

Thoughts on the Long-Term Governance Model of Social Media from the Perspective of Media-Cultural Ecology

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Abstract

By the end of 2025, there will be around 1.125 billion Internet users across China and an Internet penetration rate of 80.1 per cent. WeChat had approximately 1.418 billion monthly active users, Weibo had around 567 million, and Xiaohongshu was over 400 million. The occurrence of false information, cyberbullying, algorithmic echo chambers and vulgar content in the large-scale digital public space indicates structural deficiencies in the traditional special rectification campaigns. Theoretically, media cultural ecology is used to view society and the world of media as an integrated cultural system. Systematically investigates the causes of the governance dilemma. The results show that the long-term governance of social media faces three kinds of structural tensions: the speed of technological iteration cannot keep up with the supply of systems; there is an inherent contradiction between the platform's traffic logic and the public value orientation; and the blurred boundaries of rights and responsibilities for various parties have led to fragmented governance. Based on this, a three-dimensional collaborative long-term governance path of "system-technology-culture" is proposed: to enhance the hierarchical and classified institutional norms, promote technological governance such as algorithm transparency and content identification, cultivate a rational and peaceful digital cultural atmosphere, and advance the governance of social media from phased rectification to institutionalised, routinised and ecologically oriented operation.

Keywords

Media cultural ecology; Social media; Long-term governance; Platform governance; Network ecology.

1. Introduction

Social Platforms have been fully integrated into daily life in China. WeChat Moments, Douyin short videos, Weibo, Xiaohongshu, and others have built a media ecosystem with multiple functions for obtaining information, socializing, consuming culture and expressing opinions. According to the 57th "Statistical Report on the Development of China's Internet", by the end of December 2025, there were about 1.125 billion Internet users across the country and an internet penetration rate of 80.1 per cent. A large number of users indicate that the quality of the social media content system directly affects the spiritual and cultural life of hundreds of millions of people.

Based on the above analysis, it can be seen that the governance problems of the social media ecosystem are no longer confined to a particular industry; instead, serious problems have arisen that affect the quality of the public information environment and the cultivation of social consciousness [1].

Behind the prosperity of the ecosystem are also serious problems. False information spreads rapidly through algorithm recommendation; online violence repeatedly harms individuals under the influence of group emotion; "information cocoons" increase social cognitive

differentiation; and vulgar content damages the growth environment for adolescents. The above problems are not isolated technical failures or deviations in individual behaviour; rather, they are concentrated expressions of structural contradictions in the media culture ecosystem. The direction indicated in the above provision is that, in the future, efforts will shift from special rectification campaigns to constructing institutionalised, regular, long-term mechanisms for network ecological governance.

Based on the review of existing studies, most of the current research on the regulation of social media focuses on a single aspect, such as policy tools, technical measures or the responsibility of platforms, and has failed to conduct an all-encompassing study of social media as a whole cultural system. In accordance with the media cultural ecosystem theory, social media is not merely a collection of content and users but an entire system that includes technical infrastructure, cultural behaviour, power dynamics, values, and so on [2]. Therefore, instead of addressing these problems individually, regulation should focus on altering the operating logic of the whole ecosystem.

2. Analytical Framework for Social Media Governance from the Perspective of Media Cultural Ecology

Based on a correct understanding of the operating rules for media culture in the ecosystem, make modifications and suggestions. Introduce the corresponding theories before presenting this system. The intellectual resources of the theory of media cultural ecology can be traced back to the media ecology school that developed in the mid-to-late 20th century. The school believes that media is an "environment of life" and wishes to explore the relationship among media technology, symbolic forms and culture. With the new era of digitalised development, the social functions of social media have far exceeded those of traditional "media" and are now close to a cultural ecosystem with supporting facilities.

This system has multiple types at the level of internal structure. At the level of actors, platform operators, content creators, ordinary users, commercial enterprises, regulatory authorities, social groups and many others are all in the same area at the same time, and they each occupy different positions in the chain of content production, spread, use and regulation, forming a complex interaction network among themselves [3]. The objectives and behavioural logic of different roles may not be consistent, and thus the system has an inherent complexity. At the level of operation, algorithms for recommending content, content moderation, user interaction, business models, and cultural expressions are all interconnected and affect one another. Algorithms determine what content users can see, and by doing so, they inadvertently restrict users' cognitive horizons and cultural preferences; at the same time, users' cultural expressions, although influenced by algorithms, also feed back to adjust and update these algorithms through their behavior. At the same time, over time, due to the development of technology, changes in society and culture, or other circumstances, this system will inevitably be altered. Any modification to a local component will be propagated across the whole system.

Based on the above, we can find two prominent deficiencies in the current governance practices of social media under the traditional model. The first is the fragmentation of governance actions. Many measures have been taken to address problems such as false information, online violence and vulgar content separately, without coordinating their operation within the overall ecosystem; as a result, different lines are unable to form a synergy. The second is the stress-response character of the governance speed. A large number of governance resources are concentrated in the disposal stage after a problem has occurred, and there is a relative lack of forward-looking identification of potential risks and front-end intervention. Therefore, it will not be known. Therefore, we can see that the core of long-term governance is not "what to

manage", but rather whether a system governance framework with self-repairing and dynamically adaptable characteristics can be established [4].

3. Manifestations and Deep Mechanisms of Disorder in Social Media Ecosystem

At present, the disorder in the social media environment can be divided into three types: content, behaviour and structure. The three are related to each other and work together. Disorder at the level of content provides a breeding ground for behaviour deviation, and algorithmic bias at the structural level is a more fundamental cause.

The problems of fake news and low-quality content have not gone away either. False information takes many forms, such as deceptive alterations, re-uploads of old news, and artificial intelligence-generated content; it has a complex chain of transmission and a much higher cost for debunking compared to the initial creation of the rumor [5]. In terms of behaviour problems, there are frequent cases of group deviant behaviour, such as online violence and malicious provocation of the opposition. In 2025, in response to the Cyberspace Administration of China's "Clean and Bright" special campaign for regulating malicious provocation of negative emotions, Weibo removed more than 14,000 pieces of infringing content and handled over 1,200 rule-breaking accounts [6]. Based on the degree of behaviour control, these data suggest that the deviation from social norms on the Internet is no longer merely an individual's emotional outburst but has developed into a group or organised phenomenon. The main structural problems are "information cocoons" and algorithmic bias. Algorithm recommendations aim to maximise traffic as the optimisation objective. Vulgar and curious content are more likely to spread widely, so high-quality information has the advantage in this regard. This structural deviation will continue to change how users obtain information and make judgments about it, and this change will be self-perpetuating [7].

At the root of the above phenomena are three levels of structural contradictions that restrict governing effectiveness. The first is a conflict of interest between commercial interests and public welfare. The first two income streams of the social media platform are advertising income and user fees. If the platforms are to succeed and make money, they need to keep users interested in using the products for a long time. The content recommendation system aims to achieve this, and public values are pushed to the back in the sorting process. The second contradiction is the slower pace of technological iteration compared with rule revision. With the popularisation of AI content generation technology, the threshold for producing false information has dropped to an extremely low level, but the systems for content annotation, source tracing and responsibility investigation are still in the process of being built. At this time of change, there will be a spread of fake news. The third is that the division of rights and responsibilities among all the governing bodies is not clear [8]. It has not been specified by the government what the platforms are responsible for, how users will exercise self-discipline, or how social supervision will be conducted. During the course of governance, there are frequently cases of multiple managers or no one in charge.

These three contradictions are, respectively, behavioural deviation, institutional lag and structural imbalance; they correspond to different levels of governance response.

4. Platform-Driven Technical Governance and Rule-Based Governance Practices

Structural contradictions manifest in three aspects: behavioral deviance, institutional lag, and structural imbalance, corresponding to different governance entities. At the platform level,

operators are shifting from passive response to active governance, with technology and rules forming two main lines.

From a technical perspective, AI large models have been deeply integrated into the key aspects of content review [9]. The "Multimodal Fusion Base" of Douyin can simultaneously analyze live streaming videos, audio, text, and user feedback and make real-time judgments. The accuracy rate of identifying illegal content exceeds 90%. Compared to the beginning of 2025, the efficiency of AI review has increased by 31%, and the exposure volume of illegal content has decreased by 37% [10]. In terms of rumor control, the response cycle from discovery to response has been shortened from "days" to "hours". The common feature of these technologies is that, after eliminating the need for manual review of each item, they can identify and classify handle massive amounts of content, providing an operational basis for real-time and large-scale control.

At the level of rule governance, the platform is establishing a meticulous and long-term management system, characterized by shifting the management focus from "post-event handling" to "process intervention". The "host health score" system of Douyin dynamically grades and manages based on daily live streaming behaviors. By 2025, this mechanism will cover an additional 60% compared to the previous year, and over 90,000 hosts will receive quality or professional certifications. Throughout the year, there were over 470,000 hosts who were penalized for inducing excessive gifts, and more than 130,000 of them had their withdrawals restricted. During the same period, Douyin indefinitely revoked the live streaming permissions of 370,000 accounts, among which over 10,000 accounts with more than 100,000 followers were involved; 3.52 million accounts were punished for "lowbrow and soft pornographic" content. In terms of transparency, Douyin launched a website for safety and trust center, disclosed the algorithm logic, and released over 120 governance announcements throughout the year. The common logic of these measures is to embed governance into every aspect of the platform's daily operation.

Governance is shifting from "deletion" to "adjustment"—technology addresses "whether it can be discovered", rules address "how to handle", transparency responds to "why it is handled this way", and the combination of these three leads to platform governance moving from a broad "containment" approach to a detailed "guidance" approach [11]. However, this shift has not yet solved the fundamental problem: Platforms are ultimately commercial entities. When governance investment conflicts with commercial interests, where does the continuous governance motivation come from? This requires answers at the institutional level.

5. Institutionalized Governance Led by the Government and the Establishment of Long-Term Mechanisms

Institutionalized governance is led by the government and, in cooperation with independent governance of platforms, forms the two main supports for social media governance [12]. China has gradually strengthened its internet law over the years. Some basic laws have been released so far, such as the "Cybersecurity Law", the "Data Security Law" and the "Personal Information Protection Law", as well as other special regulations, including the "Regulations on the Governance of the Online Information Content Ecology". A multi-level network legal system has been generally built [13].

A typical measure at the implementation level is the "Clear and Bright" series of special campaigns. The "Clear and Bright" campaign in 2025 will continue to address the problems that have drawn much public attention. Highlight problems and deficiencies, strengthen management of sources and basic data, etc. Shanghai is also like that. Over 20 special campaigns were organised by the municipal Cyberspace Affairs Commission in the past year to address five main issues, removing 8.1804 million pieces of illegal and harmful information and

suspending 275,000 rule-breaking accounts [14]. These figures are all due to the concentration of efforts in a short period of time by special campaigns to have a deterrent effect and resolve accumulated problems promptly [15].

Looking back, there are also defects in the type of campaign-style governance. The system of media and culture should also be stable and continuously improved, providing for institutions and regularly carrying out. It cannot be done by intermittent concentrated rectification [16]. Some scholars have defined "a long-term mechanism for network ecological governance" as follows: Under the unified leadership of the central government and with the aim of building a clean and orderly online environment, it is based on institutional construction, has the characteristic of regular operation, and is implemented in a coordinated manner to transform governance from periodic rectification to institutionalisation, standardisation and normalisation. At the end of the day, we need to develop strong practical rules from these effective practices to turn emergency responses into daily preventative measures.

Institutionally regulated governance is developing in various places at present [17]. The idea of classified and graded supervision is relatively clear, and various kinds of platforms correspond to different levels of management. The "Method for Identifying Artificial Intelligence-Generated Synthetic Content" has been released to identify such content, and it must be clearly labelled as AI-generated. Cross-departmental Cooperation will also be carried out. The Departments of Cyberspace Administration, Public Security, Industry and Information Technology, and Culture and Tourism have begun to build mechanisms for the sharing of information and case transfers. The multiple-head governance mode is gradually changing into a single mode. All of these directions aim for the same purpose: to make governance genuinely institutionalised, standardised and regularised.

6. Multifaceted Collaborative Pathways for Cultural Governance and Ecological Restoration

Technological governance refers to the quality of management for technology; institutional governance considers who conducts the management and what standards for management are adopted. On the other hand, cultural governance also needs to address how to construct a new kind of online space. Media culture's ecological view specifically focuses on the quality of culture within an ecosystem. Extend the scope of governance from content management to the construction of an all-encompassing cultural environment. The aim is not just to remove the bad content and then be done with; rather, one should create a good-content environment that can be nurtured [18].

The first way of cultural ecological restoration is to engage several parties in joint governance. According to the "Regulations on the Governance of Network Information Content Ecology", this project must have the participation of the government, enterprises, society, netizens and other parties. The following are the actual implementation scenarios for this cooperation [19]. Xiaohongshu released "Community Convention 2.0" in January 2026 and explicitly mentioned that "Oppose creating confrontation" and promoted the community values of "sincere sharing, friendly interaction". The platform has also started sharing its governance experience and recognizing standards among the platforms. The online reporting mechanism is continually being enhanced, and people are gradually changing from being passively managed objects to active participants [20]. Netizens' media literacy and digital citizenship awareness are also gradually increasing; all of them provide a foundation for ecological governance and are gradually consolidating the foundation of multi-party co-governance.

Cultural ecological restoration also has a value-related problem of a "traffic-first" mindset. Algorithm recommendations have become the main way of spreading information, and their purpose for distribution is directly related to the whole online area. Some research has

proposed that the governance of short-video platforms can be promoted in two dimensions: "technique" and "principle". Generally speaking, the "technique" component refers to raising the standards of content review and Optimisation of the handling process for violations, and other technical problems; the "principle" component covers high-level directional issues, such as the platform's values and goals, algorithmic ethics, and community culture. Both are necessary; the former is "how to do it", and the latter is "where to go". Strengthen institutional norms and integrate mainstream values into the process of technological innovation to gradually move away from a top-down management model to a collaborative governance model. Cultural governance does not reject algorithms; instead, it changes the aim of optimisation to promote the overall health of the ecosystem rather than maximizing user dwell time. A change has occurred in recent years that has been driven by the above factors.

On May 19, 2026, the China Network Civilization Conference will be held in Nanning, Guangxi. The theme of this conference is "Cultivating a Civilised Online Environment and Generating Vigorous Forward-moving Forces". It may be possible to deal with the problem of cultural governance in the community. The governance aim of the online space should be not only to make it "clean" but also to make it "civilised", and thus serve as a cultural area that promotes well-being and consensus building in society.

7. Conclusion

The Administration of Social Media at present is in a process of change. Social Media is not a mechanical device for regulation; rather, it is a living system of culture that emerges gradually through the interactions of many groups and factors at various times and places. Although this system is somewhat self-correcting, it still has the problem of a structural imbalance. Long-term governance should build a system of operation that can continuously identify risks, adjust strategies flexibly, and continuously restore the ecosystem, rather than aiming for a one-time fix.

As shown in the above analysis, the three dimensions of the system, technology and culture need to develop in harmony for a stable and long-lasting governance system. At the system level, a complete legal framework should be built for the content production, distribution and consumption of this platform, and a flexible revision mechanism will be established to convert the effective practices obtained during the rectification period into regular institutional provisions gradually. At the level of technology, efforts will be made to promote the application of tools such as algorithm transparency and content identification, and thus the technical means can offer support for ecological restoration beyond the control mechanism. Culturally, we should strive to cultivate a rational and harmonious online social consciousness, reach an agreement among various parties on cooperative governance, and thus make "civilisation" the backdrop of the social media ecosystem.

The three are not separate entities. The system provides a norm for technology and culture, technology furnishes the foundation for implementing the system and culture, and culture offers the value support for the operation of the system and technology. There will be no single type for the general governance function.

This paper offers an initial analytical system and hopes to provide cognitive coordinates for the following institutional design and technological applications. How each dimension works specifically, how they connect effectively with one another, and how different types of platforms should be used differently all await further research. In fact, in practice, the actual level of maturity for long-term governance models also depends on the continuous integration and adjustment of institutional supply, technological means and cultural development in practice.

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