Proceedings of ICIHCS 2026 Symposium: Alternate Narratives and Cross-Cultural Visions in a Globalized World
DOI: 10.54254/2753-7064/2026.HT36235

Mechanisms of Platform Algorithm-Driven Content Diffusion in New Media: Evidence from Traffic Allocation Systems

Han Luo

School of Public Policy and Administration, Nanchang University, Nanchang, China
7108121084@alu.ncu.edu.cn

Abstract. In the era of platformized communication, algorithm-driven recommendation systems have fundamentally reshaped content diffusion on new media platforms. Unlike traditional communication models shaped by editorial gatekeeping and follower-based networks, contemporary platforms such as TikTok and YouTube Shorts rely on traffic-driven algorithms to accelerate content diffusion and maximize user engagement. This study investigates how platform algorithms reshape content diffusion through traffic allocation mechanisms and explores the communication logic underlying algorithmic amplification. Drawing on recent studies in platformization, algorithmic governance, and information diffusion, this study adopts a qualitative research design combining literature review, comparative platform case analysis, and mechanism analysis. The study focuses on three research questions: how algorithmic recommendations accelerate content dissemination, how traffic mechanisms influence visibility and user interaction, and what communicative outcomes emerge from algorithm-driven diffusion. The findings indicate that personalized recommendations, real-time feedback systems, and algorithmic traffic allocation mechanisms significantly enhance content dissemination efficiency while simultaneously reinforcing the concentration of user attention and emotional amplification. The paper argues that platform algorithms have evolved from technical tools into key actors in the communication process, reshaping both the logic of content dissemination and the structure of digital public communication.

Keywords: Platform Algorithms, Content Diffusion, Traffic Allocation *Mechanisms,* Algorithmic Recommendation, New Media Communication

1. Introduction

The rapid development of digital platforms has profoundly transformed the communication ecosystem of contemporary media. Social media platforms such as TikTok, YouTube Shorts, and Instagram Reels no longer function merely as channels for content diffusion, but as algorithm-driven infrastructures that shape content visibility and dissemination [1-3]. Unlike traditional communication models based on editorial gatekeeping and interpersonal networks, contemporary platform algorithms rely on personalized recommendation systems, real-time feedback mechanisms, and traffic allocation mechanisms to accelerate content diffusion and maximize user engagement [2, 4, 5].

© 2026 The Authors. This is an open access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License 4.0 (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

DOI: 10.54254/2753-7064/2026.HT36235

As algorithmic recommendation increasingly dominates the circulation of online information, the mechanisms behind "viral" content dissemination have attracted growing scholarly attention [4, 6]. Existing studies have examined platformization, algorithmic governance, and information diffusion from different perspectives; however, limited research has systematically explored how traffic allocation mechanisms function as accelerators of content diffusion [1, 2, 3, 7]. In particular, the relationship between platform algorithms, user interaction, and dissemination efficiency remains insufficiently theorized in new media communication studies [4, 8].

Against this background, this study investigates how platform algorithms accelerate content diffusion through algorithmic traffic allocation mechanisms. By combining literature review with platform case studies, the paper examines the operational logic of algorithmic recommendation and its influence on dissemination speed, content visibility, and user engagement [5, 6, 9]. The study contributes to discussions on algorithmic communication and offers a theoretical account of how digital content dissemination evolves [3, 4].

2. Literature review and theoretical foundations

2.1. Platformized communication and algorithmic governance

Digital platforms have reshaped contemporary communication systems. Unlike traditional media, where editorial gatekeeping determines information visibility, platformized communication relies on algorithms infrastructures to organize content distribution and mediate user attention [1, 2]. Platformization therefore represents not only the widespread adoption of digital platforms but also a structural transformation in which platforms act as dominant intermediaries connecting content creators, users, advertisers, and institutions [1].

Within this platform environment, algorithmic governance has emerged as a critical theoretical perspective. Platform algorithms no longer function merely as technical tools; they regulate visibility, rank information, and allocate traffic [3, 7]. Through algorithmic recommendation systems, platforms continuously evaluate user behavior and optimize content visibility based on predicted user engagement [7]. Consequently, communication processes are increasingly governed by data-driven decision-making rather than traditional editorial judgment. Existing research highlights that algorithmic governance introduces new forms of power, as platforms gain unprecedented control over content diffusion and audience attention [2, 3, 7].

2.2. Algorithmic recommendation and content diffusion

Algorithmic recommendation systems have altered the dynamics of content diffusion in digital environments [4, 5]. Traditional communication theories often emphasize interpersonal networks, opinion leaders, and social connections as primary drivers of content diffusion. However, in contemporary platform ecosystems, algorithmic recommendation is equally important for the speed and scale of content diffusion [4].

Algorithmic recommendation systems analyze user preferences, browsing histories, interaction patterns, and consumption behaviors to identify content most likely to attract attention [5, 6]. By matching content with interested users, algorithms reduce information overload and speed up diffusion [5]. Research on short-video platforms such as TikTok and Douyin indicates that personalized recommendations can enable content to reach large audiences even when creators possess limited social capital or follower networks [6].

DOI: 10.54254/2753-7064/2026.HT36235

Content diffusion is no longer determined solely by user sharing behavior. Instead, algorithmic amplification plays a decisive role in shaping communication outcomes [8, 9]. Algorithms continuously monitor engagement indicators such as viewing duration, completion rate, likes, comments, and shares. High-performing content receives additional exposure, creating a self-reinforcing diffusion process that accelerates content diffusion across platform networks [4, 8, 9].

2.3. Traffic mechanisms and content visibility

Traffic mechanisms underpin algorithm-driven communication systems [2, 6]. In the platform economy, traffic represents not only audience attention but also a valuable resource distributed through algorithmic allocation mechanisms. As a result, visibility becomes increasingly dependent on platform-defined metrics rather than solely on content quality [2, 8].

Contemporary studies describe traffic allocation as a multi-stage process [6, 9]. Content is first distributed to a small traffic pool through algorithmic recommendation. User responses are then evaluated through various engagement indicators. If the content achieves performance, it enters larger traffic pools and gains wider visibility [9]. This iterative process allows platforms to efficiently identify content with high engagement potential while minimizing distribution risks [8, 9].

The concept of traffic logic has therefore become central to understanding platform communication [2]. Traffic mechanisms integrate algorithmic recommendation, user interaction, and content diffusion into a unified system [2, 7]. They function as accelerators that amplify certain types of content while limiting the visibility of others. Consequently, content visibility is increasingly shaped by algorithmic assessments of engagement potential, leading to a communication environment in which platform algorithms play a central role in determining what content becomes visible, popular, and influential [2, 8].

The preceding review demonstrates that existing research has provided valuable insights into platformized communication, algorithmic recommendation, and content diffusion. However, most studies focus on recommendation functions or platform governance, while the internal mechanisms through which traffic-oriented algorithms accelerate content dissemination remain underexplained. In particular, the dynamic interaction among personalized recommendation, user feedback, and traffic allocation has yet to be integrated into a coherent analytical framework. To address this gap, the following chapter shifts from theoretical discussion to mechanism-oriented analysis, examining how these interrelated processes collectively accelerate content diffusion and reshape communication practices in contemporary platform-based media environments.

3. Platform algorithms and the acceleration of content diffusion

3.1. Personalized recommendation and traffic distribution

Personalized recommendation is the fundamental mechanism through which platform algorithms accelerate content diffusion. By analyzing user data, including viewing history, search records, interaction frequency, and content consumption habits, platform algorithms continuously predict user interests and allocate content to audiences with the highest probability of engagement [5, 6, 10]. Compared with traditional mass communication, which distributes information broadly with little differentiation, this data-driven matching process substantially improves the efficiency of content diffusion by reducing the gap between content production and audience demand [5, 10].

DOI: 10.54254/2753-7064/2026.HT36235

Rather than waiting for users to actively search for information, platforms proactively push content that is most likely to generate engagement. As a result, content rapidly reach target audiences within a short period of time. Research on TikTok and Douyin demonstrates that recommendation algorithms enable even newly uploaded content to gain substantial visibility if early engagement indicators meet platform expectations [6, 11]. Consequently, content diffusion increasingly depends on algorithmic evaluation rather than creators' follower counts or existing social networks [5, 6].

Personalized recommendation adapts to users' changing interests through behavioral analysis. This adaptive matching process serves as the foundation for accelerated dissemination in contemporary platform ecosystems [6].

3.2. User feedback and dissemination expansion

Beyond recommendation itself, user feedback plays a crucial role in amplifying content diffusion. Modern platform algorithms operate through continuous feedback loops in which user behaviors provide real-time signals for content evaluation and redistribution [4, 10, 12]. Metrics such as viewing duration, completion rate, likes, comments, shares, and follows indicate content performance and influence recommendation decisions [10, 12].

When users actively engage with content, algorithms interpret these interactions as evidence of relevance and quality. The content is then distributed to a larger audience, increasing its visibility and expanding its dissemination range. This process creates a self-reinforcing cycle in which engagement generates exposure, and exposure generates further engagement. As a result, content diffusion grows exponentially within a relatively short period [4, 11, 12].

Feedback loops enable algorithms to adjust based on audience responses. Compared with traditional media environments, where distribution decisions are often predetermined, digital platforms continuously optimize dissemination strategies through real-time data analysis [4, 13]. The integration of user feedback into algorithmic decision-making therefore enhances both the speed and precision of content distribution [10, 13].

Furthermore, emotional reactions and social interactions often intensify dissemination dynamics. Content evoking curiosity, surprise, excitement, or controversy generates higher engagement and receives greater algorithmic support [10, 11]. In this sense, user feedback functions not only as an evaluation mechanism but also as a catalyst for accelerated communication [11, 12].

3.3. Traffic pools and viral content formation

Traffic allocation represents the mechanism through which platform algorithms transform early user engagement into large-scale content diffusion. Rather than uniform distribution, platforms typically adopt a staged allocation strategy in which content is recommended to progressively larger user groups according to its observed performance [6, 9].

If the content achieves favorable engagement metrics, it is promoted to larger traffic pools and introduced to more diverse audiences [9, 11]. Each stage functions as a screening process through which the algorithm identifies content with high dissemination potential. Repeated evaluation and redistribution accumulate visibility for some content, which achieves viral status [11]. The staged allocation mechanism significantly reduces uncertainty in content distribution. By testing audience responses on a small scale before expanding exposure, platforms maximize engagement and minimize recommendation risks [2, 9]. At the same time, this mechanism contributes to the rapid

DOI: 10.54254/2753-7064/2026.HT36235

emergence of viral content, as successful content receives disproportionately greater exposure than ordinary content.

From a communication perspective, viral content is no longer solely the result of audience preferences or social sharing behavior. Instead, it emerges from the interaction between algorithmic assessment, user feedback, and traffic allocation. Platform algorithms therefore act as communication accelerators that selectively amplify content capable of generating sustained engagement. In this process, the logic of content dissemination becomes increasingly platform-centered, reflecting the growing influence of algorithms in shaping digital communication outcomes [2, 5, 11].

4. Communication impacts of algorithm-driven diffusion

4.1. Attention concentration and emotional dissemination

One of the most significant consequences of algorithm-driven diffusion is the increasing concentration of audience attention. In digital platform environments characterized by information abundance, user attention has become a scarce resource. To maximize engagement and platform activity, platform algorithms prioritize content that attracts interest and interaction [10, 11, 13]. As a result, audience attention tends to converge around a limited number of highly visible topics, creators, and content formats [13].

This concentration process is associated with emotional dissemination. Numerous studies indicate that content capable of eliciting strong emotional responses—such as surprise, excitement, anger, or anxiety—often receives higher levels of engagement than neutral information [10, 14]. Since recommendation algorithms continuously optimize content exposure according to engagement indicators, emotionally charged content is more likely to receive broader algorithmic exposure and circulate widely. Consequently, emotional reactions become an important driver of content diffusion [14].

Furthermore, the combination of algorithmic recommendation and emotional engagement contributes to the rapid formation of viral trends. Once emotionally appealing content receives positive feedback, algorithms amplify its visibility through recommendations, creating large-scale communication effects quickly [11]. While this mechanism enhances dissemination efficiency, it may encourage the production of sensationalized or emotionally polarized content. Therefore, algorithm-driven diffusion not only reshapes content diffusion patterns but also influences the emotional dynamics of digital communication [11, 14].

4.2. Echo chambers and visibility bias

Algorithm-driven content diffusion creates echo chambers and visibility bias. Personalized recommendation systems are designed to maximize user satisfaction by providing content that aligns with existing interests and preferences [12, 15]. Although this strategy improves user experience, it can simultaneously reduce exposure to diverse perspectives and alternative viewpoints [12].

As algorithms repeatedly recommend similar content, users become increasingly surrounded by information that reinforces their prior beliefs. Over time, this process may create echo chambers in which individuals primarily encounter homogeneous opinions and narratives [12, 16]. The resulting reduction in informational diversity influences public discussion, social understanding, and collective decision-making [16].

DOI: 10.54254/2753-7064/2026.HT36235

In addition, visibility bias defines characteristic of contemporary platform communication. Algorithms allocate traffic based on predicted engagement, and certain content receives more exposure than others. Content that aligns with platform preferences or generates strong interaction is more likely to be amplified, while less engaging but socially valuable information may remain largely invisible [8, 17]. Consequently, visibility is no longer determined solely by content relevance or public significance but increasingly by algorithmic assessments of dissemination potential [8, 12].

These developments suggest that platform algorithms play an active role in shaping the informational environment. Rather than functioning as neutral intermediaries, recommendation systems shape the information environment by selectively structuring content visibility, as some voices gain substantial visibility while others struggle to reach audiences [18].

4.3. Platformization and the reconstruction of communication logic

These impacts indicate a broader transformation in communication logic. In the platform era, communication processes are increasingly organized around algorithmic infrastructures and traffic-oriented mechanisms [1-3]. As platforms become dominant intermediaries of content diffusion, traditional communication models based on editorial gatekeeping and social networks are gradually replaced by algorithmically mediated dissemination systems [1]. This transformation marks a broader shift from user-centered communication toward platform-mediated communication.

Under this new paradigm, content visibility, audience reach, and communication influence are largely determined by platform algorithms [3, 7, 8]. Communication is increasingly shaped by the interaction between users, algorithms, and platform governance structures, rather than by producers' intentions or audience choices alone. Algorithms have therefore become central actors in the communication process, influencing not only how content diffuses but also what information becomes visible in the first place [7].

Platformization has transformed the criteria for evaluating communication success. Metrics such as views, engagement rates, watch time, and recommendation performance increasingly serve as indicators of communicative value [2, 13]. This shift encourages creators and organizations to adapt their communication strategies to algorithmic preferences, reinforcing platform logics across the media ecosystem [5, 13].

Overall, algorithm-driven diffusion reflects a profound restructuring of contemporary communication. While platform algorithms enhance dissemination efficiency and expand information accessibility, they also introduce challenges related to visibility, diversity, and communicative power [3, 8, 16]. Understanding these transformations is essential for explaining the evolving dynamics of new media communication in the platform age [1, 3].

5. Conclusion

This study examined how platform algorithms accelerate content diffusion through traffic mechanisms in contemporary new media environments. By integrating the perspectives of platformized communication, algorithmic recommendation, and traffic allocation, the study explored the operational logic through which digital platforms enhance content visibility, expand audience reach, and improve dissemination efficiency. The analysis demonstrates that platform algorithms have become fundamental components of contemporary communication systems, playing a decisive role in shaping the circulation and influence of digital content.

The findings indicate that personalized recommendation, continuous user feedback, and traffic-pool distribution constitute three interconnected mechanisms that collectively accelerate content

DOI: 10.54254/2753-7064/2026.HT36235

diffusion. Rather than functioning as passive technical tools, platform algorithms dynamically evaluate user behavior, allocate traffic resources, and optimize content exposure in real time. This process enables platforms to rapidly identify content with high dissemination potential while continuously adapting recommendation strategies to changing patterns of user engagement. Consequently, the logic of content dissemination has gradually shifted from audience-driven circulation to algorithm-assisted communication.

Beyond improving dissemination efficiency, algorithm-driven communication also reconstructs the broader media environment. The increasing dependence on algorithmic traffic allocation influences not only content visibility but also communication practices, audience attention, and the production strategies of content creators. These transformations suggest that platform algorithms have become central actors in the organization of digital communication, extending their influence from technical infrastructure to the governance of information flows.

Although this study provides a theoretical explanation of the relationship between platform algorithms and content diffusion, it is primarily based on conceptual analysis and recent scholarly literature. Future research could further validate the proposed analytical framework through empirical investigations, comparative analyses across different platforms, and quantitative examinations of user behavior. Such efforts would contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of algorithm-driven communication and its continuing evolution in the platform era.

References

[1] Nielsen, R. K., & Fletcher, R. (2023). Comparing the platformization of news media systems: A cross-country analysis. *European Journal of Communication, 38*(5), 484-499.

[2] Chen, C., Wang, Z., & Gn, J. (2023). Serve the traffic: The logic of traffic and its politics on WeChat platform. *Social Media+ Society, 9*(3), 20563051231193025.

[3] Lasser, J., & Poechhacker, N. (2025). Designing social media content recommendation algorithms for societal good. *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences, 1548*(1), 20-28.

[4] Iamnitchi, A., Hall, L. O., Horawalavithana, S., Mubang, F., Ng, K. W., & Skvoretz, J. (2023). Modeling information diffusion in social media: Data-driven observations. *Frontiers in Big Data, 6*(1).

[5] Meng, Z. (2026). Cross-platform sensitivity and algorithmic adaptability: How transnational creators navigate algorithms across Chinese and US-based platforms. *New Media & Society, 28*(3), 1171–1189.

[6] Entrena-Serrano, C. (2025). Watch, scroll, repeat: How interface design shapes consumptive curation affordances on TikTok. *Social Media+ Society, 11*(3), 20563051251358529.

[7] Gausen, A., Guo, C., & Luk, W. (2025). An approach to sociotechnical transparency of social media algorithms using agent-based modelling. *AI and Ethics, 5*(2), 1827–1845.

[8] Galeazzi, A., Paudel, P., Conti, M., De Cristofaro, E., & Stringhini, G. (2024). Revealing the secret power: How algorithms can influence content visibility on social media. *arXiv e-prints*, arXiv-2410.

[9] Murdock, I., Carley, K. M., & Yağan, O. (2024). An agent-based model of cross-platform information diffusion and moderation. *Social Network Analysis and Mining, 14*(1), 145.

[10] Salles, J. (2025). Affect and prediction in short-video social media recommendation algorithm: TikTok and the missing half-second. *New Media & Society*, 14614448251385086.

[11] Baumann, F., Arora, N., Rahwan, I., & Czaplicka, A. (2026). Dynamics of algorithmic content amplification on TikTok. *EPJ Data Science, 15*(1), 18.

[12] Coppolillo, E., Mungari, S., Ritacco, E., Fabbri, F., Minici, M., Bonchi, F., & Manco, G. (2025). Algorithmic drift: A simulation framework to study the effects of recommender systems on user preferences. *Information Processing & Management, 62*(4), 104125.

[13] Chen, Y., Li, F., & Preuss, M. (2025). Algorithmic attention and content creation on social media platforms. Available at SSRN 5182754.

[14] Rathje, S., Robertson, C., Brady, W. J., & Van Bavel, J. J. (2024). People think that social media platforms do (but should not) amplify divisive content. *Perspectives on Psychological Science, 19*(5), 781-795.

[15] Kim, T., & Im, I. (2025). Understanding users' AI manipulation intention: An empirical investigation of the antecedents in the context of AI recommendation algorithms. *Information & Management, 62*(1), 104061.

DOI: 10.54254/2753-7064/2026.HT36235

[16] Shin, D., & Shin, E. Y. (2025). Cascading falsehoods: Mapping the diffusion of misinformation in algorithmic environments. *AI & Society, 41*(2), 1435-1452.
[17] Corsi, G. (2024). Evaluating Twitter's algorithmic amplification of low-credibility content: An observational study. *EPJ Data Science, 13*(1), 18.
[18] Moon, J. H., Kim, S., Jung, Y., Bang, J., & Sung, Y. (2025). The effects of explainability and user control on algorithmic transparency: The moderating role of algorithmic literacy. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking, 28*(7), 497-504.