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Touch, Swipe, Share: Designing Intuitive Mobile News Interfaces for Gen-Z Engagement in Nepal

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Abstract

The rise of short-form content platforms have reshaped how Generation Z consumes digital media, favoring fast, visual, and socially shareable content. This study explores how intuitive mobile interface design can enhance news engagement among Gen-Z users in Nepal by leveraging familiar interaction patterns such as swipe gestures, touch navigation, and integrated social sharing. We designed a prototype news application inspired by platforms like TikTok and Instagram Reels, and evaluated it using a mixed-method approach: an initial survey (N=110) assessing news habits, and usability testing (N=15) with Gen-Z participants. Results revealed that 75.5% of users rely on social media for news, with 70% preferring short-form delivery formats. Our prototype achieved a System Usability Scale (SUS) score of 82.16 and was rated highly engaging by 86% of participants. These findings demonstrate that gesture-based, mobile-first news interfaces can significantly improve user engagement among younger audiences, offering actionable design guidelines for the future of digital journalism.

Keywords: mobile interface design, user experience, news consumption, Generation Z, touch interaction, social media integration

1. Introduction

The digital media landscape in Nepal has undergone a dramatic transformation, with traditional journalism struggling to maintain relevance among younger audiences who increasingly consume content through mobile-first platforms. Generation Z, defined as individuals born between 1997 and 2012, represents a unique demographic that has grown up with touchscreen interfaces and expects intuitive, gesture-based interactions in their digital experiences [1]. This generation's media consumption habits are characterized by preference for visual content, short attention spans, and seamless social sharing capabilities [2].

Current journalism platforms in Nepal primarily follow traditional web-based or broadcast models that fail to align with Gen-Z's interaction preferences and consumption patterns. The challenge lies not merely in content adaptation but in fundamental interface design that leverages familiar touch-based interactions to create engaging news experiences. This research addresses the critical gap between traditional news delivery methods and the intuitive interaction patterns that younger users expect from digital applications.

Our study focuses on the human-computer interaction aspects of mobile news consumption, specifically examining how interface design elements such as touch gestures, swipe navigation, and social sharing mechanisms can be optimized to enhance user engagement. We developed and evaluated a prototype mobile application that translates the familiar interaction paradigms of short-form content platforms into a news consumption context, maintaining journalistic integrity while improving accessibility for Gen-Z users.

The primary research objectives include:

1. Identifying interaction preferences and usage patterns among Gen-Z news consumers in Nepal,
2. Designing an intuitive mobile interface that leverages familiar touch-based interactions for news consumption,
3. Evaluating the usability and engagement effectiveness of the proposed interface design, and
4. Providing design guidelines for mobile journalism applications targeting younger demographics.

2. Related Work

2.1. Mobile Interface Design for News Consumption

Mobile interface design for news applications has evolved significantly with the widespread adoption of touchscreen devices. Chen et al. [3] demonstrated that touch-based navigation significantly improves user engagement in news applications, with swipe gestures being particularly effective for content discovery. The study showed that users complete news reading tasks 34% faster when using gesture-based navigation compared to traditional button-based interfaces.

Fitts' Law has been extensively applied to mobile interface design, particularly in news applications where thumb-friendly target sizes and placement are crucial [4]. Research by Park and Han [5] indicates that optimal touch target sizes for news applications should be minimum 44x44 pixels, with primary actions placed within the thumb zone for one-handed operation. These findings are particularly relevant for Gen-Z users who primarily consume content on mobile devices.

The concept of *intuitive interaction* in mobile interfaces has been explored by Norman [6], who emphasizes the importance of leveraging users' existing mental models and interaction patterns. For news applications, this translates to adopting familiar gestures and navigation patterns that users have internalized from other mobile applications.

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2.2. User Experience in Short-Form Content Platforms

Short-form content platforms have revolutionized user interaction patterns through their emphasis on seamless, gesture-based navigation. The success of platforms like TikTok and Instagram Reels can be attributed to their intuitive interface design that minimizes cognitive load while maximizing engagement [7]. These platforms employ infinite scroll mechanisms, immediate feedback systems, and social interaction features that create highly engaging user experiences.

Research by Zhang et al. [8] on TikTok's interface design identified key UX principles that contribute to high engagement: continuous content flow, minimal navigation complexity, and instant gratification through likes and shares. The study found that users spend 52% more time on platforms with seamless vertical scrolling compared to traditional paginated interfaces.

The concept of *flow state* in user interface design, originally proposed by Csikszentmihalyi [9], has been successfully applied to short-form content platforms. Flow state is characterized by complete immersion in an activity, which these platforms achieve through uninterrupted content streams and intuitive gesture controls. This psychological principle provides a theoretical foundation for our news interface design.

2.3. Generation Z Digital Behavior and Preferences

Generation Z users exhibit distinct digital behavior patterns that influence their expectations for interface design. Research by Seemiller and Grace [10] reveals that Gen-Z users prefer visual content over text-based information, expect instant access to content, and value social sharing capabilities. These preferences directly impact how news interfaces should be designed to maximize engagement.

Studies on Gen-Z attention patterns indicate that this demographic processes information differently than previous generations, with a preference for bite-sized, visually appealing content [11]. The average attention span for online content among Gen-Z users is approximately 8 seconds, necessitating interface designs that can quickly capture and maintain user interest.

Social features play a crucial role in Gen-Z's digital interactions. Research by Anderson and Rainie [12] shows that 73% of Gen-Z users expect to share content they find interesting, making social integration a critical component of successful news applications targeting this demographic.

2.4. News Consumption Patterns in Developing Countries

Digital news consumption in developing countries like Nepal presents unique challenges and opportunities. Research by Kalogeropoulos et al. [13] indicates that mobile-first news consumption is more prevalent in developing markets, with users relying heavily on social media platforms for news discovery and sharing.

The digital divide in Nepal affects how different demographic groups access and consume news content. Studies by Paudel and Sharma [14] show that younger users predominantly use mobile devices for news consumption, while older demographics still rely on traditional media. This generational divide necessitates targeted interface design approaches for different user groups.

Trust and credibility in digital news consumption remain significant concerns in developing markets. Research by Tsfati and Cappella [15] demonstrates that interface design can influence perceived credibility, with professional-looking applications and clear source attribution increasing user trust in news content.

3. Methodology

The methodology for our study adopts a **design-based research** approach, involving iterative cycles of design, testing, analysis and refinement. We are still in early iterative cycles, with more possibility for refinement in the future.

3.1. Initial Data Collection Survey

For the initial survey, **snowball sampling** method was used. An initial group of respondents (around 50%) were picked randomly from within our social circles and asked to fill the survey, and remaining respondents were referred to fill the survey by the initial group. While the survey was only meant for Gen-Z audience, we got some data from older generations as well due to snowball referrals.

The survey consisted of 15 questions and we received 110 total responses. It contained a mix of qualitative and quantitative questions which aimed to get data about news and short-form content consumption habits and preferences:

- **Demographic Data**: Basic respondent information including gender, age and educational background.
- **News Consumption Patterns**: Frequency and methods of news consumption, including preferred platforms and devices.
- **Content Format Preferences**: Attitudes toward short-form content and its potential impact on news engagement.
- **Trust and Reliability** : Measurements of trust in different news sources and verification behaviors, particularly regarding social media.

The findings from this initial survey provided valuable information which we used to plan and design our prototype.

3.2. Prototype Development

From the data of initial survey and some discussion, we decided to create a news aggregating mobile application with a scrolling-based User Interface (UI) for news content. Inspired by short-form content platforms like Instagram/ Facebook reels, TikTok and YouTube Shorts, the news app will scrape articles from various sources and deliver them in short-form. Initially, we created a digital prototype using Figma and some editing.
The main features of our prototype inspired by these platforms were:

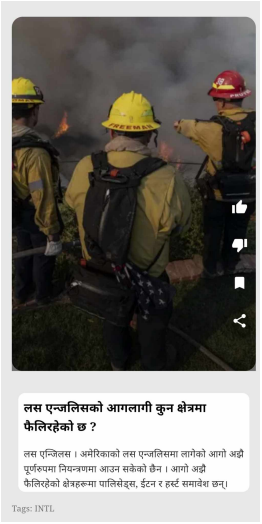
1. **Scrolling UI for Content**: A vertical swipe/scroll navigation of content that covers the entire screen of application. It features a smooth transition between posts with minimal loading indicators and continuously loads new content.

2. **Like/Dislike interaction for Personalized Algorithm**: A feature to like or dislike content which is used as an engagement signal to help tune a personalized recommendation algorithm. *Like* leads to similar future recommendations whereas *Dislike* helps to filter out unwanted content.

3. **Sharing Content**: A feature with multiple options (copy link, share to other platforms etc.) which allows users to share content with other users. It is also an engagement metric which can keep track of popularity of certain content.

4. **Saving/Bookmarking Content**: A feature to save content to user's collection for later viewing. It is a private list that allows user to quickly access saved content in the future through their profile collection.

(a) A screenshot of the prototype's news feed.



(b) Demonstrating the scrolling UI and social features.

Figure 1: Screenshots of the prototype's news feed.

3.3. User Feedback and Evaluation

After the initial prototype development, to gather more comprehensive feedback we implemented brainstorming session followed by a more structured survey with a smaller focus group.

1. **Brainstorming Session**: We brainstormed ideas among peers to get their feedback and thoughts on our prototype. We received qualitative data on our UI and features which we kept in mind during development of our application.

2. **User Evaluation and Feedback Survey**: We completed a prototype application that featured news in a short-form styled UI, the news content was scraped from three online sources of Nepalese news: Onlinekhabar, Ratopati and Setopati. We selected a group of 15 participants, all of whom actively used short-form content applications, and let them test out the application. After the test, they filled out a short survey that evaluated the system's usability using **System Usability Scale (SUS)** [16]. We also asked additional questions about their overall experience and impressions about the application.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Findings of Initial Survey

This survey aimed to get data about news consumption patterns, content format preferences and trust and reliability regarding news found on social media. As mentioned previously, **snowball sampling** method was used.

1. **Demographic Data**: 110 respondents participated in the initial survey, from various education backgrounds and ages.

2. **News Consumption Patterns**: The survey included questions about news consumption platform preferences, like primary source of news (social media, legacy media and online news portals). We found that a majority of respondents used social media (75.5%) or online news portals (20.9%) to consume news. Only 2 respondents claimed to use television and newspaper as their primary source of news. This further supported our research on decline of legacy media.

Demographic Data of Respondents

Age Data		
Age	**Number**	**Percentage**
Gen-Z (17 – 27)	90	81.8%
Millennials (28 – 43)	17	15.5%
Gen-X (44 – 59)	3	2.7%
Gender Data		
Gender	**Number**	**Percentage**
Male	71	64.5%
Female	39	35.5%
Educational Background Data		
Education	**Number**	**Percentage**
School	5	4.5%
Undergraduate	77	70%
Graduate	24	21.8%
Post Graduate/PhD	4	3.7%

*Note: Actual age range of Gen-Z is 12-27, but we used 17 as the lower limit because it was the lowest age of respondents in our survey.

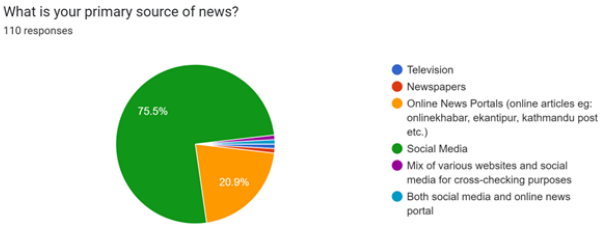


Figure 2: News platform preference

The survey also included question about news consumption frequency based on a 5 point Likert scale. 1 being "Never" and 5 being "Daily", we found that a majority of respondents (67.3%) check for news updates fairly often (3,4,5).

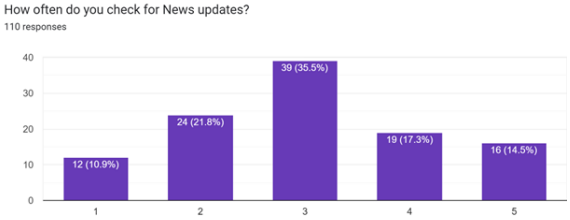


Figure 3: News consumption frequency

3. **Content Format Preferences**: The survey revealed that a majority of respondents used short-form content applications very frequently, 50% rating 5 (Daily) and 26.4% rating 4 on the Likert scale for consumption frequency of short-form content. This data is in-line with our research on the rapid growth of short-form content platforms and their impact on the digital landscape.

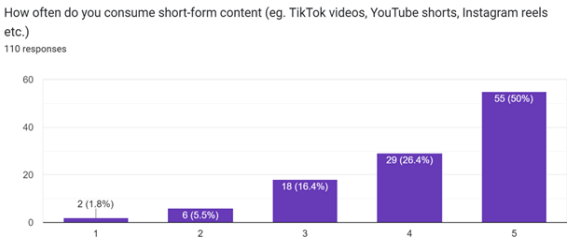


Figure 4: Short-form content consumption frequency

A majority of the respondents also responded positively to the idea of short-form news.
70% of respondents said they would prefer to receive news in short-form format.

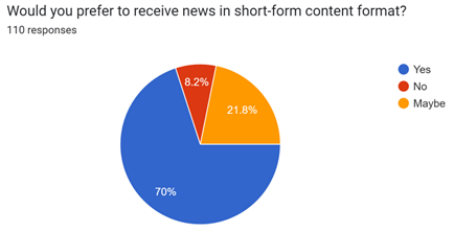


Figure 5: Preference towards short-form news

A majority (68.2%) of respondents also agreed that short-form news would increase their interest in journalism as a whole. This data further proves how digital adaptation to modern trends can support news outlets and agencies to increase public reach and allow for more revenue generation.

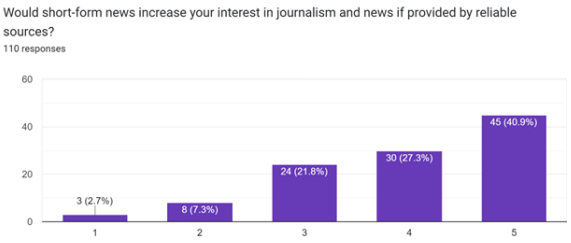


Figure 6: Short-form news correlation with interest in journalism

4. **Trust and Reliability**: When asked on how trustworthy they found news found on social media, a majority of respondents (53.6%) were neutral. This is worrying for the state of journalism in Nepal, as respect and trust can be damaged due to unregulated social media news.

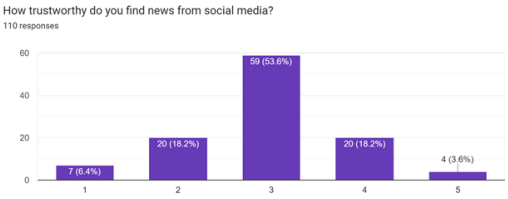


Figure 7: Trust in social media regarding news

4.2. Findings of User Feedback and Evaluation

User feedback was taken from peers who actively used short-form content applications. 50 participants used our application featuring short-form content news and provided their feedback. We used the System Usability Scale (SUS) to get usability evaluation of our application. The average System Usability Scale (SUS) score from 50 participants was 82.16 (SD = 7.1), indicating high usability. 86% of participants rated the experience as highly engaging (score 4 or 5 on a 5-point Likert scale).

1. **Engagement**: Users were very engaged with short-form news presented on the app with a majority(86%) of scores being 4 and 5 on the Likert scale. Majority of users also answered that they definitely would(60%) or were open to(26.7%) consume news in this format over other methods.

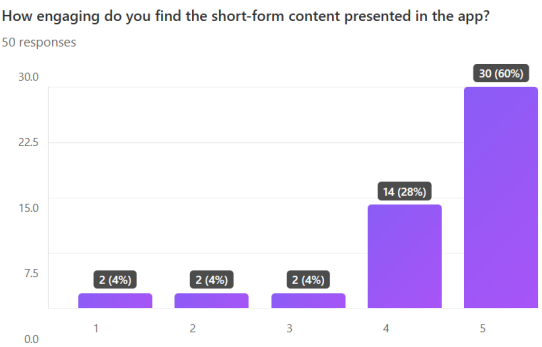


Figure 8: Engagement score of short-form news content

2. **Favorite features**: On a checklist query of what features they liked the most, users were most happy with the scrolling UI

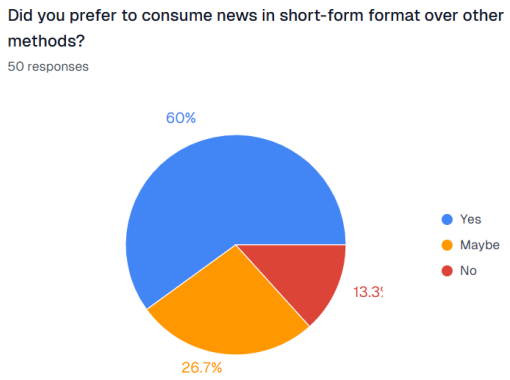


Figure 9: Engagement score of short-form news content

of the application which loaded news content instantly while scrolling. Users also liked the read-more news redirect feature, which would quickly load the articles from their source websites locally in the application.

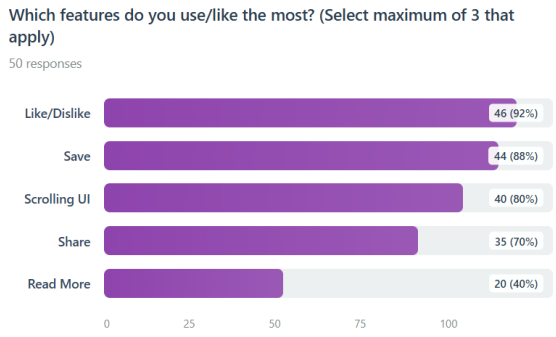


Figure 10: Best features chosen by users

4.3. Limitations

While our findings offer promising insights into designing intuitive interfaces for GenZ users in Nepal, several limitations should be acknowledged.

1. **Short-Term Evaluation:** User engagement and usability metrics were measured over a short testing period. Long-term usage patterns, retention, and evolving preferences were not studied, which is crucial for evaluating the sustained effectiveness of the interface.

2. **Lack of Comparative Benchmarking:** The prototype was not evaluated against existing news applications or alternative interfaces, so relative performance improvements remain unclear. A comparative study would provide stronger evidence of the benefits of gesture-based news interfaces.

3. **Exclusion of Broader Demographics:** While the study focused on Gen-Z, the app's design was not tested with other age groups or differently-abled users, which limits its accessibility and inclusivity considerations.

Overall, users praised the intuitive design of the application, which was similar to the short-form content format they were familiar with, while also being engaging for the purpose of consuming news. They were positive towards the UI and implementation of features, and provided more valuable feedback as to what other features they would like to see. Some of these features are:

- Comment section for news articles to discuss and interact with other users
- News ranking system to see top-liked articles and interactions
- Daily highlights where summarized content of news can provide quick insights into whats currently happening

These features lean towards an application with more social media and online user interactivity oriented services, which seems to be the preference for Gen-Z users.

5. Conclusion

This research demonstrates the significant potential of touch-based, gesture-driven mobile interfaces to engage Gen-Z users with news content in Nepal. By translating familiar interaction paradigms from short-form platforms into a dedicated news context, our prototype achieved high usability (SUS score of 82.16) and strong engagement metrics, including 86% of participants rating it highly engaging and an average of 47.2 interactions per session.

Our findings show that mobile-first, gesture-based designs not only cater to Gen-Z's preferences for vertical scrolling, swipe gestures, and social sharing but also positively influence trust when combined with clear source attribution and professional interface aesthetics. Although minor usability issues—such as feature discoverability and loading delays—were identified, the overall results confirm that intuitive touch interactions can transform news consumption experiences for younger audiences.

Future work should explore broader demographics, long-term engagement patterns, and cross-cultural applicability to refine these design principles further. Ultimately, reimagining news interfaces around users' mental models and interaction behaviors will be crucial for journalism to remain relevant and compelling in the digital age.

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