

Platform potential Final Project

Project Brief

This project focuses on the problem that user accounts of Vinted, a second-hand trading website, are often restricted by the platform. As the platform's initial analysis and determination of accounts is often determined by AI, and the user's complaints are in a low-power position (multi-channel feedback, multiple complaints, and long processing period), it makes me think about why the user's voice is silenced under the platform's automated auditing system in the involvement of AI.

This project will illustrate, through interviews and specific cases, how platform failures affect users, thus creating a problem of inequality between platforms and individuals. Ultimately, the ultimate goal of solving the inequality between platforms and sellers will be achieved through platform front-end interaction interface redesign, API transparency, and back-end process optimisation.

Research Issue

How does automated moderation on second-hand platforms like Vinted reinforce power asymmetry between the platform and users, especially in cases of account restrictions?

Target group

Users with blocked accounts on the Vinted platform

Case Study

At the beginning of the project, I developed the following **Interview Outline**:

**Part 1: Basic Information*

When did you first start using Vinted?

Is it mainly for buying or selling?

Part 2: Experience with account restrictions

Have you ever experienced an account being banned, restricted, or otherwise penalised? About how many times did it happen?

**Do you know what caused the account to be banned? Was it clearly communicated by the platform?*

What did you do first after being restricted? What was the complaint process?

Part 3: Platform feedback experience

*What did you find to be the most difficult point in the whole complaint process?

Did you try multiple channels (e.g. customer service, email, social media)? How effective were they?

Did you feel that the platform was 'listening to you'? Did you get a sense of whether the feedback was manual or automatically generated?

Do you ever feel that the platform is 'listening to you'?

Have you ever had the feeling that you were being talked to by a robot? How did it feel?

*Part 4: Feelings between the platform and the user

Do you feel that the platform is treating you fairly?

If you compare the platform to a 'judge', do you feel you have a right to a defence? Why?

Why do you feel 'vulnerable' in this case?

*Part 5: Users' Expectations and Suggestions

If you could redesign the 'Account Restriction + Grievance' process, what do you think needs to be changed the most?

What information would you like to see that the platform doesn't give you now but you would like to know?

Would you like to see more transparency in the review process? For example, would you like to see details of system ratings and reasons for banning?

*Part 6: Other

Is there any part that you find particularly unreasonable but to which the platform has not responded at all?

Are there any other experiences or feelings you'd like to add?

After optimisation I conducted interviews with 20 users of the platform, which were distilled but not altered from their original meanings, to show the following more typical **5 interviewees' information + dialogue transcripts**:

User 1

Chi Cao, 22 years old, Chinese, been using Vinted for 3 months

Q1: Have you ever experienced your account being banned?

A: My account was banned when I sold my first item. I was told that I had 'violated the commercial selling policy', but I had only listed one or two of my own clothes.

Q2: Have you tried to file a complaint? What was the process?

A: I tried looking for customer service, but I received an automated response that said, 'Account review has been completed and no further appeals will be accepted.'

Q3: What do you think is the most unfair point in the whole process?

A: The saddest thing is that I don't even know what I did wrong. The account was directly blocked, like there was a wall between me and the platform, and I didn't know what to do.

Q4: Are there any other experiences or feelings you would like to add?

A: During the process, I would be hindered in some ways due to the fact that English is not my first language. For example, I couldn't fully understand the platform Terms, and I would be confused about the complaint process due to translation issues.

User 2

Jess, 18 years old, British, just registered her number and ready to use it

Q1: Have you ever had an account banned?

A: I just registered on the webpage and as soon as I logged in, my email was banned.

Q2: Have you ever tried to file a complaint? How is the process?

A: I sent an email to complain and received a reply from the official after four days, saying that the system misjudged and could unblock me.

Q3: What information would you like to see that the platform is not giving now but you want to know?

A: I hope that the processing time cycle can be guaranteed, after all, when I registered is to want to sell things immediately, although it is not that I shelved goods can be sold immediately, but this is really especially demotivated, the app has a very bad impression, and I will not want to use it in the future. There's also the fact that I want an answer that seals me in, it's a bad feeling to be wronged.

User 3

J, 19 years old, Korean, using Vinted for 2 years

Q1: Tell us the specifics of how your account was blocked at the time

A: It blocked my account directly without notifying me, but I can always receive message alerts in my email.

Q2: How did you deal with it? Did you try multiple channels (e.g. customer service, email, social media)? What was the effect?

I deleted my previous account. But my previous account was also blocked and I couldn't access the app at all let alone delete it, after receiving the official reply email, I tried logging into my original account again and found that I could access it. I'm very confused about this.

Q3: Do you think the platform listens to you?

A: There is no phone support on this platform, so I can't talk to anyone even if I want to. The email replies seem to be automated.

User 4

Yuxin Zhang, 27 years old, Chinese living in France, using vinted for 4 years

Q: What was it like when you found out you were banned?

I had just sold an item and hadn't even signed for it when vinted said they detected unusual activity on my account and blocked me. I went back and forth with vinted many times, but they wouldn't explain what the unusual activity was and wouldn't unblock me. It's only 15 euros, but it's disgusting, and I've argued about it several times, but it still doesn't work.

User 5

Lauren, 60 years old, American, used vinted for six months

Q1: How was it resolved after being blocked?

A: I was blocked for three days, then the platform let me handwrite my id and take a picture with one of my items, and it was unblocked!

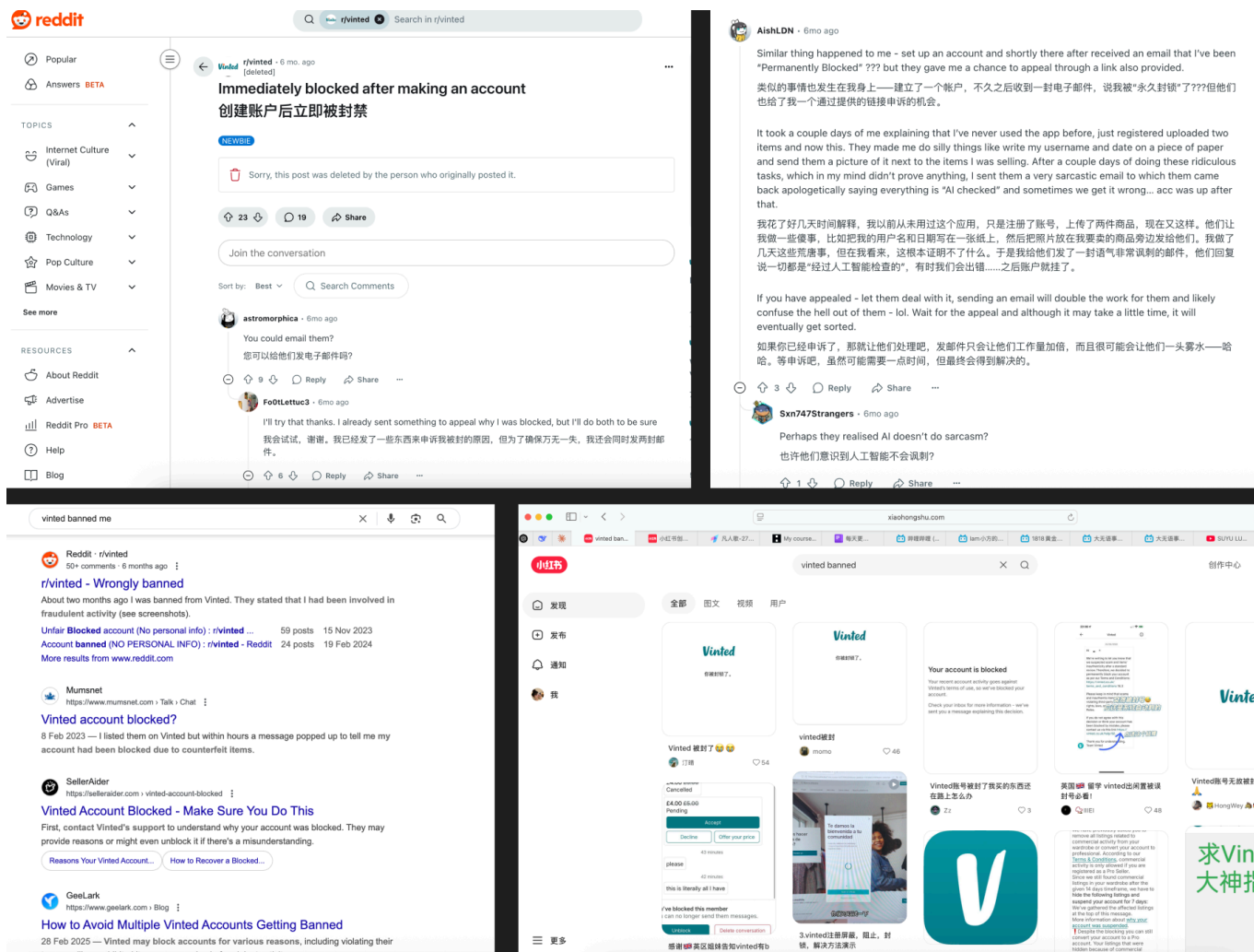
Q2: Is there any part of the story that you found unreasonable but the platform didn't respond to?

A: I'm not very good at using electronic products, and I started using this platform on my daughter's recommendation. To be honest, I didn't know what I was doing wrong when I was blocked, and it was only when my daughter emailed the platform that the problem was solved. I probably won't use it in the future.

The above information is true and reliable, and is based on problems encountered by users.

Then I started collecting similar problems from different users on the web:

Accounts are often permanently blocked / can be restricted with little explanation.



Problem Summary:

Through interviews and research, after sorting according to the severity of the problem as well as inequality ratings, users were banned for the following three main reasons:

1. Misjudgement by automated auditing: Many users indicated that their accounts were banned without clear violations, and the platform did not provide specific reasons.
2. High-frequency shelving of new goods: some users were recognised by the system as commercial sellers due to frequent shelving of brand new goods with tags, which led to account blocking.
3. Keywords in product descriptions triggering banning: Some users were misjudged by the system to be in violation of the law due to the inclusion of specific keywords (e.g. 'wigs', 'contact lenses', etc.) in their product descriptions, resulting in their accounts being banned.

Complaint process and user feedback:

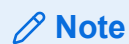
Users generally reflect that Vinted's complaint process is not transparent, lacks effective communication channels, and that the complaint results are mostly automated replies that are difficult to be reviewed manually. Even when users provide relevant supporting materials, the

platform rarely provides specific feedback or explanations, making it difficult for users to understand the reasons for their ban.

What users did:

1. Try to create a new account: Some users tried to create a new account by changing their device, IP address, phone number, etc., but there was still a risk of being banned again.
2. Contacted the platform by email: Some users tried to contact Vinted several times to seek a solution by sending emails, but usually the processing time was long and the feedback effect was limited, which led to physical and mental exhaustion of the users.

Vinted's solution for banned accounts:



My account was banned (I want to appeal the decision)

Account banning may happen when members violate our [Terms & Conditions](#), [Catalogue Rules](#), [Vinted Pro Terms and Conditions](#).

If you believe there's been a misunderstanding regarding your banned account, **you can appeal our moderation decision**. You'll find **the appeal link in the Vinted inbox message or email** with our official moderation decision.

In your appeal, please explain why you believe the moderation decision was incorrect and provide any supporting evidence for your claim. This will help us evaluate your case.

If you **haven't received the official moderation decision** from us, but only got a message that your account is under review, the situation should be resolved shortly.

Temporary ban

Your account will be **unbanned automatically after 7-30 days**, depending on the reason for banning. You'll see the ban end date when you log in to Vinted.

Unfortunately, we **can't unban it earlier** unless you provide evidence that the account was banned by mistake.

The reasons for temporarily banning members' accounts include:

- Deliberately showing offensive behaviour towards other members or our support team
- Inappropriate behaviour and/or uploading inappropriate pictures

- Repeatedly selling items that fall under the prohibited items in our [Catalogue Rules](#)
- Selling counterfeit items, i.e. fakes and/or unauthorised replicas of original products
- Promoting selling outside the Vinted payment system
- Selling items for commercial purposes (allowed only to Pro sellers, subject to the specific limitations set out in our [Catalogue Rules](#) and [Vinted Pro Terms and Conditions](#)).

Permanent ban

If you're permanently banned, you can still access your account to perform some actions, such as:

- Contacting us to inquire about the possibility of unbanning your account
- Withdrawing earnings from your Vinted Balance.

To withdraw your earnings:

1. Log in to your Vinted account — you'll be directed to your inbox
2. Go to your [Vinted Balance](#) under your profile and proceed to make a withdrawal.

Important

In some situations, **withdrawals may not be possible** if they pose a risk to other members, involve a compromised account, or if banning is due to a risk of fraud, as determined by our payment service provider.

Additionally, it's not possible to [delete an account](#) that is permanently banned due to safety reasons.

The reasons for permanently banning members' accounts include:

- Selling items prohibited by any applicable law, rule, or regulation
- Committing fraud or scamming other members
- Having multiple accounts (unless one is a standard account and the other is a Pro account, registered with distinct email addresses and phone numbers)
- Repeatedly selling counterfeit items, such as fakes and unauthorised replicas of original products
- Selling live pets
- Selling items that repeatedly violate our Catalogue Rules (see our [Catalogue Rules](#) for an exhaustive list of prohibited items):
 - Items containing animal products, such as fur, reptile skin, shell, or ivory
 - Food and drinks, tobacco and vaping products

- Sexually-provocative items
- Items violating copyright or any other intellectual property (IP) rights
- Used personal care items and homemade cosmetics, medical products
- Recalled products
- Uploading inappropriate items or pictures displaying child pornography
- Repeatedly uploading inappropriate items or pictures that contain elements of nudity or provocative posing and gestures
- Repeatedly ignoring our team's messages and not taking the required action
- Repeatedly selling items for commercial purposes (allowed only to Pro sellers, subject to the specific limitations set out in our [Catalogue Rules](#) and [Vinted Pro Terms of Use](#)). If your account was banned for this reason, we'll require you to [convert to Vinted Pro](#) when applicable. Note that you can only convert your account **within 6 months of receiving our ban notice**.
- Providing services that are explicitly not allowed for Pro sellers (selling cosmetic items, rental services, etc.).

Note

You may not be able to log in to your Vinted account when it's locked. We may lock your account at your request or automatically if we notice suspicious activity. This is to prevent others from using your account or your personal information for malicious reasons.

Please find more information on how to [protect yourself against phishing attacks](#).

Good to know

- You can only appeal the decision **once**, and **within 6 months** of receiving the moderation decision notice.
- You can also appeal our moderation decision by submitting a dispute to a certified out-of-court dispute settlement body or by bringing an action before national courts in accordance with local applicable laws.

My Solution:

Platform Transparency: Explainable AI, informing users what happened and why their accounts were banned.

Accelerated and optimised complaint process: internal online complaint interface, second quick review.

Inclusion & Accessibility Plan: Multi-language options + age-appropriate switchable interface

design.



Platform Transparency

Introduce Explainable AI to clearly communicate what triggered the ban and why it happened. Reduce the opacity of automated moderation decisions.



Appeal Process Optimization

Redesign the in-app appeal interface with real-time feedback and a secondary review layer, improving response speed and user trust.



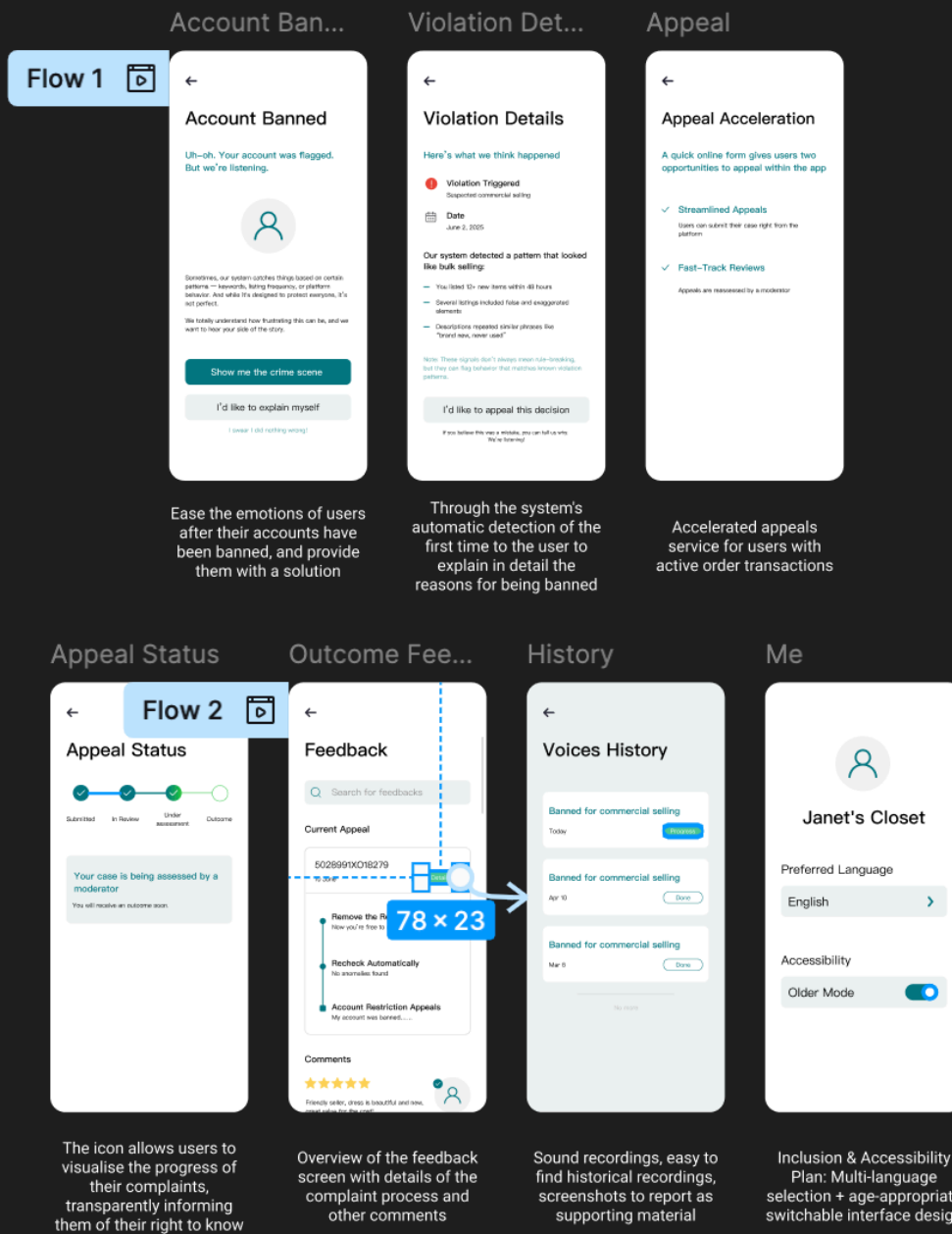
Inclusion & Accessibility Plan

Provide multilingual options and an elderly-friendly UI mode, enabling better participation for linguistically and digitally marginalized users.

Frontend Redesign for Vinted apps

Hi-Fi upgrade

This set of interfaces shows a Hi-Fi prototype of the Vinted mobile App for this project, with a complete design around the appeal process after an account is banned. The following key functional modules are included:



<https://www.figma.com/design/xpJOA9vLBiqHLFEsDm9G2R/platform-potential?node-id=179-413&m=dev&t=n5JriFlyoT13qS9d-1>

Website Prototype: AI-supported Appeal System

To respond to the inequality of power between the platform and users, I developed a working web prototype using Streamlit as frontend and FastAPI as backend. The system

simulates a human-centered appeal assistant, with the following core features:

1. Emotion-aware user interface:

Users are guided to explain their situation through selectable options like “Posted many items”, “Frequent account switching”, or describe it in their own words. Emotional phrases like “*We’re here to listen*” and responsive colors aim to reduce user frustration.

2. AI-supported feedback system:

Using a local LLM via Ollama + LLaMA 3.2, the system generates AI review summaries and empathetic messages, helping users better understand what might have gone wrong without judgment.

3. Evidence upload feature:

Users can upload screenshots or files to support their case, simulating the feeling of being “heard” and respected.

4. Human fallback logic:

Most cases are “automatically resolved” in the UI with a success animation, while a small percentage are sent to “human review”, reinforcing trust.

5. AI chatbot assistant: Users can talk to a chatbot designed as a friendly platform assistant. It doesn’t replace support, but offers emotional value and clarity in communication, reducing helplessness.

This prototype demonstrates not only the technical feasibility of improving moderation systems, but also the emotional layer of platform governance, which is something automated platforms often ignore.

 View github prototype:

<https://github.com/Sophiasuyu/vinted-appeal>