

MODERATING UNCIVIL COMMENTS HURTS TRUST IN NEWS

Austin, TX – July 18, 2019 – An unruly comment section doesn't just have an effect on the readers of a news site – it has an effect on the moderators as well. The Center for Media Engagement [previously researched](#) how uncivil comments can taint a news consumer's opinion of a site. Now we turn our attention to the moderators. We found that moderators who focused exclusively on uncivil content:

- Perceived the news outlet they were working for as less trustworthy,
- Were more emotionally exhausted,
- Were less satisfied with the task of moderation,
- And had a less immersive work experience. An immersive work experience is called a sense of “flow” in a task that makes it feel less effortful.

Our research suggests that uncivil comments can take a heavy toll on moderators. But there are steps newsrooms can take to help lessen the negative effects. “The effects of incivility in online comments not only impact news readers but also the people who do the work of moderation,” says researcher Martin J. Riedl. “News organizations should strive to improve the work conditions for moderators, for example, by breaking up tasks.”

It's notable that negative effects were evident after just 24 minutes, the length of shifts used for this experiment. The toll of moderating uncivil comments may be much stronger for moderators putting in several hours or a full day.

To read more about the findings, access the full report on our website:
<https://mediaengagement.org/research/moderating-uncivil-comments>

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The Center for Media Engagement, part of the Moody College of Communication at The University of Texas at Austin, provides research-based techniques for engaging digital audiences in commercially viable and democratically beneficial ways. Learn more at mediaengagement.org.