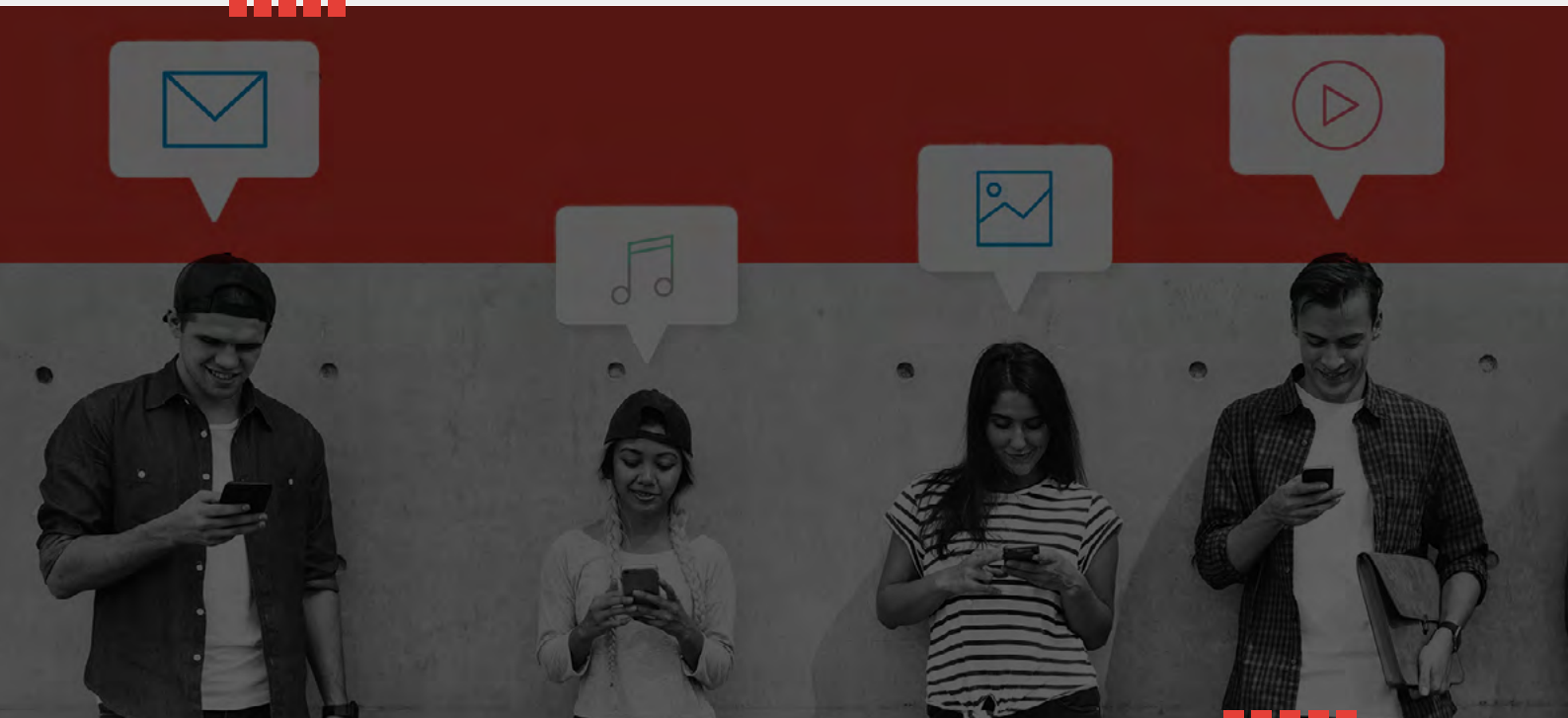




THE REGULATORY LANDSCAPE OF CONTENT MODERATION

A GUIDE ON HOW TO ADDRESS IT



A Conectys made Whitepaper



INTRODUCTION

Content moderation is a huge topic these days, especially around social platforms (i.e. Twitter) and their banning of certain public figures (i.e. then-U.S. President Trump). Entire episodes of podcasts were dedicated to content moderation, executives from some platform companies were called out, and some even stepped up to claim that “content moderation does not matter.”

As a company that works with many global, hyper-scale brands on content moderation, we can unequivocally say that content moderation does exist, it does matter, and brands take it very seriously. It’s a complicated issue of speed, scale, and security -- you want your users to feel like their posts appear immediately (speed), but you also need them to feel safe in the community (security), and you need the entire ecosystem to operate at scale.

It’s not easy to execute upon, and brands pivot and move around on their strategy periodically. We’ve worked with brands and helped them co-create new best practices, new coverage hours, new languages they need to moderate, etc. It’s a consistently moving target.

THE FIRST ISSUE: TECH VS. HUMAN

First is the issue of tech vs. human. When social platform Parler was effectively taken offline because their host (Amazon Web Services) declined to host for them anymore, Parler’s CEO vowed they would return -- with content moderation done by algorithm. This is a common concept these days with current regulatory environments; to maintain scale and cost effectiveness, brands try to turn more of their content moderation efforts over to algorithm, RPA, and machine.

Our view has always been that the best moderation work is a mix of tech and human. Tech helps with cost and scale, and it reduces the tedium on humans, which can have mental health consequences. But humans need to be part of the equation, because they have language and societal nuance that AI will often lack -- and when humans know what the core moderation issues are, they can inform marketing, sales, operations, and product back at brand HQ about what’s going on. That insight can be valuable for future brand decision-making.

The thinking is often: Get more tech to put towards these challenges of user-generated content (UGC). That definitely helps, but it’s not the full picture. Remember: at its best, tech is a force multiplier. Tech is necessary within UGC, but it’s not sufficient enough to moderate at scale.

Consider the role of artificial intelligence (AI) in moderation. We've consistently thought AI will be the primary guiding force in UGC at scale, and AI is certainly helpful as a tool.

But -- there's a good deal of cultural nuance when moderating, so much so that [Vice once even called it "the impossible job."](#) (The good news is, it's not impossible.)

Consider this distinction: in the United Kingdom, for example, irony is often the default style of humor. In the US, it's not. Hence, a comment such as "This is rubbish, we should do away with the poster" can take on a very different tone coming from someone in each country. In the US, a comment like that might be read as a direct threat; in the UK it might be dismissed as "ribbing" the poster.

AI is a strong tool in the moderation arsenal, but it lacks a deeper nuance right now. In many ways, [it's still very nascent.](#)

Basing your scaled moderation strategy almost completely on these types of technology won't work right now.

If the answer is not "Throw more technology at it" for companies facing a massive scale of UGC moderation needs, what is the answer right now?

For many, it's outsourcing -- simply because companies lack the resources to moderate at speed and scale internally. And to be blunt, when moderation is done poorly, there are massive legal and brand repercussions, so it's often an area of the business best outsourced to experts in UGC and moderation.

What to do now: Find an outsourcing partner that works in moderation (we do, in 35+ languages with 24/7 global coverage from 12 locations). Then look over some of [the necessities of a moderation partner](#), and make sure the partners you're considering have experience, scale, past clients they can speak to, and use a mix of technology and human agent. Remember also: human agents dealing with moderation needs all day (with some of the tedium replaced by technology) will understand who and what is being posted on your platform, and that insight can become conversations that inform product decisions, marketing campaigns, and sales approaches. Tech alone cannot get you there.

REGULATIONS

This one is tricky and it changes seemingly every month in different countries. The EU has one [context for the moderation of content](#), and the USA and South America and Asia are very different. While all governments have the same big goals in mind -- make sure that people are not harassed or subjected to negativity online, and make sure the framework of conversation is civil (ideally don't drag down basic human interaction principles in the process) -- the legal and regulatory approach can vary. The world is [fairly diverse in its approach to content moderation](#).

One of the big things to watch in this space is the UK's Online Safety Bill, which is in draft form. The draft legislation imposes a duty of care on digital service providers to moderate user-generated content in a way that prevents users from being exposed to illegal and/or harmful stuff online.

As you'd expect, the government dubs the plan globally "groundbreaking" and claims it will usher in "a new age of accountability for tech and bring fairness and accountability to the online world".

Critics warn the proposals will harm freedom of expression by encouraging platforms to over-censor, while also creating major legal and operational headaches for digital businesses that will discourage tech innovation.

We actually reached out to someone at Twitter in the UK, who remarked:

"It's all part of the world catching up with this 'industry' and our industry's life cycle and maturity. All businesses and industries go through a life cycle from the maverick 'early days' to maturity. Even though Social Media (and companies in it) has been around for the bones of 20 years, it appears that only now the world and it's governments are getting around to trying to put standards and controls in place. One of the big challenges to the industry is some governments' approach and the reasons behind their approach. Are they biased and do they have ulterior motives?"

If your business has ANY type of content that needs to be moderated, or any type of user-generated presence, this is absolutely a space to watch for the next 2-3 years and beyond. The legislative and judicial side will catch up to the tech side.

What to do now: First, evaluate a potential moderation partner for localization. What languages and areas has the outsourcing partner worked in? If a potential partner can only work in a few languages and it's well below the breadth of your content reach, the partnership likely won't work, or you'll need to bring in an additional partner to cover those additional geographies. In addition to that, however, the more nations and languages that a provider has worked in, the more they tend to understand those specific regulatory environments.

Next: can the partner be a consultant? This is an area Conectys prides itself on; we don't consider ourselves a vendor so much as a strategic partner for the brands we have the pleasure of serving. You ideally want to find a partner in UGC and community moderation who is more than simply transactional -- you want advice and best practices from this business relationship too. If you're working with an expert, you should expect both strategy and execution. If we know the specific environment -- moderation best practices in Turkey vs. Poland vs. the USA, for example -- we will offer that insight to you and co-execute a recruitment plan, overall strategy, training process, re-training process, and more. Our goal is to give you everything you need to be successful across multiple regulatory environments.



THE BOTTOM LINE

The [CAGR on content moderation services is 10.3%](#), 2019-2026. It's a growing space -- and quickly. There's a good chance you are already moderating at this point, and might have been for several years. But now you need to think about the next steps: post-COVID, new business models, pivots, etc. What are you doing to set yourself up for moderation success and moderation strategy in the next, say, three years?

For example, region-specific moderation is on the rise and will [increase](#) as brands look to new opportunities (markets) post-COVID.

[“Hidden digital labor”](#) is another increasing concern, and refers to the tedium and emotional labor of multi-hour moderation, and content moderation partners (like us) and brands are increasingly trying to protect brand agents against it.

As you keep thinking about content moderation trends and what your brand needs to do with content moderation, check out some of our [moderation services](#).

We'd love to talk more, as well.



Contact us at sales@conectys.com

Or learn more from our [Blog](#).

