
Click-work as Care Work: Ethico-political Contestations Through Care

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Abstract

The backlash against the employment practices of Big Tech Companies like Meta by groups like the Africa Content Moderators Union (ACMU), brought to the forefront the precarious labour that powers digital platforms. Specifically, ghost work or clickwork in cases of content moderation to label explicit or violent content, flagged the dangerous and exploitative conditions attached to such invisible digital labour. Indispensable and essential, it is content moderation that makes digital ontologies habitable. Since these click-workers help maintain, continue, and repair the (digital) world, this makes content moderation a practice of care as per Joan Tronto. Working within the discourse on care ethics, Tronto proposes to expand moral boundaries to include practices of not only certain sections of women but marginalised communities on different intersections of caste, class, race and gender and how examples of "cleaning" as care work are intimately tied to these sections of society. In the context of content moderation, this can be applied aptly as such work is carried out mostly by people in the Majority World. However, such labour is further invisibilised due to the illusion of automation in technology. This leads multinational corporations and outsourcing companies to carry out exploitative practices, resulting in backlash. Notably, befitting Tronto's framework, such assertions of resistance through unions help acknowledge such click-work as care-work, where care becomes foundational for political change. Only when such precarious labour exacerbated through unequal power relations is acknowledged as care work, that is necessary labour to maintain and repair the world, can a new paradigm for a just digital society with an even distribution of power be envisioned. Hence, content moderation, when acknowledged as care-work, provides not only a valuable ethical orientation but also a political ideal towards including and acknowledging the work conducted by the disenfranchised in global labour chains. Click work as care work, hence, contests the status quo of silence and invisibility within political contexts and ethical practices that are structurally unjust.

Keywords: care ethics, content moderation

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