

## 8. A Story

*We want to hear not only about what you did, but also about how that made this world a better place. In a few paragraphs, please tell a story of change that relates to your project. It can be a story of how somebody's life improved, or a community improvement. We would like to share this story publicly online in the APC website. Here are some generic questions you can follow as a guideline:*

1. *Why was your activity a relevant one for the community you work in?*
2. *What was the most significant change that has occurred among your beneficiaries? Why is this significant, mostly in terms of their quality of life? You can address changes on the levels of knowledge or awareness, changes in personal development, changes in attitude and behaviour, changes in participation in activities that aim to bring about positive social or political change, etc.*
3. *Is this something other organisations could replicate and readapt? Why?*

### Big Tech Monopoly and Civil Society Response in the Republic of Korea

Most of the services and content we use on a daily basis, such as messengers, news, social networks, videos, shopping, and maps, are now provided by a small number of big tech companies. The Internet is not a diverse and decentralized network any more, but a centralized network dominated by a few big techs. Global consensus is expanding on various problems caused by a small number of big techs dominating the Internet. In October 2020, a subcommittee on Antitrust, Commercial and Administrative Law under the Committee on the Judiciary of US House published the report <Investigation of Competition in Digital Markets>. The report criticised Big Tech as (1) dampening innovation and entrepreneurship, (2) negatively affecting privacy and personal data, (3) hindering the formation of free and diverse media, and (4) threatening political and economic freedom.

Already, regulators in the U.S. and Europe (e.g., market regulators or data protection supervisors) are investigating and regulating Big Tech's anti-competitive activities or personal information infringement. In addition, bills to regulate Big Tech have been proposed and discussed, and as the limitations of regulating Big Tech through the existing anti-trust law have been revealed, new regulation targeting only a few Big Techs is being introduced. In the United States, several bills to regulate big tech - for example, the American Innovation and Choice Online Act, which regulates self-preferential behavior for platforms above certain criteria, the Platform Competition and Opportunity Act for prohibiting M&A by Big Tech, and the Ending Platform Monopolies Act, which fundamentally prohibits the provision of certain products or services that cause conflicts of interest - have been proposed bipartisanly. In the European Union, the Digital Service Act (DSA) and the Digital Market Act (DMA) for regulating big tech online platforms have already passed the European Parliament in 2022 and are set to be implemented.

However, in the Republic of Korea, critical awareness of big tech is still weak. Unlike overseas, there are several native big techs such as Naver and Kakao, and there are many voices calling for fostering native tech companies. But, although the pattern of market

monopoly may be somewhat different from overseas, various problems caused by big tech at home and abroad are also appearing in Korea. Therefore, the voices of civil society and small business owners who criticize Big Tech's monopoly and high-handedness are growing.

In 2021, Jinbonet filed a personal information dispute settlement and compensation suit for damages for Meta's unauthorized provision of user personal information to third parties (related to the so-called "Cambridge Analytica" scandal). In 2022, issues related to the revision of Meta's privacy policy were raised. In July 2022, when Meta revised its privacy policies around the world, in Korea, it demanded to agree to the revised policies again, warning that users could not use the service otherwise. Korean users protested, criticizing Meta for collecting excessive personal information and actually forcing consent. Jinbonet reported to the Personal Information Protection Commission (PIPC) that Meta's collection of vast amount of personal information for targeted advertisements is a violation of the Personal Information Protection Act (PIPA) because PIPA requires collection of only personal information essential for service provision.

In connection with the controversy, it is known that Meta has also collected user personal information on Internet websites and apps outside Facebook and Instagram without even users' knowledge. In other words, Meta is collecting what users searched, what contents they read, and what items they ordered. In Korea, unlike Europe, site operators do not receive user consent for collecting personal information through cookies, so users were never aware that Meta was collecting their personal information outside of Facebook.

The personal information collected in this way is shared with numerous ad-tech companies during the online auction process for targeted advertisements. If personal information about the interests or tastes of the users who are accessing a specific website now is provided to the ad-tech companies, those companies will bid for its advertisement based on this information, and the advertisement of the winning company will be shown to the users. Apple's ad called 'Ellie's Data Auction' illustrates this online auction system. These online auctions take place in a short time when users access the site. However, when Meta or Google share users' personal information with ad-tech companies, they do not get consent from users, which is also a violation of the PIPA.

Jinbonet reported to the PIPC that Meta and Google have processed personal information in violation of the PIPA for targeted advertising purposes, and held a discussion forum at the National Assembly on the infringement of personal information in the targeted advertising process. On September 14, 2022, the PIPC imposed a fine of about 100 billion won along with a correction order for Google and Meta not sufficiently notifying users of collection of behavioral personal information from 3rd parties websites and apps without consent for targeted advertising purposes. However, the PIPC did not address the collection of personal information through cookies and sharing with ad-tech companies without user consent. Currently, the PIPC has formed a task force to examine on the processing of personal information in the targeted advertising process to examine this issue.

Targeted advertisements control users' consumption habits without users' knowledge. The processing of vast and sensitive personal information collected for target advertisements violates the user's right to privacy. As ads related to what they search follow them on any site, many people feel monitored.

In addition to targeted advertising issues, various issues surrounding Big Tech monopoly are also being raised in Korea. Like other countries, Google and Apple have forced their in-app payment systems on the App Store and Play Store, prompting app developers to protest. Coupang, an online shopping mall, has been criticized for discriminating against the products of the store vendors compared to their products and causing excessive tyranny such as price cuts to the store vendors. Recently, when Kakao Talk's server, a messenger used by the majority of the public in Korea, was stopped due to a fire in the data center, many important communication through Kakao Talk was disrupted, allowing many people to realize the social influence of certain exclusive services.

Big Tech's monopoly is not just an issue in Korea, but a global issue. In the Republic of Korea, while seeking responses to Big Tech and alternative legislation, we have drawn a lot of inspiration from overseas response movements and examples. Korea's experience will also be helpful to many civil society organizations abroad that want to respond to big tech.