# Tech algorithms reshape soft power by controlling global cultural narratives



In the evolving landscape of cultural influence, traditional notions of soft power have entered a new realm, increasingly defined by the operations of tech giants like Meta, TikTok, and Spotify. Mark Mulligan of MIDiA highlights that while the classic forms of soft power wielded by Western nations—through mediums like broadcasting and film—may appear diminished, they have not vanished. Instead, they have been supplanted by a nuanced, algorithm-driven paradigm that redefines how cultural narratives are crafted on a global scale.

Historically, the soft power of nations such as the United States, United Kingdom, and France was exercised through tangible cultural exports, fostering a shared understanding and promoting national values worldwide. However, with the rise of local-language content and fragmentation of audiences, the mechanisms of influence that once seemed robust are now facing significant challenges. The digital age has ushered in a form of soft power that operates not through human intermediaries but through the unseen algorithms that govern our online experiences. As the digital landscape continues to shift, it is evident that the responsibilities once held by cultural gatekeepers have been entrusted to automated systems that, according to Mulligan, are rewriting the rules of cultural engagement.

The implications of this shift are profound. Algorithms designed by tech companies are not merely passive tools; they actively shape public discourse and consumer behaviour by curating the content users see and engage with. This raises important concerns surrounding transparency and accountability. The creators and operators of these algorithms often embed their political and ideological beliefs within the code, thereby influencing perceptions without public scrutiny. As noted in discussions about social media's role in democracy, the potential for these algorithms to sway public opinion has elevated their status to a new form of soft power, echoing the historical narratives propagated by traditional media outlets.

The economic landscape within the entertainment industry reflects these algorithmic influences, with creators navigating a complicated framework that prioritises speed and virality over depth and sustainability. Streaming platforms, powered by social media dynamics, have necessitated a relentless production cycle that can leave artists feeling overwhelmed and undervalued. As observed in recent analyses, this has produced a system where the emphasis on “chasing virality” often benefits platforms far more than creators themselves. The challenge is accentuated by a culture that rewards quick, engaging snippets of content, leading to concerns about the long-term viability of artistic expression in an environment where quality may be sacrificed for algorithmic approval.

Moreover, as highlighted by industry figures, the implications of these algorithms extend beyond mere visibility; they are engineered to evoke powerful psychological responses, often centred around dopamine production. This manipulation of engagement tactics has implications for both creators and consumers. The negative repercussions of this approach, which can be both addictive and detrimental to mental health, underscore the need for a critical perspective on the digital structures underpinning modern entertainment. As Elliot Grainge of WMG articulates, the consequences of algorithm-driven content consumption can create an environment where success is dictated more by adherence to algorithmic whims than by artistic merit.

As the tech landscape continues to evolve, particularly with the rapid advancements in artificial intelligence, the stakes are set to rise even further. The financial backing for AI companies is closely intertwined with the ideological pursuits of their investors, potentially influencing the future of copyright and content production. The current paradigm poses two pathways for the industry: to perpetuate an increasingly algorithmically driven landscape, or to seek out new avenues for artistic expression and economic models that prioritise creator agency.

It is essential for stakeholders to acknowledge the critical juncture at which the entertainment industry finds itself. With a reformulated understanding of soft power rooted not in traditional media but in complex algorithmic governance, there lies an opportunity to advocate for more equitable systems that benefit creators and foster a healthier cultural exchange. As we navigate this new terrain, the call for transparency and accountability within algorithmic frameworks could prove essential to preserving the integrity of artistic expression and ensuring the longevity of cultural richness in an increasingly digital world.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

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2. <https://www.theguardian.com/media/2022/jan/25/social-media-algorithms-influence-democracy> - This article discusses how social media algorithms play a significant role in influencing public opinion and democratic processes. It explains that algorithms are crafted by tech companies and often reflect the political ideologies of their creators. As users engage with content, these algorithms dictate visibility, shaping perceptions within society. It raises concerns about the lack of transparency and accountability in algorithmic decisions, equating their impact to that of traditional soft power, emphasising the need for a critical view of how algorithms govern cultural narratives.
3. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/bernardmarr/2022/02/28/the-power-of-algorithms-how-they-impact-our-daily-lives/> - This Forbes article explores the pervasive role of algorithms in everyday life and their significant influence over consumer behaviour and decision-making. It outlines how major tech companies utilise algorithms to control content visibility, thereby shaping cultural norms and preferences. These algorithms serve the dual purpose of enhancing user engagement while often prioritising corporate interests over individual user experiences. The article underscores the need for greater awareness of these mechanisms and calls for accountability in their deployment, reflecting a modern evolution of soft power.
4. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-58434380> - This BBC News piece covers the rising influence of streaming platforms on global culture, particularly how they shape consumer preferences and behaviours. It highlights that entertainment companies must adapt to the rapid changes dictated by these platforms, which operate with a focus on virality and speed. The article also discusses the economic implications for creators, who often find themselves navigating a landscape that prioritises platform goals over individual artistry. It raises concerns about sustainability in creative industries under current algorithm-driven pressures.
5. <https://hbr.org/2020/12/how-algorithms-are-transforming-the-creative-economy> - This Harvard Business Review article discusses how algorithms are reshaping the creative economy by influencing how content is produced, distributed, and consumed. It stresses that while creators are required to produce content at an unprecedented pace, the algorithms governing these platforms often favour quantity over quality. The article highlights the challenges faced by artists in monetising their work amid the dominance of algorithmic decision-making, presenting a modern take on the traditional notions of soft power and cultural influence.
6. <https://techcrunch.com/2021/05/14/the-creator-economy-reset/> - TechCrunch examines the creator economy's rapid transformation fuelled by social media platforms. The article outlines how creators are navigating algorithm-driven environments that dictate their success. It discusses the inherent risks and challenges posed by the need to rapidly produce engaging content while facing algorithmic constraints. Furthermore, it points to the significant role these platforms play in shaping cultural narratives, effectively monopolising the visibility of creators' work and controlling the economic landscape for content production.
7. <https://www.mediapost.com/publications/article/363196/the-dopamine-effect-how-digital-media-is-wreaking.html> - This article from MediaPost delves into the psychological impact of digital media and the dopamine responses elicited by social media algorithms. It argues that platforms intentionally design their algorithms to promote addictive behaviours, ultimately reshaping users' engagement with content. This manipulation of consumer behaviour raises concerns about the socio-cultural implications as creators and audiences become increasingly entwined in an algorithmic framework. The piece highlights the darker side of the creator economy driven by the insatiable demand for content based on algorithmic needs rather than artistic value.