All Things in Moderation

The People, Practices and Politics of Online Content Review – Human and Machine

December 6-7, 2017

on the campus of the

University of California, Los Angeles

Los Angeles, California, USA

Call for Participation/Proposals

Proposals due September 15, 2017

Notifications October 1, 2017

https://atm-ucla2017.net

Background: Commercial Content Moderation and the Present Moment

The phenomena, policies and material realities of workers involved in commercial content moderation (Roberts, 2014; 2017) – the organized, industrial-scale process of adjudication of online user-generated content - have made global headlines in the first part of 2017 at a level previously unseen in the public sphere. In the wake of a 2016 American Presidential election, the role of social media platforms and the information they circulate online was largely questioned by a public concerned, for the first time in significant numbers, about the nature of the production of their social media content. It saw the introduction of terms like "fake news" into the general discourse. Subsequently in the first half of 2017, a series of highly publicized and violent, tragic events followed that were broadcast, in some cases, live to the world, on Facebook and other social media platforms, once again raising public questions about what and how material circulates online and who, if anyone, is doing the gatekeeping.

Additionally, several public revelations – many already known to researchers and many through the work of journalists – also came to light related to content moderation practices, including the fact that much of the labor of these adjudication processes is undertaken not by sophisticated AI and deep learning algorithms, but by poorly paid human beings who risk burnout, desensitization and worse due to the nature of their work. Facebook and platforms like it have been beset by leaks in the pages of major newspapers such as The Guardian (Solon, 2017) and Die Süddeutsche Zeitung (Grasseger and Krause, 2017) from disgruntled commercial content moderators, eager to make the public aware of their role and their working conditions. In Germany and Austria, legal channels have been employed to force social media platforms to respond to laws prohibiting the circulation of hate-related content (as defined in those jurisdictions), while other governments seek to restrict the speech of their citizens on seemingly less benign political grounds and ask Facebook and others to manage this need. On December 30, 2016, a landmark lawsuit was filed on behalf of two Microsoft employees who both claim that they have been rendered completely disabled by PTSD as a result of their moderation work.

In short, commercial content moderation – the firms that supply it, the companies that need it and the employees who undertake it – is having a moment. The topic has seized the public's consciousness across academic, journalistic, technological and policy-making sectors, despite continued opacity, obfuscation and an unwillingness to discuss it on the part of social media firms who rely on such practices to function. It is a moment of particular and rare opportunity that offers interested parties the

chance to not only propose solutions to the problems raised by content moderation at such large, global industrial scope and scale, but indeed to reframe the kinds of questions that could and should be asked regarding such phenomena and all their implications.

All Things in Moderation: A CCM Event
All Things in Moderation is envisioned as a specialized symposium on all things commercial content moderation: its policies, procedures, and people. This two-day event brings together scholars, students, policy makers, activists, journalists and members of industry, all of whom have particular concern and relationships to CCM work, the impacts of social media, and its influence on social, political and economic spheres.

During the two days on site at UCLA, participants will engage in panels, roundtables and talks from parties who come to CCM from a variety of disciplines, sectors and points of intervention. Activities will include plenaries with journalists who endeavor to cover CCM and the tech industry, at large, and CCM workers themselves, willing to share their experiences and insight with others. In addition, the program will include keynote talks from key researchers, advocates and insiders working in this area.

This first-of-its-kind event is largely experimental, and so will rely heavily on the energy and expertise of participants. We look forward to the knowledge that you will bring to the symposium, and see it as both a chance to take the pulse of CCM as practiced and studied, as well as a means to develop a roadmap for CCM's future.

To this end, participants are encouraged to submit paper proposals, panel proposals, roundtable proposals and other contributions as appropriate. There will also be opportunities to workshop and share formally and informally, around CCM from a variety of different key approaches, to include:

Some areas of concentration envisioned by organizers include (but need not be limited to):

- CCM and Policy: human rights; internet governance; transparency and control online; national cases; transnational CCM (e.g., Taylor, 2016)
- CCM and/as Labor: workplace practices; internal policies; worker mental health and wellness; workers' rights; outsourcing, globalization and contract labor; CCM work and identity (race/gender/class/sexual orientation/ability/ethnicity) (e.g., Crawford and Gillespie, 2014)
- CCM Automation: algorithmic mechanisms; machine learning and training; computer vision; automated CCM tools and techniques
- CCM and the Law: US and international cyberlaw and its applications to CCM; lawsuits; EU and other governmental legislation; CCM as repression and speech restriction (e.g., Klonick, 2017)
- Histories of Moderation: online moderation pre-CCM; histories of online communities; comparative moderation studies (e.g., Postigo, 2009)
- Covering CCM: journalism and reporting on CCM and on tech; doing academic research on CCM

Who Should Attend
All Things in Moderation welcomes participants from across academic disciplines and research areas, such as information studies, sociology, legal studies, history, data science, computer vision, media studies, communication, policy studies, globalization studies and others. It also welcomes journalists, policy analysts, lawyers, engineers, programmers and anyone with an interest in CCM work and workers.

To Submit a Proposal/Register

Proposals can take the form of:

- Paper proposals – with preference for emergent work and/or work-in-process
- Panel proposals – made up of presentations organized thematically around a particular CCM issue or concern; submit a description of the panel and its component parts
- Roundtable proposals: hands-on, interactive sessions devoted to discussion and knowledge-sharing of the current state of affairs regarding CCM and a particular area of concentration (e.g., EU regulations and CCM, 2017)
- Lightning talks – short, provocative idea sharing sessions of five minutes (or less)
- Other interventions – something that doesn't adequately fit into these boxes that you would like to share (please describe; to be planned in conversation with organizers)

Proposals should not exceed 300 words and should be submitted via the conference registration site. **Proposals are due SEPTEMBER 15, 2017**. **Registration closes OCTOBER 31, 2017**.

Costs

Thanks to the generous support of the UCLA Graduate School of Education & Information Studies, **conference registration is free**. Lodging and travel information and options can be found at the conference website; participants will be responsible for their own accommodations and travel costs. **SPACE IS LIMITED** in order to keep this event productive and successful. Please submit your proposal and register as early as possible in order to secure your place. Priority given to those registrants who submit proposals.

Hope to see you in December.

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