

REGENERATION AND REDESIGN OF PLATFORM ENVIRONMENTS: THE CASE OF ADVERTISING TIERS IN STREAMING MEDIA

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Extended Abstract

1. Introduction – Regeneration Reconsidered

Across contemporary platform discourse, “regeneration” has emerged as a recurring term to describe strategic adjustment, infrastructural renewal, and market adaptation. Streaming services are frequently portrayed as regenerating in response to subscriber slowdowns, intensifying competition, and shifting user expectations. What precisely is regenerated—community, business models, infrastructure, or governance itself?

The expansion of advertising-supported tiers has been framed as renewal—greater accessibility and diversified revenue. Yet these developments also raise structural questions about how participation conditions are reorganized.

I argue that platform regeneration is better understood as the recalibration of contractual and temporal conditions within governance environments. Platforms redesign the conditions through which participation becomes normalized. Regeneration, in this sense, operates at the level of infrastructural configuration.

To develop this argument, the paper examines the introduction and expansion of Netflix’s ad-supported tier as a focal case. Situating this case within a framework of Broadcast Governance demonstrates how regeneration functions as environmental recalibration—an adaptive restructuring of the boundaries within which rational choice unfolds.

It concerns the redesign of the conditions under which access, visibility, and temporal engagement are structured and normalized.

2. Theoretical Frame – Broadcast Governance as Environment Design

Broadcast Governance approaches authority not as direct command or coercion, but as the structuring of environments within which rational choice unfolds.

Platforms organize the spatial, temporal, and contractual parameters through which users engage with content. Pricing tiers, access conditions, and visibility regimes collectively form environments that pre-configure behavioral pathways. Authority persists not by overriding agency, but by delimiting the architecture of available options.

Temporal allocation is central to this structuring. Governance operates through pacing and redistribution—interruption, sequencing, and exposure stabilize engagement patterns. Participation is modulated through calibrated duration and layered visibility rather than explicit restriction.

Contractual visibility further consolidates this process. Contemporary platforms rarely conceal their terms; participation is organized through normalized consent structures. Consent becomes infrastructural rather than deliberative—integrated into routine access rather than negotiated as an exceptional act.

From this perspective, regeneration appears as periodic recalibration of environmental parameters. When growth slows or pressures intensify, platforms redesign participation conditions and adjust temporal allocation mechanisms. Regeneration thus functions as infrastructural recalibration: a reorganization of the boundaries within which rational choice operates. It is structural adjustment rather than symbolic renewal. Such adjustment reshapes the practical horizons within which participation becomes thinkable and routine.

3. Netflix Ad-Tier – From Subscription Purity to Default Advertising

The introduction of Netflix’s ad-supported tier in late 2022 marked a decisive departure from its long-standing subscription-only model. While maintaining comparable streaming quality, the new plan introduced price differentiation and embedded advertising exposure within the standard viewing experience.

This shift reorganizes the architecture of entry. By offering substantial price reductions in exchange for advertising exposure, the platform relocates advertising into the default condition of access for a growing segment of users. Global monthly active users of Netflix’s ad-supported tier increased from a few million in 2023 to over ninety million within two years. In several markets, advertising tiers now account for a substantial share of new subscriptions, with adoption rates exceeding one-third of total new sign-ups, indicating that advertising-based access is structurally integrated into platform growth strategies.

Parallel developments across the streaming ecosystem reinforce this pattern. In South Korea, platforms such as Tving, Wavve, and Coupang Play have expanded advertising-based models, with ad-tier participation rising markedly within short timeframes. Survey data suggest that a large majority of current ad-tier users prefer to maintain such plans, indicating adaptation rather than simple tolerance.

Advertising expansion is accompanied by infrastructural consolidation. Netflix’s development of proprietary advertising systems signals that advertising is no longer an external insertion but an integrated governance layer. Interruption becomes structured, price-access trade-offs normalized, and participation recalibrated through differentiated entry points. The Netflix case therefore demonstrates how regeneration operates as redesign of participation environments rather than a return to earlier media models. Regeneration cannot be analytically separated from optimization; it represents its infrastructural reconfiguration.

4. Regeneration and Optimization – Structural Entanglement

Optimization is commonly associated with efficiency and the refinement of engagement metrics. Yet in platform environments, optimization extends beyond algorithmic tuning to the adjustment of participation architectures—pricing tiers, access conditions, visibility rules, and attention allocation mechanisms.

The expansion of ad-supported tiers illustrates this entanglement. Rather than abandoning subscription logics, platforms introduce hybrid structures that redistribute temporal exposure, differentiate contractual entry points, and normalize layered participation regimes. These adjustments are publicly framed as renewal—greater accessibility and market inclusion—while functioning as infrastructural refinements that stabilize authority under shifting economic conditions.

Regeneration therefore appears not as suspension of existing logics but as their recalibration within redesigned environments. Advertising-based access reorganizes subscription paradigms through structured interruption and differentiated participation. Optimization persists, redirected toward maintaining durable governance conditions rather than maximizing immediate efficiency gains.

In this sense, regeneration functions as higher-order adjustment of governance infrastructures—an adaptive restructuring that responds to market pressures while preserving continuity of platform authority.

5. Implications – Regeneration as Environmental Recalibration

Regeneration becomes legible not as moral correction but as infrastructural adjustment embedded in the design of participation environments.

Such an approach aligns with broader internet research examining how governance increasingly operates through platform design, infrastructural mediation, and participation management rather than through formal institutional intervention alone.

First, distinguishing symbolic renewal from structural recalibration clarifies ambiguity in regeneration discourse. What appears as innovation or accessibility can be understood analytically as modification of participation architectures.

Second, this framework extends governance analysis beyond visible policy shifts to include entry configuration, tiered access, and attention redistribution. Participation is reorganized through layered contractual arrangements that render differentiated exposure routine.

Third, reading hybrid monetization as infrastructural redesign situates streaming transformation within broader dynamics of authority stabilization. The expansion of ad-supported tiers demonstrates how platforms adapt without abandoning core monetization logics. Regeneration recalibrates the environmental parameters that sustain authority—re-layering visibility, routinizing consent, and redistributing temporal allocation across differentiated access regimes.

Platform change thus cannot be reduced to emancipation or extraction. Authority persists through redesign of the conditions under which rational choice unfolds. Platforms regenerate not by escaping governance structures, but by reconfiguring the environmental architectures that render those structures durable across evolving market contexts.

This perspective contributes to ongoing discussions in internet studies concerning how platform governance operates through infrastructural design rather than explicit regulation. By foregrounding environmental recalibration, the analysis offers a cross-disciplinary bridge linking media studies, organizational sociology, and platform governance research.

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