mobilisation.

Table 2

Fanaticism-as-Performance: Cues Through Social Media Short-Videos

Fanaticism Cue	What it Signals	Typical Tropes	Observable Markers in Reels/Shorts	Hypothesized Persuasive Function
Hero-saviour Frame	Singular leader as national solution (often monarch)	King as saviour	Close-ups on kings, royal symbols, triumphal music	Collapses Complex problems into a restorative figure
Moral-emotional Loading	Arousal via outrage	Shame; betrayal; agents	Elevated voice, indignation, sacred idioms	Increases engagement/shares; moralizes disagreements
Certainty Posturing	Performance of knowing	Truth; facts	Declarative without sourcing; graphics labelled proofs	Substitutes affective confidence for evidentiary warrant
Conspiracy Insinuation	Hidden enemies; sell-out elites	Foreign agents; globalist/western plot	Vague connectors, a collage of 'evidences'	Supplies causal closure, directs blame
Nostalgia Activation	Idealized past order/stability	Unity; golden days	Orderly past; royal imagery	Legitimizes restoration; primes royalist sentiment
Call-to-action	From affect to behaviour	Rally; save/safeguard Nepal, culture, and religion	On-screen directives	Converts attention into mobilization

Note. This table categorizes fanatic performances into different performative categories. The table is the outcome of the analysis of the social media reels or short videos.

The Styled Experts: Occupational Façades and Shared Dramaturgy

In Nepal, the "styled experts" populating this social media domain come from disparate occupational façades—retired officials, security veterans, political aspirants, self-branded analysts, religious or astrological authorities, entertainers—but converge on a shared dramaturgy. Those who speak from institutional pasts lean on gravitas and procedural memory, especially of Panchayat, narrating civic decline, in the republic era, through comparative anecdotes that implicitly reestablishes the monarch as guarantor of discipline, morality and order. Political actors deploy immediacy: second-person address, sharpened moral binaries, and kinetic delivery designed to convert indignation into mobilization (Collins & Evans, 2007). The religious and astrological persona sacralise the stakes, folding civic frustration into cosmological frames where restoration appears not merely prudent but fated, for example, the return of Gyanendra Shah or Hridayendra Shah as Nepal's monarch. Similarly, the self-proclaimed analysts borrow the aesthetics of technocracy— only-known-to-them evidence, terminology, clipped studio sets—yet bind inference to implication, using the visual rhetoric of evidence to guide audiences toward predetermined conclusions. Likewise, cultural influencers translate seriousness into sentiment: montage, music, humour, and nostalgia to normalize monarchist affect by making it feel familiar, pleasurable, and shareable.

The styled experts are bureaucratic, prophetic, populist, and aesthetic. What holds constant is the dramaturgy: contingency in place of certainty, contestation in place of morality, and a redemptive figure in place of plural institutional repair. Credibility, in this ecosystem, is an effect of staging. Viewers recurrently ascribe "authenticity" to unscripted speech, blaming, inimical idioms, and controversy. The cumulative effect is a social proof loop: recognizable performance breeds familiarity; familiarity is read as sincerity; sincerity is received as truth

Polarization, Trust, and Royalist Sentiment

Table 3 presents the qualitative relationship among three interlinked attitudinal dimensions—actors, polarization, institutional trust, and royalist sentiment—that emerged consistently across interviews and comment analyses. According to the evidence, polarization functions more as an interpretive lens than a distinct thought, with audiences categorizing political life into moral absolutes and portraying actors as either conspirators or nationalists (Pennycook & Rand, 2019). This binary framing transforms political disagreement into moral hostility and reduces tolerance for procedural uncertainty. The republican institution is considered legitimate when polarization deepens. The trust in legislative institutions, political parties, and even the judiciary becomes restricted, which is communicated through languages of disappointment, betrayal, or complete futility. Thus, the state institutions are characterised as domains controlled by "corrupt political elites" rather than as enablers of people's political will. The collapse of procedural faith thus parallels the expansion of moral certainty, where dialogue once anchored politics, suspicion now does.

Table 3

Characterization Of "Styled Experts" and Recurrent Rhetorical Patterns in Short-Video Content

Actor Category	Typical Rhetorical Pattern	Theatricality Indicators	Inferred Persuasive Function
Ex-bureaucrats/ Security veterans	Institutional decay → need for firm hand	Ranks, office backdrops	Reinstates authority legitimacy through experience
Politicians/ aspirants	Moral outrage → mobilize support	Rally footage, party flag display, and leaders	Channel outrage into mobilization
Religious figures /astrologers	Cosmic prophecy → moral renewal	Religious attire, sacred music	Sacralises monarchy; moral legitimacy
Academicians/analysts	"Evidence" justification → expose hidden plots	Historical evidence, *only* known to them, reveal function	Rationalizes belief through pseudo-analysis
Cultural influencers/ entertainers	Humour/art → shared grievance	Music overlays, montage	Normalizes monarchist feeling via aesthetic affect

Note. This table categorizes the actors involved in the fanaticism-as-performance, indicating their standard stylistic pattern, dramaturgical methods, and what they attempt to infer

As the political system is plagued with moral conflict and undermined institutional trust, the royalist sentiments resurface as an emotionally cohesive alternative. The monarchy is observed as the only solution for partisanship, chaos, and corruption within the present political system. The short reels/videos employ emotive signals/language to elucidate monarchy such as "stability", "national unity", and "discipline", which act as counterbalances to the nation's alleged moral decline. This attitude is more of a nostalgic readjustment of trust than a deliberate ideological repositioning: the imagined monarch personifies honor and conviction in present circumstances where institutions fail. As a result, polarization and institutional mistrust combine to produce the perceptual and emotive ecosystem in which monarchist desire restoration of moral order and epistemic simplicity rather than just regime type becomes conceivable and even attractive.

Discussion

Performance, nostalgia, and democratic risk in Nepal's short-video sphere

The analysis implies Nepal's social media reels/short video ecosystem has given rise to a perceptible spectrum of persuasive strategies that are effective in high-access/low-digital literacy backdrop, including heroic restoration, moralized grievances, conspiratorial closure,

and categorical certainty. The centre of gravity for social media shifted significantly toward performance over proof in both the 2025 September's Gen-Z movement against social media platform ban and poor governance, and the 2025 March's pro-monarchical protests in Kathmandu. Even in cases where there was little or less evidence, the styled-experts were observed on almost real social media feeds with dramaturgical signals. These signals do more than entertain in a [digital] society where anti-corruption discourses, generational discontent, and party fragmentation fatigue are prevalent; the styled-experts provide a rationale for making sense of disorder and give rise to a narrative solution through royalist restoration. In short videos/reels, the monarchy is portrayed as a moral pathway that leads to promises of unity, order, and dignity rather than a constitutional framework. This moral technology received salience precisely as Nepal cycled through a platform crackdown and a dramatic policy reversal following deadly youth-led protests, making questions of information governance inseparable from questions of regime legitimacy.

First, the aftermath of the Gen Z protests has normalized a politics in which platform policy is understood as regime policy (Sombatpoonsiri, 2025). Any renewed attempt to restrict or re-register major services (or the perception of selective enforcement) will be understood through a legitimacy lens, not merely a regulatory one, especially by a digitally native electorate. Second, the compressed electoral calendar heading into early 2026 intensifies incentives for all actors to weaponize short-video performance—both for mobilization and for delegitimation.

Table 4

Cross-Tabulation of Polarization, Institutional Trust, and Royalist Sentiment

Dominant Evaluative Tone	Common Trust Descriptors	Typical Polarization Markers	Indicative Stance Towards Monarchy	Illustrative Narrative Pattern
Pragmatic/ issue-based	Weak or corrupt government	Criticism across parties	Monarchy as ceremonial/ symbolic only	Seeking reform; recognizing political risk
Ambivalent/ nostalgic	Failed system	Disgusts for parties, limited hero rhetoric	Conditional acceptance ("may be a need for guidance)	Balance nostalgia with republican ideals
Moralized/absolutist	No one to trust except the King	Binary *us-them*, vilification of elites	Strong restorative royalism ("the King *must* return)	Frames monarchy as moral salvation and national rebirth

Note: The table represents the relationship between different trust descriptors in the social media short videos through different polarization markers, enticing diverse levels of monarchist sentiments.

The styled-experts' dramaturgical performance can translate elite signals into vernacular indignation in such a situation, often with plausible deniability for formal organizations, making them "force multipliers" for political parties and pressure groups (Turner, 2013). The risk posed is simple: escalatory dissemination of information quickly intensifies from affective performance [only] to coordinated street action as similar to the narrative frictions or occurrences to 28 March 2025. The insubstantiality of the governance is highlighted by the fact that government actions against unregistered platforms caused lethal rioting before being reversed.

The findings show a consistent affective pathway where communication style becomes belief content in low-trust discourse. The peripheral authority signals, such as theatrical certainties, moralized binaries, and nostalgic language, take audiences from grievances to closure. The trust shifts to individuals and symbols that promise quick repair when institutions are perceived as captured (Gillespie, 2018). In practice, dramatization and modulation, which include close-up camera, the indicative intonation, the reasoning, and ritualized visuals, work persuasively. These lead up to styled-experts such as actors, religious personas, and retired officials converge around comparable rhetorical bundles that are tailored for a low-friction interface and a high-friction political present. For political actors, the practical lesson is counterintuitive: refuting the assertions without addressing the dramaturgy frequently backfires. Ignoring such rhetoric in counter-messaging allows those who are skilled at it to take control of the psychological landscape. The styled-expert environment serves as a mediated moral network that connects otherwise disparate audiences from a sociopolitical perspective. Figures like Durga Prasai exemplify how entrepreneurial actors leverage parasocial intimacy and symbolic repertoires (sacral nationalism, anti-elite grievance, promises of disciplinary order) to stitch together heterogeneous publics under a restorationist banner (Aryal & Pulami, 2025). Such brokerage is more than just discursive; it has already been tested and proven street-level capacity where protest and performance reinforce one another, first in March 2025 and again in later mobilization calls the same year. The lines of accountability in media spaces are further blurred by the reputational permeability between influencers and formal politics (including invitations to talks and efforts at co-optation) (Abidin, 2021). Regardless of the official accomplishment of political parties with monarchical allegiances, this [digitally] networked performance politics shall probably continue in the 2026 elections; the deeper cultural shift is that royalist discourse has been re-legitimized as a socially acceptable remedy for moral chaos. Because platform dynamics play a significant role in this re-legitimation, concentrating solely on individuals runs the risk of overlooking infrastructural reproduction of the style (Abidin, 2021).

Nepal currently faces a structural irony: a large portion of the electorate lacks proficiency in verification and contextualization, despite the country having high internet access. Because royalist imagery and memory scripts are culturally "ready-to-hand," they spread quickly once amplified by content creators who comprehend the dramaturgical logic of the

platforms. This contradiction interacts with a saturated nostalgia politics. When you combine this with the policy volatility of 2025—ban, backlash, deaths, reversal—it has a communicative environment where platform governance is already politically charged. There are two practical implications. First, civic capacity must be treated as an immediate risk-mitigation priority in the run-up to elections: rapid-cycle, vernacularized credibility cues (how to spot de-contextualised video; how to read categorical certainty) can be disseminated via creators with cross-camp credibility rather than solely through state channels. Second, platform policy must move from episodic directives to rule-bound coordination: a public registry of compliance, clear escalation ladders, due-process timelines for takedowns, and an election-period protocol (archiving requirements, rapid-appeal panels, ad-library transparency) jointly owned by the Election Commission, civil society, and major platforms. These are not silver bullets, but they lower the temperature by ensuring that content disputes do not immediately become disputes about regime intent.

However, as the study is qualitative and interpretative by design, the manually curated corpus privileges high-salience videos and public-facing reels; it cannot capture private-group circulation or encrypted ecosystems where mobilization narratives may differ. Intentionality (a hinge in information-disorder typologies) is inferred cautiously from observable cues; misclassification remains possible, especially in satire, remix, or second-order commentary. The styled-expert categories are analytic conveniences that inevitably compress hybrid identities. Audience interpretations are reconstructed from comments and interviews; they remain vulnerable to selection bias and social desirability effects. Lastly, the qualitative association between polarization, distrust, royalist sentiment, and styled-expert consumption is more than just a causal estimate; it recognises patterns and mechanisms that should be confirmed in future panel or field designs.

Fanaticism-as-performance is a competitive political style in contemporary Nepal, where platform governance is debated, party systems are delicate, and cultural memory provides ready restoration scripts. For the time being, the democratic actors' immediate task is to outcompete the dramaturgy that makes fabrications seem true, in addition to correcting falsehoods. To prevent the next crisis or campaign from turning communicative heat into political fire, it is necessary to combine rights-preserving platform rules with performance-literate civic capacity.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to examine how fanaticism functions as performance in Nepal's social media sphere and how, in the face of declining confidence in democratic institutions, this performative approach rekindles monarchist nostalgia. The study displays that persuasion in Nepal's short-video environment primarily relies on affective dramaturgy rather than factual deliberation by evaluating the communicative panache of styled-experts, including their theatrical certainty, moral-emotional language, conspiratorial closure, and invocation of heroic restoration. The results show that these performances offer emotionally consistent explanations for political chaos in a setting with high digital access but low digital literacy, translating disillusionment into the conviction that moral salvation is found in a single, restorative figure. In a volatile political moment, the narratives surrounding the

reestablishment of the monarchy thus resurface not only as a historical memory but also as a symbol through which citizens re-negotiate identity, stability, and trust. The study emphasizes the critical need to improve civic capacity, platform transparency, and performance-literate media education while also highlighting how social media performance can erode institutional legitimacy and exacerbate polarization. Finally, fanaticism-as-performance in Nepal's digital politics is both a symptom and a warning that democratic resilience now depends as much on communication integrity as on institutional architecture. It also reflects the crisis of epistemic trust in the republic.

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