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GOVERNING ANXIETY-ORIENTED CONTENT: A PLATFORM ETHICAL CO-GOVERNANCE FRAMEWORK

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Abstract: *Digital platforms increasingly organise social anxiety as an attention resource by linking emotionally charged narratives to repeated engagement and monetisable affordances. This conceptual study explains how anxiety-oriented content becomes a platform-ethics problem and develops a multi-actor governance framework. It adopts a theory-building design supported by an integrative literature synthesis. Relevant scholarship on social media anxiety, platformisation, algorithmic governance, digital advertising, corporate digital responsibility, and user vulnerability was identified through structured database and keyword searches, supplemented by backward and forward citation tracing. The literature was compared thematically to identify recurring mechanisms, responsibility gaps, and governance responses. The analysis identifies four interconnected forms of platform ethical disorder: algorithmic amplification, emotional manipulation, commercial inducement, and responsibility displacement. It then specifies four corresponding governance transformations: platforms must move from traffic maximisation to responsibility-bearing, creators from emotional stimulation to value accountability, regulators from ex-post punishment to process-oriented oversight, and users from passive exposure to rights-based participation. The study contributes by reframing anxiety-oriented content as a structural linkage among affective vulnerability, platform stickiness, and commercial conversion rather than as a purely psychological outcome or isolated content violation. Practically, the framework supports recommendation-risk assessment, prominent commercial disclosure, creator accountability standards, stronger user controls, and closed-loop coordination among platforms, creators, regulators, and users.*

Keywords: *anxiety-oriented content; platform governance; ethical co-governance; algorithmic amplification; vulnerability monetisation; user rights*

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Introduction

Digital platforms have become central infrastructures for communication, consumption, and everyday emotional life. Their recommendation systems, engagement metrics, and commercial interfaces do more than distribute information: they shape what becomes visible, how long users remain attentive, and which forms of interaction can be converted into economic value. Platformisation therefore changes the status of emotion. Feelings that were once treated primarily as private experiences can be captured as behavioural signals, amplified through personalised distribution, and connected to advertising, livestream commerce, paid subscriptions, consultation services, and other monetisable affordances (Constantinides et al., 2018; Nieborg & Poell, 2018; Ren, 2024).

Within this environment, anxiety-oriented content has become a recurrent form of platform communication. It frames ordinary but consequential concerns—employment insecurity, educational competition, health uncertainty, body image, parenting, ageing, financial vulnerability, and self-improvement—as unresolved personal risks that require continued attention and response. Such content is not equivalent to all negative content, nor is it necessarily false or illegal. Its distinctive feature is the combination of problematisation, comparison, urgency, and solution-seeking. Users may continue watching because they seek reassurance, explanation, warning, or a route out of uncertainty. This makes anxiety-oriented content especially compatible with engagement systems that reward viewing time, repeated return, search, following, sharing, and conversion.

The ethical difficulty emerges when anxious attention is treated as ordinary preference. A user who pauses on a career-risk video, searches for health information, or compares educational options may be expressing uncertainty rather than enjoyment. Yet an engagement-optimised system can interpret these behaviours as demand for more of the same. Repeated recommendation may then intensify exposure, while creators learn that crisis framing improves visibility and commercial actors connect promised relief to products or services. The resulting chain—anxiety, engagement, platform stickiness, and monetisation—can weaken user autonomy even when each individual post remains formally compliant. Research on recommender systems and algorithmic governance shows why such systems cannot be understood as neutral intermediaries: they allocate visibility, structure choices, and distribute responsibility across technical and organisational actors (Gorwa et al., 2020; Martin, 2019; Milano et al., 2020).

Existing scholarship provides important but fragmented explanations. Psychological research demonstrates associations between social media practices, upward comparison, anxiety, loneliness, and well-being, but commonly treats anxiety as an outcome of use (Meier & Johnson, 2022; O'Day & Heimberg, 2021; Verduyn et al., 2017). Platform-economy research explains how attention, data, and cultural production are monetised, but often leaves the affective basis of persistent engagement underdeveloped (Nieborg & Poell, 2018; Törnberg, 2023). Governance research examines moderation, algorithmic accountability, and corporate digital responsibility, yet much of it is oriented toward identifiable illegality, misinformation, or discrete harms rather than cumulative anxiety-based commercial pressure (Gorwa et al., 2020; Lobschat et al., 2021). The unresolved problem is therefore not simply whether anxiety exists online, but how platform arrangements organise anxiety as a repeatable and monetisable mechanism.

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Accordingly, this study has two linked objectives: to explain the mechanisms through which anxiety-oriented content produces platform ethical disorder, and to construct a multi-actor ethical co-governance framework involving platforms, content creators, regulators, and users.

It addresses the following research questions:

RQ1: Through what mechanisms does anxiety-oriented content generate ethical disorder in digital platform environments?

RQ2: How can platforms, content creators, regulators, and users be integrated into an ethical co-governance framework for anxiety-oriented content?

By answering these questions, the paper shifts analysis from isolated problematic posts to the platform-level relationship among affective vulnerability, engagement optimisation, commercial conversion, and responsibility allocation. Its central argument is that anxiety-oriented content requires mechanism-level governance: legitimate emotional expression should remain possible, but the systematic extraction of value from unresolved insecurity should become visible, contestable, and institutionally accountable.

Literature Review and Critical Synthesis

Anxiety as Psychological Outcome and Platformed Content Logic

A substantial body of research treats anxiety as a psychological consequence of social media use. Systematic and critical reviews associate problematic patterns of use with social comparison, fear of missing out, loneliness, self-evaluative pressure, and reduced subjective well-being, while also stressing that effects vary by person, context, platform, and mode of engagement (Meier & Johnson, 2022; O'Day & Heimberg, 2021; Verduyn et al., 2017). This literature establishes that platform use is not emotionally neutral. It also cautions against simple technological determinism: social media may provide connection and information, yet the same affordances can intensify comparison and uncertainty.

The limitation is analytical direction. When anxiety is treated mainly as an outcome measured after exposure, less attention is given to how anxiety itself is formatted as content. Anxiety-oriented narratives select a risk, personalise its implications, amplify the perceived cost of inaction, and maintain uncertainty long enough to sustain further viewing or searching. In this form, anxiety is not merely produced by platform use; it becomes part of the communicative architecture of engagement. Research showing that emotionally and morally charged messages diffuse more widely supports the broader proposition that affective intensity can shape online visibility, although such evidence does not imply that all anxiety-related content is intentionally manipulative (Brady et al., 2017).

This distinction matters ethically. A post may accurately identify a social problem and still be organised in a way that repeatedly activates insecurity. Conversely, anxiety-related communication may provide genuine support, public recognition, or useful warning. The relevant boundary is therefore not between "positive" and "negative" emotion. It is between proportionate communication that expands users' understanding and platformed communication that narrows judgement through repeated crisis framing, comparison, and commercially directed relief. Anxiety-oriented content should thus be analysed as a content logic whose ethical significance depends on distribution patterns, persuasive form, commercial connection, and audience vulnerability.

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Platformisation, Attention, and Monetisation

Platform research explains why this content logic can become economically consequential. Digital platforms coordinate multiple groups, control access to infrastructures, define participation rules, and use data to continually adjust matching, ranking, and monetisation (Constantinides et al., 2018). In cultural and content markets, platformisation makes content contingent on changing data infrastructures, business models, and governance arrangements (Nieborg & Poell, 2018). Engagement is therefore not merely a measure of audience response; it is an operational input into recommendation and a commercial asset that can support advertising, transaction commissions, subscriptions, and creator revenue.

The literature broadly agrees that platforms are active market and governance actors, but it differs in how control is conceptualised. Some studies emphasise economic intermediation and the opportunities platforms create for producers and advertisers. Others show that algorithmic matching can simultaneously operate as management and control by setting visibility conditions, measuring performance, and shaping conduct (Möhlmann et al., 2021). More recent work conceptualises platform firms as lead actors that govern interdependent stakeholders through algorithmic systems while remaining dependent on creators, advertisers, and users for value creation (Möhlmann et al., 2025). These accounts undermine the claim that platforms simply host autonomous choices.

An unresolved inconsistency concerns the emotional meaning of engagement. Platform metrics generally record observable actions, not the reasons behind them. Viewing time generated by enjoyment, alarm, confusion, reassurance-seeking, or compulsive comparison may appear equivalent in the data. Yet these motives have different implications for autonomy and welfare. When anxious engagement is operationally indistinguishable from positive preference, recommendation systems can intensify the very uncertainty users are trying to resolve. The platform-economy literature explains how attention becomes value, but anxiety-oriented content reveals why the quality and origin of that attention must also be governed.

Ethical Governance, Responsibility, and User Vulnerability

Ethical and governance scholarship increasingly rejects the idea that algorithmic outcomes can be assigned to technology alone. Algorithmic accountability requires attention to how organisations design objectives, select data, define success, distribute authority, and respond to foreseeable consequences (Martin, 2019). Recommender systems raise ethical concerns involving opacity, autonomy, bias, exposure diversity, and responsibility, particularly where users cannot meaningfully understand or alter the logic shaping their information environment (Milano et al., 2020). Content moderation research similarly shows that automation embeds political and institutional choices rather than eliminating them (Gorwa et al., 2020).

The literature also contains a debate between concentrated and cooperative responsibility. Assigning primary responsibility to platforms reflects their infrastructural power, but platform governance is enacted through relationships among firms, creators, advertisers, regulators, civil-society actors, and users. Cooperative responsibility therefore emphasises differentiated obligations rather than equal blame: actors should be accountable in proportion to their authority, information, incentives, and capacity to prevent harm (Helberger et al., 2018). Corporate digital responsibility extends this logic by treating the ethical use of digital technologies as an organisational responsibility that reaches beyond minimal legal compliance (Lobschat et al., 2021).

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User vulnerability sharpens this issue. Formal choice does not guarantee meaningful autonomy where interfaces are opaque, persuasion exploits fear, or users face high-stakes uncertainty. Experimental research on dark patterns demonstrates that interface design can influence decisions while remaining difficult for users to recognise, especially when multiple manipulative techniques are combined (Luguri & Strahilevitz, 2021). Digital well-being research likewise argues that outcomes emerge dynamically from interactions among individual characteristics, device use, and context rather than from screen time alone (Vanden Abeele, 2021). These findings support vulnerability-sensitive governance without portraying users as passive or incapable.

Critical Synthesis and Unresolved Debate

Across the three research streams, there is substantial agreement that platforms shape emotional experience, that engagement can be monetised, and that algorithmic systems distribute power and responsibility. Their disagreement lies in the primary unit of analysis. Psychological studies centre users and outcomes; platform studies centre infrastructures and value creation; governance studies centre rules, accountability, and institutional capacity. Each perspective is informative, but none alone explains the complete trajectory through which social insecurity is framed as content, translated into behavioural signals, stabilised as repeated engagement, and connected to commercial action.

A second tension concerns the threshold of harm. Content regulation often seeks identifiable violations, whereas anxiety-based monetisation may remain lawful, factually plausible, and individually minor. Its ethical significance is cumulative and relational: repeated exposure can narrow an affective environment; creator authority can convert recognition into dependence; commercial interfaces can make consumption appear necessary; and fragmented governance can leave no actor accountable for the combined effect. This grey zone cannot be addressed adequately through content deletion alone.

The theoretical gap is therefore a missing mechanism-level account linking affective vulnerability, platform stickiness, and monetisable behaviour. This paper addresses that gap by integrating platform governance, attention-economy, digital-responsibility, and user-vulnerability perspectives. The resulting framework distinguishes four forms of platform ethical disorder and connects each to a corresponding transformation in governance responsibility.

Methodology

Conceptual Research Design

This study employs a conceptual theory-building design supported by an integrative literature review. Conceptual research is appropriate when a phenomenon is discussed across partially disconnected literatures and the principal task is to clarify constructs, identify relationships, and build an explanatory framework rather than estimate a single causal effect (Jaakkola, 2020). An integrative review permits the combination of empirical, theoretical, and normative scholarship while requiring transparent decisions about search scope, selection, comparison, and synthesis (Snyder, 2019; Torraco, 2005). The purpose was not to produce an exhaustive systematic review or meta-analysis, but to achieve theoretical coverage of the mechanisms and governance responsibilities relevant to anxiety-oriented content.

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Literature Search and Selection

The review protocol focused on peer-reviewed English-language scholarship published primarily from 2010 to June 2026, while allowing earlier foundational studies where necessary. Scopus and Web of Science were specified as the principal indexing databases, and Google Scholar was used for supplementary citation tracing and identification of relevant books or interdisciplinary work. Searches combined terms relating to the focal phenomenon and its mechanisms, including “anxiety-oriented content,” “social media anxiety,” “social comparison,” “attention economy,” “platform capitalism,” “platform governance,” “algorithmic recommendation,” “algorithmic amplification,” “emotional manipulation,” “digital advertising,” “creator economy,” “commercial inducement,” “dark patterns,” “digital well-being,” “user vulnerability,” “corporate digital responsibility,” and “co-governance.” Backward and forward citation tracing was used to locate foundational and closely connected studies.

Sources were screened in three stages. Titles and abstracts were first assessed for relevance to digital platforms, emotional or behavioural engagement, monetisation, governance, or user protection. Full texts were then examined to determine whether they contributed to construct definition, mechanism explanation, empirical support, or governance design. Finally, the retained literature was evaluated for theoretical authority and fit. Priority was given to peer-reviewed articles in established information-systems, platform-studies, business-ethics, communication, marketing, policy, and psychology journals. Duplicates, purely clinical discussions without a platform dimension, descriptive commentaries lacking analytical relevance, and sources that did not inform the proposed mechanisms or governance framework were excluded. Non-journal sources were retained only when they supplied a foundational concept not adequately represented elsewhere.

Synthesis and Analytical Framework

The selected literature was synthesised through iterative thematic comparison. The analysis first coded how existing studies described emotional activation, recommendation and visibility, commercial conversion, user vulnerability, and responsibility allocation. It then compared agreements, disagreements, and missing links across psychological, platform-economy, and governance perspectives. Recurring relationships were organised into four mechanism categories: algorithmic amplification, emotional manipulation, commercial inducement, and responsibility displacement. These categories were not treated as independent variables; they represent analytically distinct but mutually reinforcing processes within a platform system.

A second stage mapped each mechanism to the actor with the greatest capacity to influence it while preserving the principle of differentiated shared responsibility. This produced four governance transformations: platform responsibility, creator accountability, process-oriented regulation, and rights-based user participation. The framework was refined by testing whether each proposed response addressed the mechanism that generated the risk, whether responsibilities were proportionate to actor power, and whether legitimate expression and innovation could be preserved. The analysis therefore moves from diagnosis of platform ethical disorder to construction of an ethical co-governance architecture.

Conceptual Framework of Platform Ethical Co-Governance

Anxiety-oriented content is defined here as platform-mediated communication that frames socially or personally significant uncertainty as an unresolved risk requiring continued attention, comparison, interpretation, or corrective action. The construct is narrower than

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general negative content because it contains an open-ended problematisation logic, and broader than fear appeals because it need not present a single bounded threat or a clearly specified protective action. It also differs from doomscrolling, which describes a consumption pattern, and from social comparison, which identifies one source of anxiety. Anxiety-oriented content refers to the communicative organisation of insecurity and the way that organisation interacts with platform distribution and commerce.

The proposed framework begins with a platformised attention economy in which anxiety-oriented narratives encounter engagement metrics, recommendation systems, creator competition, and integrated commercial affordances (Figure 1). These conditions can produce four forms of ethical disorder. Algorithmic amplification repeatedly converts anxious attention into further exposure. Emotional manipulation uses insecurity and trust to intensify response. Commercial inducement connects heightened uncertainty to paid solutions. Responsibility displacement disperses accountability while concentrating benefits. The mechanisms form a reinforcing sequence, but they can also occur separately and at different intensities.

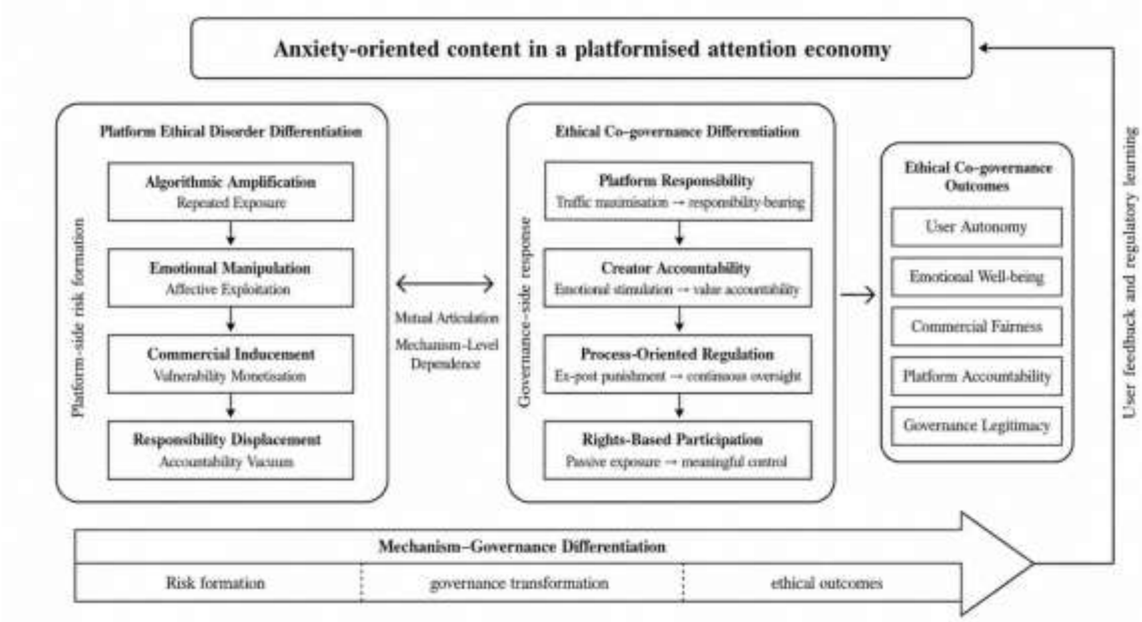

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

The lower half of the framework translates these risks into governance transformations. Platforms bear infrastructural responsibility because they control recommendation, interface, data, and monetisation architectures (Table 1). Creators bear communicative responsibility because they frame risk, mobilise trust, and disclose—or conceal—commercial interests. Regulators bear institutional responsibility because they define standards, require information, and coordinate across content, consumer, advertising, and data-governance domains. Users remain agents rather than merely protected objects, but meaningful participation depends on information, control, redress, and differentiated protection. Ethical co-governance emerges when these responsibilities operate as a coordinated cycle rather than as isolated compliance activities.

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Table 1. Mechanisms of Platform Ethical Disorder and Corresponding Governance Responses

Mechanism	Primary locus	Principal ethical risk	Corresponding governance response
Algorithmic amplification	Platform recommendation	Repeated emotional exposure and affective narrowing	Affective-risk audits; exposure-diversity controls; recommendation explanations; topic-management tools
Emotional manipulation	Creator framing	Exploitation of insecurity, trust, and perceived authority	Contextualised claims; evidential standards; qualification and commercial disclosure; graduated sanctions
Commercial inducement	Content-commerce integration	Opaque or pressured consumption based on vulnerability	Prominent labels; separation of advice and transaction; claim substantiation; refund and redress mechanisms
Responsibility displacement	Multi-actor system	Accountability vacuum and individualisation of harm	Differentiated duties; platform reporting; cross-domain oversight; traceable complaints and independent audit

The framework does not presume that all anxiety-related communication is harmful. Risk depends on intensity, repetition, opacity, commercial coupling, audience vulnerability, and the availability of control or redress. The normative aim is therefore not emotional sanitisation. It is to prevent platform systems from systematically benefiting from insecurity while externalising the emotional and financial consequences to users.

Platform Ethical Disorder

Algorithmic Amplification: Emotional Overexposure

Algorithmic amplification occurs when recommendation systems translate anxious attention into signals for further distribution. The core measurement problem is that engagement data reveal behaviour but not its emotional origin. A user may watch repeatedly because the content is enjoyable, but may also remain because the issue feels threatening or unresolved. Systems optimised for predicted engagement can treat both cases as equivalent. Repeated recommendation then creates a feedback loop in which attempts to understand or resolve anxiety generate additional exposure to comparable narratives.

The ethical risk is not limited to any single recommendation. Accumulated exposure can narrow the user's informational and affective environment, making crisis narratives appear more prevalent, urgent, and representative than they are. Recommender-system scholarship identifies autonomy, opacity, and exposure diversity as central ethical concerns, while content-moderation research shows that automated ranking embeds organisational objectives and policy choices (Gorwa et al., 2020; Milano et al., 2020). Anxiety-oriented content makes these concerns concrete because engagement may be produced by vulnerability rather than endorsement.

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Platforms cannot resolve this problem merely by removing extreme posts. Mechanism-level governance requires assessment of clusters, frequency, recency, commercial connection, and repeated exposure. Relevant measures include affective-risk audits for sensitive domains, diversity constraints that interrupt emotional narrowing, explanations for repeated recommendations, and accessible controls to reduce or pause selected topics. These interventions should be proportionate and reviewable so that legitimate discussion of social risk is not suppressed.

Emotional Manipulation: Affective Exploitation

Emotional manipulation arises when creators strategically intensify insecurity to obtain visibility, trust, or conversion. Creator markets reward content that attracts immediate attention and generates measurable response. Crisis headlines, deterministic predictions, selective success stories, and comparative language can therefore become competitive techniques. Emotional intensity can increase diffusion in online networks, but visibility incentives do not by themselves establish manipulation; the ethical threshold is crossed when users' fear or self-doubt is deliberately narrowed toward engagement or commercial dependence (Brady et al., 2017).

The mechanism often follows a recognisable sequence. Content first identifies a pain point, then validates the user's concern, escalates the consequences of inaction, and positions the creator as an interpretive or emotional authority. Continued following, private groups, consultations, courses, or recommended products are subsequently presented as routes to reassurance or control. The asymmetry lies in creators' ability to select evidence, control pacing, define the problem, and obscure commercial incentives, while users may encounter the message under conditions of uncertainty.

Governance should distinguish emotional resonance from exploitative persuasion. Creators should contextualise claims, state uncertainty, avoid universalising personal experience, and disclose relevant qualifications and commercial relationships. Platforms should incorporate repeated fear-based framing, hidden promotion, and unsupported high-stakes claims into creator-governance standards. The aim is not to prohibit strong language, but to align persuasive power with evidential and commercial accountability.

Commercial Inducement: Vulnerability Monetisation

Commercial inducement occurs when anxiety-oriented communication is connected to products, services, or paid access in a way that makes relief appear contingent on consumption. Content-commerce integration enables advertising links, livestream sales, subscriptions, consultations, and affiliate recommendations to appear within the same interactional space as advice or emotional support. Research on digital content platforms confirms that advertising and content creation are strategically interdependent rather than separate activities (Ren, 2024).

The ethical issue is not commerce itself. It is the use of heightened vulnerability, opacity, or artificial urgency to shape decisions. Employment insecurity may be directed toward paid coaching; educational concern toward tutoring or parenting programmes; health and body anxiety toward testing, supplements, or cosmetic services; and financial uncertainty toward investment courses or private communities. Users remain formally free to refuse, but repeated crisis framing can make refusal feel irresponsible or dangerous. Experimental evidence on dark patterns shows that design choices can materially affect consumer decisions while remaining

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difficult to detect, especially when manipulative practices accumulate (Luguri & Strahilevitz, 2021).

Vulnerability-sensitive commercial governance should require prominent sponsorship and affiliate disclosure before the decision point, clearer separation between informational and transactional interfaces, substantiation of high-stakes claims, and restrictions on false scarcity or fear-based urgency. Sensitive sectors such as health, finance, education, youth development, and body image require stronger safeguards because the consequences of error are greater. Complaint, refund, and appeal procedures should be visible and workable rather than formally available but practically inaccessible.

Responsibility Displacement: The Accountability Vacuum

Responsibility displacement describes the fragmentation through which each actor explains away its contribution to a cumulative outcome. Platforms may describe themselves as technical intermediaries, creators as independent speakers, advertisers as providers of lawful products, regulators as responders to clear violations, and users as autonomous choosers. Each account may contain some truth, yet together they create an accountability vacuum. Benefits from attention and conversion are distributed among organisations, while emotional strain, financial loss, and the burden of self-protection remain individualised.

This problem reflects a separation between power and responsibility. Platforms possess infrastructural power over ranking and interface design; creators exercise framing and relational power; advertisers shape incentives and claims; regulators possess standard-setting and investigative authority. Users generally have the least information about how these elements interact. Algorithmic governance research therefore emphasises organisational accountability, while cooperative-responsibility approaches allocate differentiated obligations among interdependent actors (Helberger et al., 2018; Martin, 2019).

The appropriate response is neither to assign equal blame nor to place all responsibility on platforms. Instead, obligations should follow control, knowledge, benefit, and preventive capacity. Platforms should report on recommendation and commercial-risk management; creators should disclose incentives and correct misleading claims; commercial actors should substantiate offers; regulators should coordinate standards and oversight; and users should have enforceable rights to information, control, complaint, and remedy. Shared responsibility becomes meaningful only when roles are specified and failures can be traced.

Ethical Co-Governance

Platform Logic: From Traffic Maximisation to Responsibility-Bearing

Platforms are the infrastructural centre of the proposed governance community. Their responsibility follows from their capacity to define ranking objectives, collect behavioural data, set creator incentives, integrate commercial tools, and control user interfaces. Treating all engagement as beneficial is ethically inadequate where the same metrics can reflect anxiety, confusion, or compulsion. Platform responsibility therefore requires welfare-sensitive optimisation: engagement performance should be evaluated alongside exposure diversity, user control, complaint patterns, and the concentration of sensitive content.

Operationally, platforms should conduct periodic risk assessments of anxiety-intensive content clusters and document how recommendation systems respond to repeated interaction in high-

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risk domains. Audits should consider whether users are exposed to escalating crisis frames, whether commercial content receives disproportionate amplification, and whether vulnerable groups face differentiated risk. Corporate digital responsibility provides a basis for treating these practices as part of organisational governance rather than optional social responsibility (Lobschat et al., 2021).

Platform design should also provide meaningful control. Users need understandable explanations of why content is recommended, visible options to reduce or diversify particular topics, and friction before repeated exposure is converted into commercial targeting. Reporting tools should allow users to identify hidden advertising, exaggerated claims, and emotionally manipulative patterns. Aggregated feedback should trigger review of content clusters and recommendation pathways, not only the individual post that generated a complaint.

Creator Logic: From Emotional Stimulation to Value Accountability

Creators are not simply sources of user-generated content; they are participants in an incentive system that can reward affective intensity. Value accountability requires them to consider the foreseeable consequences of framing choices, not merely whether a statement violates a rule. Claims about employment, education, health, finance, body image, parenting, and self-improvement should be proportionate, contextualised, and transparent about uncertainty. Personal success stories and selective examples should not be presented as universal predictions.

Commercial accountability is equally important. Creators should clearly distinguish independent opinion, sponsored recommendation, affiliate promotion, sale of their own products, and paid professional advice. Disclosure must be prominent and timely rather than buried after persuasion has occurred. Where creators invoke professional authority, relevant credentials and limits should be clear. Platforms can support compliance by standardising labels, requiring declarations, and using graduated sanctions for repeated concealment or unsupported high-stakes claims.

The phrase “value accountability” does not require creators to adopt a single moral viewpoint. It requires them to recognise that relational trust and emotional authority create obligations. Responsible creators can discuss anxiety, warn of genuine risks, and commercialise expertise, but should not manufacture inadequacy or present consumption as the only route to safety, competence, or social worth.

Regulatory Logic: From Ex-Post Punishment to Process-Oriented Oversight

Regulators face a category problem because anxiety-oriented content often falls between content moderation, advertising law, consumer protection, data governance, and mental-health policy. A single item may be lawful, a product legitimate, and a recommendation technically compliant, while their combination generates cumulative pressure. Process-oriented oversight therefore examines how production, distribution, monetisation, and user impact are connected rather than waiting for a clearly illegal post or completed transaction.

Relevant regulatory tools include risk-based duties for sensitive sectors, mandatory disclosure standards, access to platform reporting, independent audit requirements, and clear procedures for complaints and redress. Governance should focus on proportionality: interventions should be stronger where claims concern high-stakes decisions, commercial interests are hidden, audiences are vulnerable, or recommendation produces repeated exposure. Artificial-

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intelligence governance research supports adaptive arrangements that combine rule-setting, monitoring, organisational responsibility, and learning rather than relying on a single control mechanism (Taeihagh, 2021).

Process-oriented governance also requires coordination. Advertising authorities may address claims, consumer agencies transactions, data regulators targeting, and platform regulators systemic risks. Without information sharing, each institution sees only part of the mechanism. An integrated approach should establish who investigates cross-domain cases, what evidence platforms must retain, how user complaints are escalated, and how standards are updated when new monetisation formats emerge.

User Logic: From Passive Exposure to Rights-Based Participation

Users are neither passive victims nor fully informed market actors. Their agency is real, but it operates within environments structured by opaque recommendation, asymmetric information, and persuasive design. Rights-based participation begins with the right to know when content is sponsored, why it is being recommended, which data or actions contributed to targeting, and how to alter that process. It also includes practical rights to reduce exposure, refuse personalisation, exit commercial funnels, complain, appeal, and obtain remedy.

Digital literacy remains necessary but cannot substitute for institutional responsibility. Asking users to recognise every manipulation, verify every claim, and continually manage emotional exposure transfers systemic burdens to individuals. Digital well-being is produced by interactions among people, technologies, and contexts, which means that user skills must be complemented by safer design, accountable creators, and enforceable standards (Vanden Abeele, 2021). Differentiated support is particularly important for young people, patients, job seekers, financially insecure users, and others facing high-stakes uncertainty.

Participation should also generate governance knowledge. User reports, topic-reduction choices, appeals, refund requests, and descriptions of emotional overexposure can reveal patterns not captured by conventional performance metrics. Platforms and regulators should aggregate and analyse this evidence, publish meaningful summaries, and demonstrate how it changes policy. Feedback without visible response is symbolic participation; rights-based participation requires institutional uptake.

Multi-Actor Integration and Discussion

The four transformations are mutually dependent. Platform audits have limited value if creators can conceal commercial relationships; creator standards are weak if platform metrics reward crisis escalation; regulatory duties are ineffective without access to platform data; and user controls are inadequate if complaints do not alter recommendation or enforcement. Ethical co-governance must therefore operate as a closed loop linking detection, disclosure, participation, review, correction, and learning.

A workable sequence begins with platforms identifying high-risk content clusters through technical and human review. Creators and commercial partners supply disclosure and substantiation information. Users contribute experiential evidence through controls, reports, and appeals. Regulators examine platform reporting, investigate cross-domain risks, and revise standards where recurring gaps appear. Independent researchers or auditors can test whether exposure, labelling, and redress systems function as claimed. Responsibility is shared, but not diluted: each stage has an identifiable actor, evidence requirement, and route of escalation.

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The framework makes three theoretical contributions. First, it reframes anxiety-oriented content from a purely psychological outcome into a platformed content logic. This highlights how insecurity is selected, narrated, distributed, and commercialised. Second, it connects affective vulnerability to platform stickiness without assuming that repeated engagement represents satisfaction or endorsement. Anxious attention can be behaviourally persistent yet welfare-reducing. Third, it extends platform-governance theory by showing why cooperative responsibility must be mechanism-specific. Shared responsibility becomes analytically useful only when platform, creator, regulatory, and user roles are linked to the risks they can actually prevent or correct.

The framework also clarifies an important normative boundary. Ethical governance does not require platforms to eliminate anxiety, creators to avoid difficult topics, or regulators to determine which emotions are acceptable. Such an approach would suppress legitimate experience and public discussion. The target is the systematic coupling of emotional vulnerability with opaque amplification and pressured commercial conversion. This distinction protects expression while making extraction practices governable.

Practically, the framework can guide platform policy and regulatory assessment. Recommendation governance should evaluate emotional concentration and commercial coupling rather than engagement alone. Creator policies should address repeated crisis framing, evidential context, professional authority, and commercial disclosure. Commercial governance should provide stronger friction and substantiation in sensitive domains. User governance should make topic controls, recommendation explanations, complaints, and remedies accessible. These measures are most effective when evidence flows across actors and when outcomes are evaluated over time rather than through one-off compliance checks.

Conclusion

This study examined anxiety-oriented content as a structural platform-ethics problem. Its risk does not arise simply from negative emotion or from the truth or falsity of an isolated post. It arises when unresolved insecurity is repeatedly activated, translated into engagement signals, amplified through recommendation, connected to commercial solutions, and governed through fragmented responsibility. The conceptual analysis identified four interrelated forms of ethical disorder—algorithmic amplification, emotional manipulation, commercial inducement, and responsibility displacement—and linked them to four governance transformations involving platforms, creators, regulators, and users.

The proposed platform ethical co-governance framework contributes an integrated explanation of how affective vulnerability, platform stickiness, and monetisation interact. It also provides a responsibility architecture in which obligations follow actor power and preventive capacity. Platforms must govern recommendation and interface systems; creators must account for affective framing and commercial interests; regulators must supervise processes across institutional domains; and users must possess meaningful information, control, participation, and redress rights. Ethical co-governance is achieved not through a single authority, but through coordinated and traceable responsibility.

This study has several limitations. As a conceptual paper, it does not empirically test the proposed mechanisms or establish their relative strength. The framework synthesises research from different countries, platforms, sectors, and methodological traditions, so its applicability may vary across regulatory and cultural settings. Anxiety-oriented content is also a broad,

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context-dependent construct whose boundary with legitimate risk communication, fear appeals, and ordinary negative content requires further operational clarification. Finally, an integrative review depends on the databases, keywords, language, and selection judgements used to construct its literature base and cannot guarantee exhaustive coverage.

Future research should develop transparent coding criteria for anxiety-oriented content and test the four mechanisms through content analysis, experiments, surveys, interviews, digital trace data, and platform audits. Comparative studies could examine whether particular platform architectures or regulatory regimes intensify or constrain anxiety-based monetisation. Research should also investigate heterogeneous effects across age, digital literacy, socioeconomic position, and content domain. These empirical extensions would allow the framework to move from conceptual diagnosis toward measurable governance standards while preserving the central distinction between legitimate anxiety-related communication and exploitative vulnerability monetisation.

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