Governance of Content Moderation, Content Moderation Requests of Government:

Digital sexual violence over platforms and the South Korean governmental entities’ measures

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Hi! I appreciate this great chance of sharing with fascinating participants about my research, whose title is renamed as “Governance of Content Moderation, Content Moderation Requests of Government: Digital sexual violence over platforms and the South Korean governmental entities’ measures.” My name is Yoehan Oh, a Ph.D. student in the Department of Science and Technology Studies, at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, in the United States.

My talk aims to provide another framework to think of platform governance when it comes to content moderation. One familiar framework may be a multistakeholderism, where various stakeholders such as platform companies, users & voluntary moderators, NGOs (& civil society), researchers, and governmental regulatory bodies are participating together, centering on the content moderation. To this, a framework I propose is centered on the government’s executive branch, and its various agencies’ administrative actions to address the content moderation problems. My focal point is the content of digital sexual violence in the context of South Korean government. There are at least four governmental agencies to address digital sexual violence: Law enforcement, Authority over Domestic Platform Companies, Internet Censorship Body, and Victim Support. Out of these various governmental agencies, some entities under agencies play the roles of requesting content moderation to platform companies.

Due to the time constraint, I will focus on the empirical observation, rather than a deeper analysis or conceptualization. My observation is about how two governmental entities play the roles in requesting content removal when it comes to digital sexual violence. By the digital sexual violence, I mean various kinds of sexual violence caused by the dissemination of the graphical content over digital platforms such as (a) social media platforms (Tumblr, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram), as well as messenger apps (b) pornography website, (c) peer-to-peer sharing services (P2P)/torrent, and (d) WebHard services. The examples can include the non-consensual
distribution of sexual images or video, the dissemination of deepfake video where ordinary subjects appeared, and so on.

My observation is based on data collected from governmental press release, government-funded research papers, and newspaper articles. Upon this observation, my further research will be continued. In the remaining of this talk I will address five questions to make sense of two governmental entities’ emergence, roles, and limitations.

The first three questions are about one governmental entity, and the latter two will be about another entity. The first question is, why was a governmental entity mainly responsible for supporting the content removal of digital sexual violence created in the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family? It was because the digital sexual violence victims had difficulty in requesting content removal until 2018. There were at least five ways to request the removal. First, victims could ask the companies to remove the content. However, the long process itself did harm to victims. Second, victims could commission the Internet censorship body to request the removal. However, this process itself requires victims to screen-capture and submit the content in which the victims can be graphically identified. Third, victims could report to the police. However, in the investigation processes, police officers oftentimes blamed victims, which prevented victims from reporting to police. Fourth, victims could commission “digital undertakers” to request platform companies to remove content. However, it was expensive (such that it took $1,600 (KRW 2,000,000) per month and it took three to six months to keep monitoring whether the content starts spreading again). Fifth, victims could commission NGOs to request content removal. However, the NGOs of this kind was such small that it consisted of 10-20 part-time voluntary staff, the demand could not be met.
The second question is how is the governmental entity for removal support working as a gateway for victims? In April 2018, the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family launched the “Digital Sex Crime Victim Support Center” (디지털 성범죄 피해자 지원센터). The center’s primary aim was to provide a free-charge support service for digital sexual crime victims to request content removal. The center’s removal support activity on behalf of the victims is threefold. First, the center collects the cases that the content was posted to the various platforms and websites and asks the companies to remove the content. Second, the center is commissioned to screen capture the content, which is required to report to police. Third, if the platform or website companies would not respond to removal request, the center commissions the Internet censorship body. After one case is closed, the center keeps monitoring whether the content starts spreading again elsewhere.

The third question is: what are the current limitations of this governmental entity for removal support? We can identify three problems. Firstly, because the center officers work from Monday to Friday, from 10 am to 5 pm, the timely countermeasure is not always available, especially during the weekend. Secondly, the limited number of officers are critical. (The number of the officers in “Digital Sex Crime Victim Support Center” was 16 in 2018 and 2019 and is 17 in 2020. And the number of removal support in average by month was 3,610 in 2018 and 8,213 in 2019.\(^\text{ii}\) By simple calculation, it means that every officer in the center everyday have to deal with 10.2 cases in 2018 and 21.9 cases in 2019.) Out of the burdened workload around daily 10 – 20 cases in average, the officers are likely to report to police or commission to Internet censorship body instead of actively collecting the cases over various platforms and websites by themselves. Thirdly, the center has no authority to demand the priority to the Internet censorship body or platform companies. However, this center starts addressing this issue. The center is developing a ‘hotline’ between the center and the Internet censorship body so that the center can submit many
cases at once instead of submitting individual cases separately. And since May 2019, the center has communicated with Twitter through an exclusive window so that Twitter can prioritize the center’s removal request.iii

Now I turn to another entity, which is located in the Internet Censorship body. The fourth question is: how did the entity come into being and how has it developed? In April 2018, the Korea Communications Standards Commission launched the “Digital Sex Crime Response Team” [디지털성범죄대응팀] with 6 officers. The team was dedicated to dealing with digital sex crime content. Upon the request, the team officers look for the original content, screen-capture fifty times, and look for other copied content over the various platforms and websites.iv Thanks to this dedicated team, the time taken from being requested to taking counteraction decreased from 10.9 days to 3.2 days. In September 2019, the team was expanded to “Digital Sex Crime Standard Review Support Group” [디지털성범죄심의지원단] with 30 officers. The time taken from being requested to taking counteraction further decreased up to within a day.v

The fifth, and last, question is how effective is Internet censorship body’s request for content removal? The authority seems only partially effective. Let’s examine. Before the standard review of the content reported, the censorship body gives companies the “corrective advice” for self-regulation of that content. If the companies would not respond, the censorship body conduct standard review over the content, to issue the “corrective orders” to companies. If the companies would still not respond, the censorship body blocks the access to the URLs to those pages or objects. However, as the Table shows, more than two thirds of the Censorship Body’s total corrective measures were to block the access because platform companies tend not to comply with this censorship body’s corrective advice or order.
To sum up, I have shown how governmental entities responsible for requesting content moderation regarding digital sexual violence come to exist, how these entities are working, and what their limitations are. I also want to note that I do not include here more recent changes, which bring more workforces and fund to those entities. I hope my talk helps you get a sense of how the framework from the perspective within government can benefit empirical research in platform governance. *Vielen Dank!* [END].

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5 [https://www.hankookilbo.com/News/Read/202001201763048843](https://www.hankookilbo.com/News/Read/202001201763048843)