

¹UNPUBLISHED PAPER:

Tentative title: “Tumblrpocalypse and Platform Migration of NSFW Communities”

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Abstract

Tumblr has recently announced a new policy to ban all adult content on its platform. This decision has led to a resounding critique from both the communities who rely on Tumblr to collect, exhibit, share, and monetize NSFW (not-safe-for-work) contents (i.e. creators of fan works, artists, and sex workers) and the consumers of diverse contents on the platform. Users voiced their disappointment and dissatisfaction with the policy by trending hashtags like #TumblrIsOverParty, #Tumblrpocalypse on Twitter, while NSFW content creators and fan communities started to migrate to alternative platforms such as Twitter, OnlyFans, Patreon, etc. This essay takes the ban of adult content on Tumblr as a case to examine how user communities navigate the digital landscape of social media platforms and how such landscape is formed through the interactions among and between user communities and platform affordances, networks norms and practices.

Community formation on social media platforms is a socio-technological process. It is conditioned by both technical and cultural factors, including the services and affordances the platforms can offer and the motivations of the users. Meanwhile, the boundaries around online communities are constantly negotiated through the dialectic between vernacular discourses (e.g. NSFW culture) and institutional discourses (e.g. platform policy). Building on the theories of participatory and internet culture (Jenkins, 2006; Senft, 2008; Kreiss, 2018), technological affordances (boyd, 2010) and vernacular web (Howard, 2008), this essay delineates an ecological account of a shifting digital landscape by looking into a selection of Tumblr accounts flagged for NSFW contents and tracing their activities on alternative platforms. We contend that the design and policy changes enacted by platforms like Tumblr not only influence the production and flow of contents, but also introduce disruption to the community composition, norms and practices via patterns of user migration across the digital landscape.

References

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