

Research on Algorithmic Governance and Content Management of Digital Platforms in the Republic of Korea under the Platformization Background

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Abstract: In recent years, digital platforms in the Republic of Korea have gained growing influence in news dissemination, video recommendation, and content operation. Represented by NAVER, Kakao, YouTube, Netflix, TVING, and other platforms, algorithms have been deeply embedded in information distribution and user management, and have gradually become a core component of platform governance. Combined with the practical development of digital platforms in the Republic of Korea, this paper analyzes the realistic background and main operation modes of algorithmic governance, as well as its specific manifestations in content management. The study finds that while algorithmic mechanisms improve content matching efficiency and user engagement, they also trigger problems such as unbalanced information distribution, expanded platform power, and difficulties in liability identification. In the future, platform governance needs to strike a more reasonable balance among technological innovation, market competition, and public interests.

Keywords: Platformization; Digital platforms in the Republic of Korea; Algorithmic governance; Content management

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1. Introduction

Since the start of the 21st century, digital platforms have become the core structure of the media industry. The traditional media system centers on newspapers, radio, television, and publishing houses, and its communication process follows a linear flow of content production, editorial review, channel distribution, and audience reception. With the development of search, social media, video, and streaming platforms, information dissemination increasingly relies on platform infrastructure. The core transformation brought by platformization lies in the fact that media communication is no longer merely a one-way process of “content

flowing from media institutions to audiences.” Instead, it has evolved into a dynamic process restructured by platform rules, data interfaces, recommendation algorithms, and user feedback. Platforms continuously calculate user preferences by collecting behavioral data including clicks, searches, comments, stay duration, shares, and paid consumption, and adjust content rankings accordingly. As a result, algorithms have transformed from back-end technical tools into institutional mechanisms that shape information visibility.

Republic of Korea boasts mature internet infrastructure, a high penetration rate of mobile communication, and a well-developed digital consumption culture, with both domestic and global platform enterprises operating actively. NAVER has long served as the Republic of Korea’s portal search engine, news aggregator, and entry for life services; Kakao expanded from instant messaging to social networking, payment, content, games, and commercial services; YouTube exerts powerful influence on video consumption and public issue communication in the Republic of Korea; Netflix has upgraded competition among streaming platforms through investment in Korean content. Despite different business types, all the above platforms rely on algorithmic systems for content recommendation, user management, and commercial monetization ^[1-3].

2. Forming background of algorithmic governance mechanisms on digital platforms in the Republic of Korea

First, the formation of algorithmic governance on digital platforms in the Republic of Korea is linked to shifts in media access points. In the Republic of Korea’s traditional media system, newspapers and TV stations acted as core producers and distributors of information. News outlets spread content via exclusive pages, channels, and programs, allowing audiences to access information through relatively fixed paths. After the popularization of the Internet, portal platforms gradually became major entry points for users to obtain news and daily information ^[4-5]. Portal platforms such as NAVER and Daum not only provide search services but also aggregate massive news. Users often browse news through portal homepages or mobile information streams. This structural change weakened traditional media’s control over distribution channels. Although media organizations still produce news, they no longer fully control the exposure of news articles. Whether news can gain visibility increasingly depends on platform recommendations, ranking rules, user clicks, and real-time popularity. For media organizations, portals are more than external channels; they constitute a critical environment that shapes communication effects and operating revenues. Even sound internal management within media organizations may put them at a competitive disadvantage if they fail to adapt to platform distribution logic, which reflects this structural shift.

Second, the rise of algorithmic governance is closely tied to data-driven management. Platforms can record user behaviors in real time to generate data on content performance, user interests, and commercial transactions. Korean platform enterprises continuously integrate data from search, news, communities, advertising, social interaction, and content consumption to build unified data decision-making systems. Data-based management has replaced experience judgment and periodic statistics adopted by traditional media, shifting management from post-event summarization to real-time adjustment ^[6-8]. Algorithmic governance of digital platforms in the Republic of Korea also stems from the expansion of platform ecosystems. NAVER is not a standalone search tool but an integrated platform ecosystem covering news, shopping, Q&A blogs, advertising, payment and content services. Similarly, Kakao evolved from KakaoTalk to an interconnected system of social relations, payment, games, music and commercial services. More complex platform

ecosystems require algorithms for classification, ranking, matching and risk identification, making algorithms the internal collaborative infrastructure of platforms.

Third, discussions over platform responsibilities among the Republic of Korea government and the public have intensified. As platforms exert influence over public opinion, issues including algorithmic transparency, fairness of news ranking, governance of disinformation, management of malicious comments, youth protection and personal information security have entered the policy agenda. Platforms can no longer evade liabilities by claiming to be merely technical intermediaries and must respond to public interest requirements.

To sum up, the algorithmic governance mechanisms of digital platforms in the Republic of Korea did not emerge naturally from technological progress alone. They are jointly driven by the platformization of media access, datafication of user behaviors, integration of platform ecosystems, competition between global platforms, and transformation of national regulation. Essentially, the emergence of algorithmic governance represents an institutional restructuring of content, user, and commercial relations within the Republic of Korea's media industry under the trend of platformization.

3. Visibility governance on portal platforms: A case study of NAVER news recommendation

Within the Republic of Korea's digital media landscape, NAVER has long functioned as a vital information hub. Apart from search services, users frequently engage with various public issues through its news pages, mobile information streams, and affiliated communities. Unlike traditional news outlets, NAVER does not produce large volumes of original news itself. However, its news aggregation mechanism, sorting logic of search results, and operation rules of recommendation systems significantly shape the reach and exposure of news content^[9–10]. Therefore, NAVER is a frequent research subject for studies on the Republic of Korea's platform algorithmic governance.

In the traditional media era, news screening and ranking were the exclusive duty of editorial departments. Editors determined news placement and display order based on event importance, timeliness, and public attention, which long constituted the core organizational model of news dissemination.

In practice, algorithmic recommendation has improved the efficiency of information distribution, enabling users to access interest-matching content with lower information acquisition costs. Nevertheless, platform sorting rules may alter the competitive landscape of different news types. Some topics with high public value but low traffic may fail to gain equal exposure as entertainment content. Some researchers worry that platform evaluation criteria exert sustained impacts on news organizations' content production strategies.

Interdependence has formed between the Republic of Korea's news outlets and portal platforms. Visits originating from portals such as NAVER have become a major source of online traffic for most media, so news producers must adapt to platform distribution rules when releasing articles. Meanwhile, platforms rely on continuous news input to maintain user engagement and information service functions.

However, the two sides hold unequal resources: platforms possess user data, recommendation algorithms and page layout rules, while media organizations mainly undertake content production. To secure exposure, news outlets often adjust headline formats, content structures and release strategies to fit platform operation logics.

NAVER's algorithmic governance is also reflected in its adjustments to comment sections, hot ranking lists and news exposure volume. Republic of Korea society has long raised concerns over malicious comments, public opinion manipulation, and ranking mechanisms. When facing public criticism, platforms respond by removing or revising ranking lists, strengthening comment moderation, introducing human review, and partially disclosing recommendation principles. This proves that algorithmic governance is not a fully automated process but a continuous interaction among platforms, media, government, and the public ^[11].

From an operational perspective, news recommendation is closely linked to advertising and user retention. News content attracts users and extends their stay on the platform, which in turn drives traffic to search, advertising, and shopping services. Thus, platform news governance serves both public information management and ecosystem operation. Algorithms simultaneously fulfill public information distribution, user operation, and commercial monetization functions. The NAVER case illustrates that portal algorithmic governance is essentially visibility governance. It shapes news dissemination via technical means while creating tensions between public value and commercial efficiency. To understand the Republic of Korea platform algorithmic governance, one must look beyond algorithmic accuracy and examine institutional power, commercial objectives, and public accountability behind algorithms.

4. Relational governance in social ecosystems: A case study of Kakao's social algorithms

If NAVER represents visibility governance for portal platforms, Kakao embodies relational governance for social ecosystem platforms. As the Republic of Korea's widely used instant messaging tool, KakaoTalk has evolved into an integrated platform connecting social interaction, payment, games, music, content, and life services. The distinctive feature of Kakao's algorithmic governance lies in matching content based on social networks in addition to user interests ^[12].

Information dissemination logics differ between portal and social platforms. Portals distribute content through search and homepage aggregation, while social platforms spread information via social ties, group chats, friend interactions, and shares ^[13–14]. Kakao's core asset is its user social network. Based on communication relations, interaction frequency, and service consumption habits, algorithms judge not only users' preferences but also their social connections, relational scenarios, and the transmissibility of specific content within social circles.

Relational governance strengthens platform stickiness. Users complete socializing, payment, entertainment, and information access within Kakao, and accumulated data facilitate coordinated services ^[15]. From an operational standpoint, a single user behavior can activate multiple business scenarios: content sharing in chats may lead users to news or entertainment pages; post-consumption activities may drive payment and shopping services; gaming and music behaviors further enrich user portraits. Yet relational governance also carries risks. Social networks may accelerate the spread of rumors and extreme emotions, as users tend to trust and forward information shared by acquaintances. If algorithms amplify high-interaction content, closed information loops within communities may be reinforced. As a fundamental social infrastructure, Kakao's service stability, data security and content governance directly affect public life.

Kakao's algorithmic governance integrates regulatory and commercial objectives ^[16–17]. Platforms must manage harmful, spam and fraudulent information while sustaining user activity. Algorithms switch dynamically between risk identification, content recommendation, social networking and consumption

promotion. Platform governance extends beyond simple deletion of violating content to a full set of mechanisms including risk detection, transmission restriction, user guidance, service coordination and ecosystem monetization.

The Kakao case demonstrates that the Republic of Korea platform governance has evolved beyond pure news management into comprehensive governance of integrated life platforms. Content, social interaction, payment, and commercial activities intertwine within a single ecosystem, making algorithmic governance far more complex. Platforms must address not only violating content but also runaway information diffusion, compliant data usage, transparent commercial recommendations, and protection of user rights. Algorithmic governance of the Republic of Korea social platforms cannot be reduced to mere news recommendation or content moderation; it involves comprehensive management of social relations and daily life services. The deeper social platforms integrate into daily life, the greater public accountability algorithmic governance must bear.

5. Algorithmic governance of cultural content on video and OTT platforms

Video and OTT platforms constitute another key field of algorithmic governance in the Republic of Korea. YouTube, Netflix, TVING, Wavve, and AfreecaTV play important roles in domestic video consumption, entertainment industries, and cultural communication. Unlike portal news platforms, their algorithms exert more direct impacts on viewing duration, content production styles, fan engagement, and the overall cultural industrial structure^[18–19].

While portal platforms mainly shape news distribution, video and OTT platforms directly influence cultural production and consumption. In the Republic of Korea's digital media landscape, YouTube, Netflix, TVING, Wavve, and AfreecaTV serve as major channels for audiovisual content, with algorithmic recommendations covering the whole user experience cycle.

Take YouTube as an example: its recommendation system continuously optimizes results based on viewing history, watch time, likes, comments, and subscriptions. For many users in the Republic of Korea, YouTube functions not only as an entertainment platform but also as a channel for news, social discussion, knowledge learning, and pop culture access. Creators can reach targeted audiences via recommendation algorithms, yet some producers tailor content to fit platform preferences such as high update frequency and emotionally provocative topics to boost interaction.

Netflix's influence centers on content investment and global distribution. In recent years, the Republic of Korea audiovisual works, including *Squid Game*, have gained global popularity via streaming platforms. Netflix evaluates content value based on completion rates, binge-watching behaviors, and cross-regional viewing data. These metrics shape recommendation rankings and guide subsequent content procurement and investment decisions, extending algorithmic impacts beyond distribution to content development.

Facing competition from international streaming services such as Netflix, domestic OTT platforms TVING and Wavve have enhanced data operation capabilities. They prioritize original content and leverage recommendation algorithms to improve content discoverability, raise membership activity, and renewal rates. Algorithms simultaneously deliver content matching and user operation functions.

Live streaming platforms represented by AfreecaTV feature real-time interaction and rapid content generation, bringing heavier regulatory pressures. Platforms adopt combined mechanisms of automatic recognition, user reporting, and human moderation to mitigate the spread of violating content. Meanwhile,

live streaming development relies heavily on audience interaction, gifts, and community participation. Platforms adjust live room exposure based on real-time online numbers and engagement, which may incentivize some hosts to produce highly provocative content and create new governance challenges.

The positive effects of algorithmic governance on video platforms include lowering content discovery costs for niche creators, facilitating global export of the Republic of Korea's cultural products, and providing production feedback for creators. The experience of the Republic of Korea's video and OTT platforms proves that algorithmic governance permeates the entire cultural production chain ^[20]. Algorithms determine what users watch, what platforms invest in, and what content creators produce, as well as how success is measured within cultural industries. For the Republic of Korea, a country with advanced cultural industries, algorithmic governance is both a media management issue and a matter of cultural industrial policy.

6. Conclusion

Algorithmic governance of digital platforms in the Republic of Korea has emerged amid media platformization, datafication of user behaviors, integrated platform ecosystems, and intensified competition among global platforms. Algorithms have become core mechanisms linking content governance, user operation, and commercial operation across the Republic of Korea media platforms. Analysis of typical platforms reveals distinct models: NAVER implements visibility governance for portals, Kakao delivers relational governance for social ecosystems, while YouTube, Netflix, TVING, Wavve, and AfreecaTV demonstrate the complexity of algorithmic governance for cultural content. Despite differing business scopes, all platforms operate a closed loop of “data-recommendation-feedback” to organize content exposure, user attention, and commercial conversion.

Meanwhile, algorithmic governance generates risks including information homogenization, weakened public nature of news, concentrated platform power, ambiguous liability boundaries, and compressed cultural diversity. Platform algorithms are not neutral technical tools but social mechanisms with institutional consequences. As both commercial enterprises and critical public information infrastructure, digital platforms in the Republic of Korea must assume social responsibilities matching their influence.

Disclosure statement

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