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## Call for papers: Content moderation on digital platforms: beyond states and firms

Tuesday, 31. October 2023 - 23:30

### Special issue of the *Internet Policy Review*

assignment\_returned **Abstract submission deadline: October 31, 2023**

assignment\_returned **Full paper submission deadline: March 17, 2024**

Content regulation on digital platforms has attracted growing interest from scientists and regulators in recent years. In Europe, new legal initiatives at the national and European level, such as the NetzDG in Germany, the Law on fake news in France or the Digital Services Act, transform the power relation between public authorities and private platforms. At the academic level, these developments are seen primarily through the lens of state-platform relationship, focusing in particular on the role of nation states in Internet governance.

However, content regulation on digital platforms goes far beyond this dual relationship. It encompasses a wide diversity of actors who develop their own practices of content regulation, apart from, in partnership with, or against public authorities and firms. Journalists build up fact-checking procedures to limit the spread of fake news. Activists put pressure on advertisers in order to cut sources of funding for hate groups. Marketing agencies monetize blacklists of sites, groups and channels to avoid reputation backlash while advertising online. Social media users put in practice counter-speech strategies in order to stem hate speech or circumvent restrictions on social media. Even researchers develop their own transparency and accountability indicators to assess platform policies related to content regulation. Besides, these actors are gradually associated with the evolution of content regulation through formal partnerships and multi-stakeholder organizations.

All these actors, and many others, who could be grouped together under the banner of "civil society", are now actively contributing to content moderation and regulation on digital platforms. However, their precise role, their strategies and means of action remain little studied. Following recent works published in *Internet Policy Review*, such as calls for studying content regulation issues beyond the scope of relationships between states and platforms (Gillespie et al., 2020), this special issue intends to illustrate the role of "civil society" in the global governance of speech online, and map the variety of social groups involved in content moderation. Drawing on existing work on multistakeholderism that have discussed the participation of civil society in the global internet governance (Massit-Folléa, 2014; Raymond, DeNardis, 2015), this special issue aims at pushing forward the understanding of non-state actors' contribution in the current internet regulatory framework. It calls for empirical studies that provide an insight on the social conditions and materiality of civil society's contribution to content regulation.

### Scope of the special issue

For this special issue we invite contributions that analyze the role of users, non-profit organizations, media, technical and professional groups, researchers and other actors from civil society in moderating and regulating contents on digital platforms, while potentially discussing their articulation with public authorities and platform initiatives. Three axes of contribution are envisioned.

First of all, this special issue aims at moving beyond the state-platform scope of analysis by gathering papers that describe the complex configurations of actors involved in the moderation of contents. Contributors are invited to study the various social and institutional arrangements informing moderation policies and notably the extent of civil society's involvement in this process – from the orientation of moderation policy to the detection of illegal content. Such contributions could also enlighten the role of users' protests and mobilizations in shifting the scope and focus of moderation (Gillespie, 2018; Myers-West, 2017), notably how sexual minority and race-based groups try to voice their concern regarding the specific discrimination and censorship they face online (Nakamura, 2013).

Secondly, we would like to identify papers that contribute to the study of technologies and design in offering new forms of regulation. Although many works have focused on algorithmic content detection by the platforms (Yeung, 2018; Gorwa, Binns, Katzenbach, 2020), in articulation with their business of data collection, we would like to attract papers that discuss alternative design and standards developed by tech communities to promote more diverse and distributed types of moderation. For example, platforms such as Mastodon emphasize the role of users in defining alternative moderation rules and mechanisms. Such a discussion may also include new strategies developed by activists to document algorithmic censorship and inform shadowbanning practices.

Thirdly, we would like to include in this special issue papers that study the circulation and distribution of practices and knowledge across civil society organizations. Global fora on content moderation are key loci to observe exchanges between organizations as well as conflicting interpretation of moderation principles. Far from a homogenous ensemble, civil society is a broad concept that gathers various groups with conflicting interest and unequally distributed resources. Such papers could contribute to a global mapping of power relations within civil society as well as shed new light on the “Brussel effect” (Bradford, 2020) from third parties perspectives. More broadly, it would offer a critical assessment of “civil society” as a regulatory entity and the way it is endorsed or instrumentalized by governments and platforms.

### Special issue editors

Romain Badouard, Associate Professor, University Paris Panthéon-Assas

Anne Bellon, Associate Professor, University of Technology of Compiègne

### Important dates

- 750-1000 words abstracts should be sent to [romain.badouard@u-paris2.fr](mailto:romain.badouard@u-paris2.fr) and [anne.bellon@utc.fr](mailto:anne.bellon@utc.fr) by **31 October 2023**. The abstracts should delineate the research question to be discussed, the case study to be analysed and an indication of the expected findings or conclusions.
- Decisions will be sent to the authors by **30 November 2023**.
- Full papers of the selected abstracts should be submitted by **17 March 2024**. Submissions must be around 6,000 words in length and have to follow the submission guidelines of the Internet Policy Review. They will be peer-reviewed between March and July.
- The planned publication date of this special issue is Q4 **2024**.