THESIS

THE TUMBLR PORN BAN: THE PLATFORM TRIAD AND THE SHAPING OF ONLINE

SPACES

Submitted by

Ben Pettis

Department of Communication Studies

In partial fulfillment of the requirements

For the Degree of Master of Arts

Colorado State University

Fort Collins, Colorado

Summer 2020

Master's Committee:

    Advisor: Evan Elkins

    Thomas Dunn
    David Wolfgang

ABSTRACT

This thesis considers social media platforms and the fluid nature of online spaces. Specifically, I examine the social network site (SNS) Tumblr and the controversy that surrounded its recently amended community guidelines and adult content policy. Tumblr had previously had somewhat of an "alternative" identity as compared to mainstream SNSs such as Facebook or Twitter. This identity had largely resulted from its previously lax policy toward pornography and other adult content. Such content had previously been allowed on the website, which enabled a wide degree of personal freedom and expression. This policy, along with the platform's specific affordances, had contributed to Tumblr's characteristic as an online queer space. Many LGBTQ+ individuals and groups had once used the platform to share pornography and adult content, but also just to form a sense of community and express their identities in ways that were not always possible on other SNSs or within the physical world.

But in December 2018, Tumblr Staff announced significant changes to the website's community guidelines, and that after December 17, 2018 any such content would no longer be allowed on the platform. This policy announcement, which became colloquially known as the Tumblr porn ban, represented a divergence in how the platform's users and its corporate owners envisioned the online space. For Tumblr users, the platform had been an online queer space characterized by a significant degree of individual autonomy and expression. But for Tumblr Inc., the platform could only be an online queer space until it was no longer profitable, and thus adjusted the content policy in response to various political economic pressures.

In this thesis, I use digital discourse and political economic analyses of Tumblr Staff's announcement as well as Tumblr users' responses. I argue that the controversy that emerged surrounding the Tumblr Porn Ban represents the fluid and co-construction of platforms and

online spaces. The negative response to the Tumblr Porn Ban was not necessarily directly in response to the loss of pornography and adult content, but rather a loss of what such contented had once represented—individual freedom and autonomy for users. Removing the adult content was significant because it changed what the online space had once been. By studying the Tumblr Porn Ban, this thesis demonstrates that online platforms are not static or monolithic entities. Instead, they are fluid online spaces that are constructed, shaped, and continually redefined by a platform triad of users, corporations, and state power.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

DEDICATION

For Grandpa Tommy

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter One – "A Better, More Positive Tumblr"

Every online platform has its own affordances, community, and identity. Even though most modern websites are built upon the same technology, there is no singular look and feel to the Web overall. Even among social media platforms, all of which are generally meant for connection and interaction, there are significant differences among SNS (Social Network Site) platforms. Not only are there different interfaces, affordances, and modes of interaction, but there are entirely different users and communities as well. Not only is each platform different from one another, but each platform is different from itself on a day-to-day basis. SNS platforms are not a singular finalized entity. The identity of any given platform is fluid and in a constant state of definition and reshaping.

In late 2018, the online microblogging platform Tumblr and its identity came into question. Tumblr had been viewed as somewhat of an alternative space, separate from mainstream social media platforms such as Facebook or Twitter. In part this alternative identity was a result of its diverse user communities and customizable aesthetics, but also largely because of its once lax stance toward adult content. For the majority of the platform's existence, Tumblr's community guidelines made no specific reference to adult content such as nudity or sexuality, whereas most other SNSs explicitly disallowed such content.[1] But starting December 17, 2018 all adult content would no longer be permitted on the platform. Tumblr Inc. explained its position and reasoning in a series of blog posts and web pages, but the majority of Tumblr users immediately took issue with what became colloquially known as the "Tumblr Porn Ban."

---

[1] In 2012, Tumblr's then-CEO David Karp explained, "I'm not into moderating this stuff. Tumblr's an excellent platform for porn, which I don't personally have any moral opposition to." Tom Cheshire, "Tumbling on Success: How Tumblr's David Karp Built a £500 Million Empire," *Wired UK*, February 2, 2012, https://www.wired.co.uk/article/tumbling-on-success.

This updated adult content policy is more than just a question of pornography on an online platform. Rather, the Tumblr Porn represents the messy relationship between the users of an internet platform and the platform's corporate owners, underscores the inherent co-constructed nature of an online space, and calls into question idealistic views of the internet as wholly free and equalizing.

From its initial development and growth in the twentieth century, the internet has been marked by discourses of limitlessness and opportunity. Conversations surrounding this global communications network have positioned it as being somehow distinct and separate from the so-called "real world," and have positioned the Internet as a virtual space that had the potential to completely revolutionize human communication.[2] During the initial ARPANET years in the 1960s and 1970s and NSFNet in the decades the followed, connections among government and university networks promised new forms of research collaboration and the potential to be separate from the pressure of corporate profitability.[3] In the 1990s the World Wide Web was exploding in popularity, and there was a sense that it would bring with it the full equality of information.[4] In more recent years, social network sites (SNSs) have emerged as online spaces to facilitate social connections and for individuals to "articulate and make visible their social networks."[5] These similar sentiments of equality and democratization have existed in all these

---

[2] See, for instance: Mark Stefik, ed., *Internet Dreams: Archetypes, Myths, and Metaphors* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1996); John Perry Barlow, "A Declaration of the Independence of Cyberspace," Electronic Frontier Foundation, February 8, 1996, https://www.eff.org/cyberspace-independence; Fred Turner, "Where the Counterculture Met the New Economy: The WELL and the Origins of Virtual Community," *Technology and Culture* 46, no. 3 (2005): 485–512.

[3] Robert W. McChesney, Digital Disconnect: How Capitalism Is Turning the Internet Against Democracy (New York: The New Press, 2013), Kindle loc. 2296.

[4] Megan Sapnar Ankerson, Dot-Com Design: The Rise of a Usable, Social, Commercial Web (New York: New York University Press, 2018), 34.

[5] danah boyd and Nicole B. Ellison, "Social Network Sites: Definition, History, and Scholarship," Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication 13, no. 1 (2007): 211, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1083-6101.2007.00393.x.

phases of the Internet's history. The basic idea was that if anyone can access and participate in the decentralized network, the entire structure of traditional media industries and human interactions might be reconfigured. And while a complete upheaval of the industry has not taken place, it remains the case that the Internet has made possible new forms of communication and human connection. SNSs such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Tumblr have provided online spaces for people to meet, interact, and express themselves in ways that had not necessarily been possible in physical settings alone.

For much of its history, Tumblr had been distinct from other SNSs and had been widely viewed as an online platform for LGBTQ+ individuals and communities.[6] For these precarious and marginalized groups, SNS platforms such as Tumblr may have provided the only available means to safely explore and express their identities, especially when such opportunities were not possible in face-to-face settings.[7] Rather than articulate an explicit definition of its community, Tumblr has defined itself in terms of its own users: "Tumblr is 460 million different blogs, filled with literally whatever."[8] This ambiguous and malleable definition of the Tumblr platform created a rich online space for LGBTQ+ individuals to gather, express themselves, and contribute to the overall definition of the Tumblr community.[9] Furthermore, Tumblr had previously been unique compared to other SNSs such as Facebook or Twitter due to its adult

---

[6] Marty Fink and Quinn Miller, "Trans Media Moments: Tumblr, 2011–2013," Television & New Media 15, no. 7 (November 1, 2014): 611–26, https://doi.org/10.1177/1527476413505002; Brady Robards and Paul Byron, "There's Something Queer about Tumblr," The Conversation, May 29, 2017, http://theconversation.com/theres-something-queer-about-tumblr-73520; Alexander Cho, "Queer Reverb: Tumblr, Affect, Time," in Networked Affect, ed. Ken Hillis, Susanna Paasonen, and Michael Petit (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2015).

[7] Cho, "Queer Reverb: Tumblr, Affect, Time."

[8] Tumblr, "Sign Up," Tumblr, 2019, http://www.tumblr.com.

[9] Fink and Miller, "Trans Media Moments"; Cho, "Queer Reverb: Tumblr, Affect, Time"; Robards and Byron, "There's Something Queer about Tumblr."

content policy.[10] Under this policy pornography was allowed, thus providing an online space for

LGBTQ+ individuals to access and share pornography separately from other major websites that

primarily hosted content for cisgender heterosexual men.[11] This previously lax adult content

policy, along with Tumblr's affordances and user community, contributed heavily to the SNS

operating as an online queer space.

But in December 2018, Tumblr updated its adult content policy and almost immediately

found itself at the center of significant controversy. Under the new policy, adult content would

no longer be permitted on the platform.[12] Tumblr's Community Guidelines now defined adult

content as any "photos, videos, or GIFs that show real-life human genitals or female-presenting

nipples, and any content … that depicts sex acts."[13] The new adult content policy went into effect

on December 17, 2018 and the platform began using artificial intelligence to assist its human

moderators in identifying and removing adult content from public view. Despite a small set of

exceptions, as well as the fact that it only applied to visual and not textual content, the new adult

content policy significantly changed the character and identity of the Tumblr platform.

Especially given that the SNS had previously existed as an online queer space, a

significant population of Tumblr users reacted negatively to the announced policy change.

Several popular press articles described these negative responses, and noted that the content

---

[10] Andre Cavalcante, "Tumbling Into Queer Utopias and Vortexes: Experiences of LGBTQ Social Media Users on Tumblr," Journal of Homosexuality, September 20, 2018, 1–21, https://doi.org/10.1080/00918369.2018.1511131.

[11] John Paul Brammer, "RIP Tumblr Porn. You Made Me Who I Am.," Washington Post, December 4, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2018/12/04/rip-tumblr-porn-you-made-me-who-i-am/; Robards and Byron, "There's Something Queer about Tumblr."

[12] Tumblr Staff, "A Better, More Positive Tumblr," December 3, 2018, https://staff.tumblr.com/post/180758987165/a-better-more-positive-tumblr; Tumblr Staff, "Hey Tumblr...," Tumblr Staff, December 17, 2018, https://staff.tumblr.com/post/181199101690/hey-tumblr-a-couple-of-weeks-ago-we-announced-an.

[13] Tumblr, "Community Guidelines," December 17, 2018, https://www.tumblr.com/policy/en/community.

policy would disproportionately affect LGBTQ+ people and communities.[14] Tumblr had

previously been described as the online equivalent of gay clubs and bars in the physical world.[15]

Especially for people who did have access to these physical spaces, Tumblr was an important

online space to explore and express individuals' queer identities.[16] By one estimate, 18-34 year

old gay and bisexual users were four times more likely to use Tumblr than their heterosexual

counterparts.[17] Thus by limiting the ways that it permitted its users to interact with the platform

and each other, Tumblr's new adult content policy not only changed the meaning of the platform

and its community, but also had a significant impact on the lived experiences of many people.

Tumblr had once been an online queer space for its users but became redefined and reshaped in

response to pressure from its corporate owners.

This thesis examines what has become colloquially known as the Tumblr Porn Ban and

how the updated adult content policy changed the meaning of the platform and its communities.

By analyzing the ways that Tumblr announced and articulated the new policy, as well as how

Tumblr users responded, I use the Tumblr Porn Ban to consider questions about individuals'

ability to speak freely within online communication settings: How did Tumblr users and

Tumblr's owners contribute to the platform and its community becoming an online queer space?

What are the physical and industrial structures and forces that limit individuals' expression and

---

[14] See, for instance: Shannon Liao, "Tumblr's Adult Content Ban Means the Death of Unique Blogs That Explore Sexuality," The Verge, December 6, 2018, https://www.theverge.com/2018/12/6/18124260/tumblr-porn-ban-sexuality-blogs-unique; Kaitlyn Tiffany, "When Tumblr Bans Porn, Who Loses?," Vox, December 4, 2018, https://www.vox.com/the-goods/2018/12/4/18126112/tumblr-porn-ban-verizon-ad-goals-sex-work-fandom; Brammer, "RIP Tumblr Porn. You Made Me Who I Am."; Jessica Powell, "The Problem With Banning Pornography on Tumblr," The New York Times, December 7, 2018, sec. Opinion, https://www.nytimes.com/2018/12/06/opinion/tumblr-adult-content-pornography-ban.html.

[15] Cavalcante, "Tumbling Into Queer Utopias and Vortexes."

[16] Cavalcante; Robards and Byron, "There's Something Queer about Tumblr."

[17] Leonie Roderick, "More than Half of LGBT+ Community Feels 'invisible' in Advertising," *Marketing Week*, April 5, 2017, https://www.marketingweek.com/lgbt-community-advertising/.

challenge the seemingly free and limitless views of the internet? Building from these questions, I

demonstrate that the Tumblr Porn Ban is indicative of how dominant ideologies from the

physical world continue to exist even in online settings, driven by issues of media ownership,

control, and profitability. Though the platform had existed as an online queer space for several

years, it was not wholly free and separate from corporate profit incentives. Tumblr's updated

adult content policy underscores the inherent relationship between the queer community and

industry practices in online spaces.

As I have mentioned, Tumblr's updated adult content policy became colloquially known

as the "Tumblr Porn Ban." Given that pornography had once been permitted on the platform, and

that such content would no longer be allowed, this phrasing did make sense. And, given the

significant negative user response, it might be easy to jump to the conclusion that the

overwhelming majority of the controversy about the adult content policy was specifically related

to pornography. My contention, however, is that the central issue at stake in the Tumblr Porn

Ban was not actually the porn itself. Though a large majority of users had encountered

pornography on the platform, this content was not necessarily central to every user's engagement

with the platform prior to December 17, 2018 and it was not central to every user's response to

the adult content policy.[18] Instead, I argue that the primary conflict was not the pornography

itself but rather what it represented. And in the case of Tumblr, the previously lax adult content

policy and the permissibility of pornography represented possibility and individual user

autonomy. Even for users that never posted, shared, or engaged with pornographic content, the

opportunity and potential was still there. There was not the looming specter of company policy

---

[18] Mauro Coletto et al., "Pornography Consumption in Social Media," in *Proceedings of the 10th International AAAI Conference on Web and Social Media* (ICWSM 2016, Cologne, Germany, 2016), http://arxiv.org/abs/1612.08157.

or government law to dictate how they live their lives in the online space. But when the website's new adult content policy changed, many users suddenly felt a new degree of control over their own activities. The Tumblr Porn Ban, then, was not strictly about the porn per se, but rather what the prior allowance of pornography represented in terms of individual user agency and autonomy.

Even in the context of online communication, there are many limitations on an individual's ability to speak freely and without consequence. Though the Internet may seem entirely free and open, it remains situated within the political economic pressures of the real world, and the profit motives of individual corporations influence how SNS platforms operate. In this thesis, I describe how the platform's user community and corporate owners have viewed the platform's ethos within different contexts and contributed to the overall characteristics of the online space. Ultimately, I argue in this thesis that Tumblr had been an online queer space until it was no longer profitable. When Tumblr announced its updated content policy, it entirely redefined the meaning of the online space against the wishes of its user community. Though the decision to update the platform's adult content policy may have been rooted within the company's financial pressures, it was the real people that comprise its user community that faced real consequences when they were suddenly pushed out and excluded from an online queer space that had once welcomed them. These users had once contributed greatly to the definition of the platform and its online space, but suddenly had that autonomy torn away as the platform's corporate owners unilaterally redefied the online space. However, I argue that because online platforms are fluid and continually being redefined by users, corporate power, and government regulation, and therefore there remains the possibility that Tumblr—and indeed all platforms— will continue to be shaped and reshaped, including by individual users and communities.

Rather than focus on specific content that was removed, this thesis instead considers the conversation surrounding Tumblr's adult content policy. By conversation, I mean the ways that the Porn Ban was articulated and discussed, both by the company and the platform's users. Specifically, I use a combination of digital discourse analysis and political economic analysis to understand how the Tumblr corporation and Tumblr users wrote about the new adult content policy. These methods place public Tumblr posts into conversation with how Tumblr itself presented its policy—to both the general public and to its stakeholders. This thesis aims to pinpoint the conflicting viewpoints of Tumblr and its users, as well as the implications of this disagreement for the meaning of the Tumblr community and the platform's potential as an online queer space.

A Note on Terminology

As scholars, the terms that we use to refer to groups of people are significant. Our terminology can offer clarity and precision when used effectively and can exclude and marginalized individuals when used poorly. Given the power of terminology, I have been mindful in my use of the terms that I use to reference various Tumblr users and segments of the overall Tumblr community. Specifically, I have pored over the terms "LGBTQ+" and "queer," both of which appear somewhat regularly throughout Tumblr's corporate messaging and in Tumblr user posts, and thought carefully about how they appear throughout my writing.

I am entering this project as somewhat of an outsider, a position which has largely informed my proposed methods. While I had been loosely following the announcement and implementation of Tumblr's new adult content policy as it unfolded, the fact remains that I am not a Tumblr user. I had heard initially about the issue from friends and acquaintances—people who *do* use Tumblr. Though they described to me how they perceived changes within that online

space, the stakes of the new policy are not the same for me. Furthermore, my own identity as a white-passing cisgender heterosexual male places me at a considerable distance from the people who were most directly impacted by Tumblr's new policy. This is something that I have been mindful of as I develop my proposed plan of study to examine how the Tumblr community—both its owners and its users—discussed the new adult content policy.

One of my concerns surrounding terminology has been the inadvertent homogenizing effects of broad terms like "queer" or "LGBTQ+" when applied to groups of people. Gloria Anzaldúa explains that "Queer is used as a false unifying umbrella which all 'queers' of all races, ethnicities and classes are shored under."[19] Anzaldúa notes that this "umbrella" is sometimes necessary as a means of coalition building and strengthening, but that its homogenizing power should not be overlooked.[20] Blanket terms have the potential to misrepresent the cohesiveness of diverse gender and sexual groups as members of a singular "community," and I strive to avoid such mischaracterizations throughout my work.[21] The term "LGBTQ+" appears throughout many Tumblr Staff blog posts to reference much of the Tumblr user community.[22] However, the use of this term implies homogeneity and cohesiveness among groups of users that may have been entirely separate. Some Tumblr users did see the platform as a venue for identity exploration and expression, others used it as a form of escapism from the pressures and difficulties of their offline lives, and others yet really only viewed it as a means to locate and share pornography. And many users' understanding of the platform bridges these

---

[19] Gloria Anzaldúa, Norma Cantú, and Aída Hurtado, *Borderlands / La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, 4 edition (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 2012), 250.

[20] Anzaldúa, Cantú, and Hurtado, *Borderlands / La Frontera*.

[21] Hannah McCann and Whitney Monaghan, *Queer Theory Now: From Foundations to Futures*, 1st ed. 2020 edition (Red Globe Press, 2019), 10–11.

[22] Tumblr Staff, "Hey Tumblr..."

categories, or even exists beyond them. Indeed, Tumblr had once been known for its very *lack* of homogeneity or singular definition of its purpose. But when Tumblr Inc. uses blanket terms such as "LGBTQ+" it effectively groups together these otherwise disparate groups, which as I discuss later, may be related to the corporation's profit motives.

In this thesis, I use the word "queer" as a broad umbrella term to describe many of Tumblr's users and communities that had previously viewed the platform as an online space for non-normative expression. This includes individual identities and people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, or any other non-heteronormative identity. That said, I recognize the problematic homogenizing effects of such a term, but view it as necessary at times to speak broadly about Tumblr users as a whole. In effect, this groups together users and communities that may have been wholly separate, and that have only the common characteristic of responding negatively to Tumblr's changed adult content policy. Thus, whenever possible, I use as specific terminology as possible to refer to particular users and communities. Different groups, individuals, and entities will refer to different sets of different people for certain reasons. When available, I match the language that each user or group uses to refer to themselves. Throughout this thesis, I also use the term "queer theory" to specifically refer to academic theories and definitions of the performativity of identity, and the term "queer spaces" to refer to the sites and settings where these identity performances take place..

Tumblr had once defined itself very broadly and avoided defining a specific right or wrong way to use the website. Users could make of the platform whatever they wanted, which had once helped contribute to the proliferation of the numerous separate user communities. Though its splash page still touts that individuals can "use it however you like" and that "Tumblr is blogs," the reality is that through the new adult content policy, the corporation was for the first

time making an overt statement about a right or wrong way to use the platform.[23] The Tumblr Porn Ban represented a significant reconfiguration of the overall meaning and definition of the platform. The online space had once been largely shaped by its individual users and communities, but was now being unilaterally changed by the corporate owners. Though this change has been characterized as being wholly about pornography, it was really the loss of user agency and autonomy to define the online space that was at the center of this controversy.

Online Queer Spaces in the Platform Era

My thesis synthesizes seemingly disparate threads from various bodies of literature. The Tumblr porn ban touches on issues within multiple fields and presents a rich opportunity to forge connections across separated areas of scholarly inquiry. In her essay on what she terms "Queer OS," Kara Keeling describes "an interest in bringing the considerable insights of queer theory and LGBT studies to bear on discussions and studies of new media and their technologies and vice versa."[24] Following this logic, my analysis of the Tumblr Porn Ban builds upon work from media studies, Internet studies, and queer theory to consider the nature of online queer spaces in the era of SNS platforms.

Tumblr as an Online Queer Space

David Karp launched Tumblr in February of 2007 and, unlike more traditional longform blog platforms such as WordPress or LiveJournal, the microblogging platform encouraged shorter and more frequent posting.[25] Karp had originally created Tumblr based on his own

---

[23] Tumblr, "Sign Up."

[24] Kara Keeling, "Queer OS," *Cinema Journal* 53, no. 2 (2014): 156.

[25] Tumblr, "Sign Up"

interests in microblogging and was initially skeptical about turning the SNS-blog hybrid platform into a commercial endeavor.[26] But as the platform's userbase quickly grew, the company soon began to sell advertising on Tumblr.[27] In 2013, Tumblr was purchased by Yahoo, which itself was later acquired by Verizon in 2017.[28] After the acquisition, Karp stepped down as Tumblr's CEO and was replaced by Jeff D'Onofrio.[29] As of 2019, the platform had 460.6 million blogs and 170.8 billion posts, demonstrating its significant growth since 2007.[30] In December 2018, Tumblr announced changes to its community guidelines that would no longer allow adult content to be posted on the platform. The controversy that quickly arose around this new adult content policy indicates that throughout its history, Tumblr's users and Tumblr's corporate owners did not fully agree on the platform's meaning and the nature of its online space.

Despite Tumblr's long history and broad popularity, Facebook and Twitter have emerged as the most popular objects of study for social media researchers.[31] However, there has been some published research on Tumblr in a handful of disciplines. In a meta-analysis of Tumblr-

---

[26] Jeff Bercovici, "Tumblr: David Karp's $800 Million Art Project," Forbes, January 2, 2013, https://www.forbes.com/sites/jeffbercovici/2013/01/02/tumblr-david-karps-800-million-art-project/.

[27] Cotton Delo, "Tumblr Announces First Foray Into Paid Advertising," Ad Age, April 18, 2012, https://adage.com/article/special-report-digital-conference/social-media-tumblr-announces-foray-paid-ads/234214/.

[28] Jay Yarow, "Yahoo's Board Approves $1.1 Billion Purchase Of Tumblr," Business Insider, May 19, 2013, https://www.businessinsider.com/yahoos-board-approves-11-billion-purchase-of-tumblr-2013-5; Vindu Goel, "Verizon Completes $4.48 Billion Purchase of Yahoo, Ending an Era," *The New York Times*, December 22, 2017, sec. Technology, https://www.nytimes.com/2017/06/13/technology/yahoo-verizon-marissa-mayer.html.

[29] Jon Fingas, "Tumblr Founder and CEO David Karp Resigns," Engadget, November 27, 2017, https://www.engadget.com/2017/11/27/tumblr-founder-david-karp-resigns/.

[30] Numbers were current as of March 8, 2019. The platform's growth is based on the 2014 data cited by Bourlai and Herring. Tumblr, "Sign Up"; Elli Bourlai and Susan C. Herring, "Multimodal Communication on Tumblr: 'I Have So Many Feels!,'" in *Proceedings of the 2014 ACM Conference on Web Science* (ACM Web Science 2014, Bloomington, Indiana: ACM, 2014), 171–175, https://doi.org/10.1145/2615569.2615697.

[31] Robert E. Wilson, Samuel D. Gosling, and Lindsay T. Graham, "A Review of Facebook Research in the Social Sciences," *Perspectives on Psychological Science* 7, no. 3 (2012): 203–20; Shirley A. Williams, Melissa M. Terras, and Claire Warwick, "What Do People Study When They Study Twitter? Classifying Twitter Related Academic Papers," *Journal of Documentation* 69, no. 3 (2013): 384–410.

related research, Rose Attu and Melissa Terras identified 38 papers in a five year period that specifically focused on Tumblr as an SNS platform, and 23 papers with a partial focus on the platform.[32] The majority of these Tumblr-related projects have used analytic and examination methods to situate Tumblr users and their content within specific offline communities. For instance, Paul Booth describes how Tumblr contributed to the rise of fandom and fandom parodies of the *Inspector Spacetime* show-within-a-show from NBC's *Community*.[33] Other work has considered the spread of memes on the Tumblr platform, such as in Ryan Milner's analysis of Occupy Wall Street memes.[34] Furthermore, there has been much work that studies Tumblr as a site for online performances of sexuality.[35] This type of work is especially salient because it underscores how Tumblr had widely been viewed as an online space for identity expression prior to the Porn Ban. Though this possibility of the space is still present, the restriction on adult content has largely curtailed the extent to which individual users and groups can freely express their identities. Although much of this previous scholarship has studied the users and messages that exist on the platform, it situates Tumblr as an online setting where certain interactions are made possible but without questioning how that space itself is defined. This thesis contributes to

---

[32] Rose Attu and Melissa M. Terras, "What People Study When They Study Tumblr: Classifying Tumblr-Related Academic Research," *Journal of Documentation* 73, no. 3 (March 24, 2017): 528–54, https://doi.org/10.1108/JD-08-2016-0101.

[33] Paul Booth, "Reifying the Fan: Inspector Spacetime as Fan Practice," *Popular Communication* 11, no. 2 (April 1, 2013): 146–59, https://doi.org/10.1080/15405702.2013.779505.

[34] Ryan M. Milner, "Pop Polyvocality: Internet Memes, Public Participation, and the Occupy Wall Street Movement," *International Journal of Communication* 7, no. 0 (October 30, 2013): 34.

[35] Fink and Miller, "Trans Media Moments"; Katrin Tiidenberg, "Bringing Sexy Back: Reclaiming the Body Aesthetic via Self-Shooting," *Cyberpsychology: Journal of Psychosocial Research on Cyberspace* 8, no. 1 (March 1, 2014), https://doi.org/10.5817/CP2014-1-3; Katrin Tiidenberg, "Boundaries and Conflict in a NSFW Community on Tumblr: The Meanings and Uses of Selfies," *New Media & Society* 18, no. 8 (September 1, 2016): 1563–78, https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444814567984; Robert J. Zeglin and Julie Mitchell, "Using Social Media to Assess Conceptualizations of Sexuality," *American Journal of Sexuality Education* 9, no. 3 (July 3, 2014): 276–91, https://doi.org/10.1080/15546128.2014.933994.

the growing body of Tumblr literature by questioning how the platform's owners and its users co-construct the online space.

Tumblr has received greater attention in writing outside of academic circles. Prior to 2019, popular press writing on the platform was generally limited to profiles of CEO David Karp, major financial milestones, and the Yahoo and Verizon acquisitions.[36] However the Tumblr Porn Ban itself received considerable attention. In early December 2018, multiple articles described the announced policy as detrimental to the platform and its community.[37] Others noted that the proposed policy would specifically undermine Tumblr's existence as an online space for LGBTQ+ and other non-normative identities.[38] These sentiments were echoed by articles written after the adult content policy went into effect.[39] Aja Romano wrote that the content policy was more than just an issue of pornography and sexual content, but an issue of the Tumblr community and platform identity because "Tumblr has traditionally had a primarily harmonious relationship with its user base, despite its users' increasing distrust of its motives and interests."[40] Given the recency of the adult content policy, the disparity between popular press

---

[36] Cheshire, "Tumbling on Success"; Delo, "Tumblr Announces First Foray Into Paid Advertising"; Fingas, "Tumblr Founder and CEO David Karp Resigns"; Goel, "Verizon Completes $4.48 Billion Purchase of Yahoo, Ending an Era"; Yarow, "Yahoo's Board Approves $1.1 Billion Purchase Of Tumblr."

[37] Liao, "Tumblr's Adult Content Ban Means the Death of Unique Blogs That Explore Sexuality"; Powell, "The Problem With Banning Pornography on Tumblr."

[38] Steven W. Thrasher, "What Tumblr's Porn Ban Really Means," The Atlantic, December 7, 2018, https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2018/12/tumblr-adult-content-porn/577471/; Tiffany, "When Tumblr Bans Porn, Who Loses?"; Brammer, "RIP Tumblr Porn. You Made Me Who I Am."

[39] Shannon Liao, "Tumblr Porn Vanishes Today," The Verge, December 17, 2018, https://www.theverge.com/2018/12/17/18141106/tumblr-porn-ban-adult-content-appeal; Eli Rosenberg, "Tumblr's Nudity Ban Removes One of the Last Major Refuges for Pornography on Social Media," Washington Post, December 3, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2018/12/04/tumblrs-nudity-crackdown-means-pornography-will-be-harder-find-its-platform-than-nazi-propaganda/; Dan Savage, "Savage Love: Where to Find Porn after the Tumblr Ban," Detroit Metro Times, accessed July 9, 2019, https://www.metrotimes.com/detroit/savage-love-where-to-find-porn-after-the-tumblr-ban/Content?oid=19039711.

[40] Aja Romano, "Tumblr's Adult Content Ban Hurts All of Internet Culture," Vox, December 4, 2018, https://www.vox.com/2018/12/4/18124120/tumblr-porn-adult-content-ban-user-backlash.

and academic writing is unsurprising. Now that several months have passed since the original controversy, there is opportunity to consider the Tumblr Porn Ban in an academic setting and question the ways that the platform as an online queer space had had this previous identity compromised and redefined.

Tumblr and Its Affordances

Tumblr had been understood as an online queer space because of the ability for its individual users and its community to define the platform. Unlike other SNSs, Tumblr does not provide an explicit articulation of its intended purpose. For instance Facebook's log-in splash page states, "connect with friends and the world around you on Facebook."[41] Twitter presents itself as a way to "see what's happening in the world right now."[42] However, Tumblr avoids providing this kind of explicit definition and instead articulates its platform's purpose in terms of its users. Tumblr's splash page invites individuals to "come for what [they] love" and to "stay for what [they] discover," and directly states, "Tumblr is blogs."[43] Unlike other SNSs, there is not one specific thing that Tumblr defines itself as. Instead, the SNS creates space for its users to define the platform.

A digital technology's affordances shape what actions are possible and for SNSs, shape the ways that users are able to interact with the platform.[44] In the case of Tumblr, its affordances have enabled its users to establish the SNS as an online queer space for identity exploration and

---

[41] Facebook, "Facebook - Log In or Sign Up," 2019, https://www.facebook.com/.

[42] Twitter, "Twitter. It's What's Happening," 2019, https://twitter.com.

[43] Tumblr, "Sign Up."

[44] danah boyd, "Social Network Sites as Networked Publics: Affordances, Dynamics, and Implications," in *Networked Self: Identity, Community, and Culture on Social Network Sites*, ed. Zizi Papacharissi, 2010, 39–58, https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203876527-8; T. Bucher and A. Helmond, "The Affordances of Social Media Platforms," in *The SAGE Handbook of Social Media* (Sage Publications, Inc, 2018), 233–53.

expression. While each individual feature I discuss below is not wholly unique, taken collectively they contribute to what Fink and Miller describe as "a mode of engagement distinct to the site."[45]

Tumblr does not enforce real-name policies, which on other web platforms can significantly limit user privacy and safety.[46] Additionally, Tumblr does not require basic profile information such as name, gender, and location to use the platform.[47] Though an individual could choose to provide thorough and accurate personal information, they could just as easily post under a pseudonym without any identifying information; each Tumblr user can choose the level of anonymity they feel most comfortable with. This greatly contributes to how Tumblr had once existed as an online queer space. Vikki Fraser notes that online spaces can be an important venues for young queer people to practice coming out.[48] By this logic, Tumblr is an especially fitting online space for queer communities because of the highly granular control each user has over how much of themselves they choose to present at any given time.

Tumblr's reblog is another way that its users can customize their own experience with the platform and has partially contributed to the SNS's identity as an online queer space. The reblog allows one user to repost and comment on another user's post, while deemphasizing original authorship of content. Though similar to a retweet on Twitter, Tumblr's reblog emphasizes the user's curation and commenting rather than the original creator being reblogged.[49] This has an

---

[45] Fink and Miller, "Trans Media Moments," 614.

[46] danah boyd, ""Real Names" Policies Are an Abuse of Power," apophenia, August 4, 2011, http://www.zephoria.org/thoughts/archives/2011/08/04/real-names.html.

[47] Yi Chang et al., "What Is Tumblr: A Statistical Overview and Comparison," *ACM SIGKDD Explorations Newsletter* 16, no. 1 (September 2014): 21–29, https://doi.org/10.1145/2674026.2674030.

[48] Vikki Fraser, "Queer Closets and Rainbow Hyperlinks: The Construction and Constraint of Queer Subjectivities Online," *Sexuality Research and Social Policy* 7, no. 1 (March 1, 2010): 30–36, https://doi.org/10.1007/s13178-010-0006-1.

[49] Chang et al., "What Is Tumblr"; Cho, "Queer Reverb: Tumblr, Affect, Time."

important effect on Tumblr as an online queer space. An individual user can choose how closely connected they want to be with the Tumblr content they consume and share. Whereas on Facebook and Twitter the act of joining a group, following another user, or "liking" a certain page is a very public act of labeling oneself, the Tumblr reblog is a way to interact with other community members on one's own terms.

In addition to the curation made possible by the reblog, Tumblr's personalized and customizable blog dashboards enable each user to closely control their own Tumblr experience; There is no one single way to use Tumblr. A user can choose to follow a particular blog, which will then place any new posts into their personalized dashboard. Unlike Facebook friend requests, this social interaction is not necessarily reciprocal, which adds significant complexity to the Tumblr network.[50] The lack of reciprocity limits the possibility of grouping Tumblr users into distinct communities. Instead, there is often overlapping and blurring of the boundaries between Tumblr user communities. Furthermore, the customizable dashboard enables each user to construct a fuller online persona. A user's queerness does not have to be the only facet of their online identity; they might see posts from members of LGBTQ+ communities in-line with content from their favorite TV shows. In addition to control over what content they see, Tumblr users have significant ability to reconfigure the look and feel of the online space itself. By using the site's built-in design tools or through their own custom HTML code each user can, "Look however [they] want. Customize [their] Tumblr's colors, fonts, layout, everything."[51] This ability

---

[50] Chang et al., "What Is Tumblr"; Jiejun Xu and Tsai-Ching Lu, "Inferring User Interests on Tumblr," in *Social Computing, Behavioral-Cultural Modeling, and Prediction*, ed. Nitin Agarwal, Kevin Xu, and Nathaniel Osgood, Lecture Notes in Computer Science (Springer International Publishing, 2015), 458–63.

[51] Tumblr, "About," Tumblr, 2019, https://www.tumblr.com/about.

for each user to make the space truly their own has contributed to Tumblr's emergence as an online queer space in ways that are not possible on other SNSs such as Facebook or Twitter.

Finally, there are seven separate types of Tumblr blog posts: text, photo, quote, link, chat, audio, or video.[52] Though researchers have found that the overwhelming majority of Tumblr content is text or photo posts, the specific content that comprises Tumblr posts is nevertheless wide and varied.[53] Furthermore, Attu and Terras have pinpointed Tumblr's multimodality as a major characteristic of the platform as an online space for identity construction.[54] Katrin Tiidenberg also views Tumblr as a platform for identity construction, particularly thanks to its prior tolerance of adult content.[55] The wide range of Tumblr content underscores the multi-faceted quality of the Tumblr userbase; it is not so much one single community, but rather countless smaller communities that coalesce around similar views, interests, and content.

While these individual affordances are not wholly unique, Tumblr's specific combination of affordances empowers its users by offering highly granular control over their own experience with the platform. Line Nybro Petersen explains that "the types of conversations that take place on Tumblr are only possible because of the affordances put forth on Tumblr."[56] There are opportunities for identity play and experimentation on Tumblr that are not possible on other platforms or in face-to-face communication. Rather than Tumblr itself explicitly defining the

---

[52] Tumblr, "Sign Up."

[53] Chang et al., "What Is Tumblr"; Bourlai and Herring, "Multimodal Communication on Tumblr."

[54] Attu and Terras, "What People Study When They Study Tumblr," 541.

[55] Tiidenberg, "Boundaries and Conflict in a NSFW Community on Tumblr."

[56] Line Nybro Petersen, "Sherlock Fans Talk: Mediatized Talk on Tumblr," *Northern Lights: Film & Media Studies Yearbook* 12, no. 1 (2014): 93, https://doi.org/10.1386/nl.12.1.87_1.

platform and what it is for, Tumblr users have largely been the ones who have defined Tumblr through their posting practices and contributed to its identity as an online queer space.[57]

Though Tumblr had once been an online queer space, the announcement of the new adult content policy significantly changed this platform identity. My thesis sees the Tumblr's adult content policy as a conflict between an SNS corporation and the platform's users. Given that this thesis questions how online spaces are managed and controlled, I must consider Tumblr's ownership and its potential profit motives. Robert McChesney describes how the Internet remains intertwined with capitalism and calls for a consideration of the large media corporations that still exert significant influence over online spaces.[58] Additionally, Jonathan Hardy cautions that techno-Internet-centric analyses have "tended to obscure a key insight from political economy, that the wider external context affects the internet's impact: that capitalism influenced the Internet more than vice versa."[59] Thus, while my analysis will largely focus on how the adult content policy was communicated to, and subsequently discussed by, Tumblr users it will also consider how such conversations fit within the larger political economy of an online media corporation. The Tumblr porn ban does not exist within a vacuum, and Tumblr's acquisition by Verizon along with the accompanying legal regulations and pressures should not be overlooked.

Myths (and Realities) of the Internet

The development of the Internet prompted visions of a globalized communication network that transcended the boundaries of space and time. Many people articulated an idealistic

---

[57] Cavalcante, "Tumbling Into Queer Utopias and Vortexes."

[58] McChesney, *Digital Disconnect*.

[59] Jonathan Hardy, *Critical Political Economy of the Media: An Introduction*, Communication and Society (London ; New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2014), 112.

view of online space that would bring with it the democratization of communication.[60] Mark Poster wrote that "the 'magic' of the Internet is that it is a technology that puts cultural acts, symbolizations in all forms, in the hands of all participants; it radically decentralized the positions of speech, publishing, filmmaking, radio and television broadcasting, in short the apparatuses of cultural production."[61] This so-called "magic" of the Internet could be seen in John Perry Barlow's declaration of "the global social space we are building to be naturally independent of the tyrannies [that governments] seek to impose on us."[62] Fred Turner's analysis of the development of the Whole Earth 'Lectronic Link (WELL) bulletin-board system underscores the early Internet's roots in 1960s counter-culture.[63] Given these early idealistic visions, it is unsurprising that the initial entry of commercial communication into online spaces was met with significant backlash and skepticism.[64] Yet the reality of the modern Internet is one of significant corporatization. Richard Barbrook and Andy Cameron's "Californian Ideology" describes this seeming contradiction; though it was rooted in counter-culture, the development of the technology sector also had significant influence from the entrepreneurial class as well.[65] The role of corporations in online spaces, therefore, challenges the extent to which the Web can truly be free, open, and equal.

---

[60] See, for instance: Barlow, "A Declaration of the Independence of Cyberspace"; Howard Rheingold, *The Virtual Community: Homesteading on the Electronic Frontier*, Revised Edition (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2000); Clay Shirky, "The Political Power of Social Media," *Foreign Affairs*, December 20, 2010, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2010-12-20/political-power-social-media; Stefik, *Internet Dreams*; Turner, "Where the Counterculture Met the New Economy."

[61] Mark Poster, "Cyberdemocracy: Internet and the Public Sphere," in *Internet Culture*, ed. David Porter (London: Routledge, 1997), 211.

[62] Barlow, "A Declaration of the Independence of Cyberspace."

[63] Turner, "Where the Counterculture Met the New Economy."

[64] Ankerson, *Dot-Com Design*, 31–32.

[65] Richard Barbrook and Andy Cameron, "The Californian Ideology," *Science as Culture* 6, no. 1 (1996): 44–72, https://doi.org/10.1080/09505439609526455.

The corporatization of online space has become increasingly prevalent in the 21st century, which has in part prompted further considerations of the reality of internet culture as it lives up to its idealistic myths. Nick Couldry and Ulises Mejias describe the modern Internet as a mechanism of *data colonialism*, and draw explicit connections to corporate power:

> "The world of internet-based connection is a world in which new types of corporate power, with privileged access to data streams extracted from the flow of life, can activate a metaphorical button—an apparatus of extraction, whether platform, app, or AI system—that reconfigures human life so that it contributes continuously to the collection of data and thereby, potentially, to the generation of profit."[66]

Though online communication was once thought to liberate and transform the lives of individual users, the reality is that new media technologies also represent new mechanisms of control and exploitation.[67] Tarleton Gillespie, for instance, describes how Web platforms have taken on regulatory roles to manage and curtail certain types of online speech.[68] The same sites that tout convenience and connection are the same entities that limit what users can do in online spaces.

The idealistic visions of the Internet are further challenged by the growing prominence of social network sites, which do not necessarily unify all Internet users to the extent they might claim. danah boyd and Nicole Ellison define social network sites (SNSs) as:

> "web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system."[69]

---

[66] Nick Couldry and Ulises Ali Mejias, *The Costs of Connection: How Data Is Colonizing Human Life and Appropriating It for Capitalism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2019), xviii.

[67] Hardy, *Critical Political Economy of the Media*, 212.

[68] Tarleton Gillespie, "Regulation of and by Platforms," in *The SAGE Handbook of Social Media*, by Jean Burgess, Alice Marwick, and Thomas Poell (London: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2018), 254–78, https://doi.org/10.4135/9781473984066.n15.

[69] boyd and Ellison, "Social Network Sites," 211.

Though the naming conventions and interfaces of each SNS may vary, individual platforms are similar in that the actual networking that takes place is often limited. Most SNSs are typically more about maintaining pre-existing communities, and less about reaching out and connecting with *everyone* else. While this lack of widespread networking is not necessarily a bad thing, it does present a departure from earlier myths of the Web as a radical reshaping of human communication and thus a slightly different view from the early idealistic visions of the Web. The fact that corporate owners retain significant power and control limits the extent to which any SNS platform can exist as a free and open online space.

Online "Spaces" and Community

Though online communication is often characterized by its lack of physicality and its erasure of distance, much of what takes place on the Internet can still be thought of within terms of space. Mark Graham has argued that the Web itself is still spatial, in both its nomenclature and its interfaces.[70] For example, space is referenced in phrases such as "web *sites,*" "online *platforms,*" or even the term "cyber*space*." Charlton McIlwain echoes this point, as well as notes that in the offline world space has been used as a tool of racial inequality.[71] Because online settings still have spatial characteristics, it is important to note that various forms of inequality likely still exist in these online spaces. Different online spaces can operate as venues for people and communities to gather, but it is not necessarily the case that the Web in its entirety will be one single homogenous space. Mark Poster explains that "individuals construct their identities in

---

[70] Mark Graham, "Geography/Internet: Ethereal Alternate Dimensions of Cyberspace or Grounded Augmented Realities?," *The Geographical Journal* 179, no. 2 (June 1, 2013): 177–82, https://doi.org/10.1111/geoj.12009; Mark Graham and Matthew Zook, "Visualizing Global Cyberscapes: Mapping User-Generated Placemarks," *Journal of Urban Technology* 18, no. 1 (January 1, 2011): 115–32, https://doi.org/10.1080/10630732.2011.578412.

[71] Charlton McIlwain, "Racial Formation, Inequality and the Political Economy of Web Traffic," *Information, Communication & Society* 20, no. 7 (July 3, 2017): 1073–89, https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2016.1206137.

relation to ongoing dialogues."[72] This implies that in different online spaces—that is, within different dialogues—individuals' behaviors and identity construction may play out differently. The Internet is less of a single social space but rather an amalgamation of multiple overlapping and intersecting spaces. As Dave Healy puts it, "two virtual places may be 'separated' by only a keystroke, but their inhabitants will never meet."[73] Each individual online location has its own characteristics, communities, and relationships of power. This thesis specifically examines the power relationships that exist between Tumblr's user communities and its corporate owners and how the platform's online space is constructed.

In a similar vein, the development of the Internet and the Web raised questions about the potential for online spaces to serve as new venues for democracy and public discourse. Mark Poster's "cyberdemocracy" extends beyond the original Habermasian definition of a public sphere, and he calls for scholars to think of the Internet not so much as a tool but rather as a social space in and of itself.[74] Howard Rheingold envisioned a similar possibility for the Internet to facilitate community building.[75] While in many ways he positions the existence of virtual communities as the electronic equivalent of a public sphere, it is important to note that he was writing about one specific online community, the WELL. But online communities are largely characterized by fragmentation and what takes place in one online space is not necessarily indicative of all online communication.[76] This thesis examines Tumblr as an online space, and

---

[72] Poster, "Cyberdemocracy: Internet and the Public Sphere," 211.

[73] Dave Healy, "Cyberspace and Place: The Internet as Middle Landscape on the Electronic Frontier," in *Internet Culture*, ed. David Porter (New York: Routledge, 1997), 62.

[74] Poster, "Cyberdemocracy: Internet and the Public Sphere."

[75] Rheingold, *The Virtual Community*.

[76] Marshall Van Alstyne and Erik Brynjolfsson, "Global Village or Cyber-Balkans? Modeling and Measuring the Integration of Electronic Communities," *Management Science* 51, no. 6 (June 2005): 851–68, https://doi.org/10.1287/mnsc.1050.0363.

the community that had once gathered there but my arguments should not necessarily be generalized to apply to *all* of the Internet. That said, it can serve as a case study of how a particular online space can be defined by both its users and its owners, as well as the potential conflicts that might arise in any online setting.

There has been much work that considers the possible conflicts within online settings, as well as the limitations on community building in online spaces. In their discussion of oppositional politics and Internet activism, Richard Kahn and Douglas Kellner acknowledge the utility of online spaces for opposition groups to meet and organize. However, those online communities will always be limited by the Internet's inherent commercial interests.[77] The same giant media corporations persisted, even during the growth of the Internet's popularity, marking what was simply a relocation, rather than an overthrow, of the means of cultural production.[78] The corporate reality of the modern Internet has led some to explicitly state that online communication is unable to meet the criteria for true democratic discourse.[79] Similarly, Katherine Hayles has described the lack of true presence in online settings as mere "electronic flickers," which again limits the formation of communities.[80] The common thread throughout all these conceptualizations of community in online spaces is that the relationships between the various inhabitants of the space become murky and intertwined.

Online communities comprise complex relationships not only among users, but with the owners and operators of the space as well. There is an inherent power imbalance between a

---

[77] Richard Kahn and Douglas Kellner, "Oppositional Politics and the Internet: A Critical/Reconstructive Approach," *Cultural Politics* 1, no. 1 (March 1, 2005): 75–100, https://doi.org/10.2752/174321905778054926.

[78] McChesney, *Digital Disconnect*; Poster, "Cyberdemocracy: Internet and the Public Sphere."

[79] Susan C. Herring, "Gender and Democracy in Computer-Mediated Communication," in *Computerization and Controversy (2nd Ed.)*, ed. Rob Kling (Academic Press, Inc., 1996), 476–89.

[80] N. Katherine Hayles, "Virtual Bodies and Flickering Signifiers," *October* 66 (1993): 69–91, https://doi.org/10.2307/778755.

platform's users and its corporate owners. Despite the fact that it is the users and their content that largely contributes to the value and definition of an online community, when that community forms in an online space that is beholden to corporate interests, there is always the possibility for the space to be redefined against the interests of its users.

The Tumblr Porn Ban provides an opportunity to probe these conceptualizations of online spaces and their potential for community-building. This thesis questions the ways that an online space is defined and possibly redefined through corporate interests. In this thesis, I specifically conceptualize Tumblr as an SNS platform that had once been established as an online queer space by its users but became redefined and reshaped in response to pressure from its corporate owners.

Online Queer Spaces

Queer theory has emerged as a major driving force in much scholarship that considers gender, sexuality, and identity. Queer theory positions identity as highly fluid and subject to change. David Gauntlett explains that all aspects of identity, and gender in particular, arise through performances and repetition.[81] Given that identity is inherently performative, there are significant opportunities for subversion and redefinition of binary gender norms through what Butler describes in her call to create "gender trouble."[82] "There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very "expressions" that are said to be its results."[83] Through its platform affordances and previously lax content policies, Tumblr provided opportunities for individuals to create this so-called "gender trouble" within

---

[81] David Gauntlett, *Media, Gender and Identity: An Introduction*, 2nd ed (New York: Routledge, 2008), 146–47.

[82] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York : Routledge, 1999).

[83] Butler, 33.

25

online settings. Individual users and communities had great freedom to perform their gender in the online space of Tumblr, rather than being forced into strict binary definitions. Indeed, Tumblr and its user communities were sites where multiple facets of identity could be explored and constructed, and was not just limited to gender alone.

Queer theory encompasses more than gender alone and includes studies of sexuality, bodies, identity, and much more. Queer theory has influenced thinking throughout many disciplines, including its many contributions to geography and understandings of space.[84] For example, scholars have argued for the potential of "queer spaces" as important locations for the performance of identity.[85] David Bell et al., for instance, explain that "The question of *where* transgression occurs has been central to [their] thinking."[86] And Sara Ahmed specifically conceptualizes bodies within particular spaces, noting that, "space acquires 'direction' through how bodies inhabit it, just as bodies acquire direction in this inhabitants."[87] Put another way, queer spaces can be significant sites where individuals are able to challenge the heteronormativity and hegemony of most spaces and practices. Furthermore, individuals shape queer spaces just as much as those same spaces shape the individual. Although most conceptions of queer spaces were rooted in physical locations, there has been some work that has begun to consider the ways that online spaces can serve similar functions.

---

[84] Minelle Mahtani, "Judith Butler," in *Key Thinkers on Space and Place*, ed. Phil Hubbard and Rob Kitchin (London: Sage Publications, 2010), 65–71.

[85] Kate O'Riordan and David J. Phillips, "Introduction," in *Queer Online: Media Technology and Sexuality*, ed. Kate O'Riordan and David J. Phillips (New York: Peter Lang Inc., International Academic Publishers, 2007).

[86] David Bell et al., "All Hyped up and No Place to Go," *Gender, Place & Culture* 1, no. 1 (March 1, 1994): 44, https://doi.org/10.1080/09663699408721199.

[87] Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 12.

Online queer spaces are settings in which identity performance can take place, often providing users with opportunities that may not be available within their offline lives.[88] Writing about LGBT youth in rural areas, Mary Gray emphasizes the importance of visibility for the establishment and performance of queer identities.[89] By this logic, online settings may provide opportunities for users to be visible and perform identities separately from their offline settings. Indeed, Vikki Fraser explains that the Internet may provide people with their first opportunities to become part of a queer community.[90] Furthermore, these online spaces are often more fluid and malleable than their physical counterparts. In an online queer space, individual users have significant ability to define the online setting, including its community standards and norms. The online space's fluid affordances and aesthetics foster queer user communities, and simultaneously these queer communities contribute to the online space feeling more fluid and malleable. Through this cyclical process, Tumblr had built its prior identity as an alternative platform and online queer space. This was also largely a result of the corporation's previously lax and hands-off policy toward content regulation and platform management.

The fluidity and empowerment of individual users indicates that online communication technologies can help to sustain queer communities.[91] Indeed, there has been significant work that probes the intersections of online media, technology, and identities.[92] Kara Keeling

[88] Cavalcante, "Tumbling Into Queer Utopias and Vortexes."

[89] Mary L. Gray, *Out in the Country: Youth, Media, and Queer Visibility in Rural America*, Intersections : Transdisciplinary Perspectives on Genders and Sexualities (New York: New York University Press, 2009).

[90] Fraser, "Queer Closets and Rainbow Hyperlinks."

[91] Kate O'Riordan, "From Usenet to Gaydar: A Comment on Queer Online Community," *ACM SIGGROUP Bulletin* 25, no. 2 (February 1, 2005): 28–32, https://doi.org/10.1145/1067721.1067727.

[92] Kate O'Riordan and David J. Phillips, eds., *Queer Online: Media Technology and Sexuality* (New York: Peter Lang Inc., International Academic Publishers, 2007); Safiya Umoja Noble and Brendesha M. Tynes, eds., *The Intersectional Internet: Race, Sex, Class, and Culture Online* (Peter Lang International Academic Publishers, 2016).

specifically describes this combination of queer theory and new media in her call for the establishment of "Queer OS" research projects.[93] This thesis builds upon her call, as well as the previous literature, by asking how Tumblr had once operated as an online queer space, and what that online space had once meant to its users.

In general, online queer spaces have served as important settings for identity performance and expression that counter heteronormative norms of most spaces. Lynn Cherny writes that even in the supposedly equalizing spaces of online communication, people with different gender identities will experience the same online space in different ways.[94] This is why specific online queer spaces have remained so important. Even though such spaces may be viewed essentially as online "closets," this term can still be one of empowerment. For instance, the Internet may provide some people with their first opportunities to be part of a queer community, especially when that type of identity performance is not necessarily possible in one's offline life.[95] Marjo Laukkanen notes that an individual's social body includes material, represented, and imagined dimensions and that online spaces produce different experiences in all three of these dimensions.[96] The availability of online queer spaces, then, might be understood as being critical for creating opportunities for individuals to perform and construct their identities.

However, there has been some caution in lauding the Web as enabling wholly new forms of identity performance. While online queer spaces can be important sites where such

---

[93] Keeling, "Queer OS."

[94] Lynn Cherny, "Gender Differences in Text-Based Virtual Reality," in *Cultural Performances: Proceedings of the Third Berkeley Women and Language Conference. Berkeley: Berkeley Women and Language Group*, 1994, 102–15.

[95] Fraser, "Queer Closets and Rainbow Hyperlinks."

[96] Marjo Laukkanen, "Young Queers Online: The Limits and Possibilities of Non-Heterosexual Self-Representation in Online Contexts," in *Queer Online: Media Technology and Sexuality*, ed. Kate O'Riordan and David J. Phillips (New York: Peter Lang Inc., International Academic Publishers, 2007), 81–100.

performances unfold, they are not without their limitations. In their discussion of "computer crossdressing," Debra Ferreday and Simon Lock caution against viewing online spaces as the perfect solution that will enable positive identity performativity.[97] They cite the case of "Julie," a supposed disabled woman in an online community who was actually a male psychologist, to underscore the potential consequences of online communication on identity performance.[98] Lisa Nakamura has described these consequences as "identity tourism," in which privileged people take advantage of online communication to play out their own fantasies, often at the expense of already-marginalized individuals.[99] As such, online spaces should not be overly-idealized as settings in which *all* forms of identity performance are made possible without issue.

Online queer spaces are also limited by the reality of the internet and its corporate interests. Online corporations that seemingly cater to queer communities have been described as Janus-faced, platforms "which present themselves as inclusive communities to gay and lesbian consumers while simultaneously presenting themselves as surveilling entities to corporate clients."[100] Though not specific to online corporations, Ron Becker has described how television companies attempted to segment out a "gay audience" alongside its "straight audience."[101] Through this segmentation, corporations created and defined specific queer audiences—not in response to individual experience and needs, but in response to corporate logics and profit

---

[97] Debra Ferreday and Simon Lock, "Computer CRoss-Dressing: Queering the Virtual Subject," in *Queer Online: Media Technology and Sexuality*, ed. Kate O'Riordan and David J. Phillips (New York: Peter Lang Inc., International Academic Publishers, 2007), 155–74.

[98] Allucquere Rosanne Stone, "Will the Real Body Please Stand Up?," *Cyberspace: First Steps*, 1991, 81–118.

[99] Lisa Nakamura, "Race in/for Cyberspace: Identity Tourism and Racial Passing on the Internet," *Works and Days* 13, no. 1–2 (1995): 181–93.

[100] John Edward Campbell, "Outing PlanetOut: Surveillance, Gay Marketing and Internet Affinity Portals," *New Media & Society* 7, no. 5 (October 1, 2005): 663–83, https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444805056011.

[101] Ron Becker, *Gay TV and Straight America* (New Brunswick, N.J: Rutgers University Press, 2006).

motives. Given the inherent corporate nature of the internet, it is likely that similar motives were

present in the case of Tumblr and its corporate owners. Though online queer spaces do provide

important opportunities and settings for queer communities, there remain many limitations to just

how effective they can actually be. By examining the ways that Tumblr's corporate owners

redefined the meaning of the platform through the adult content policy, this thesis questions the

extent to which an SNS platform can operate as an online queer space as well as the many

limitations that exist even within seemingly free and open online settings.

Regulating the Web

This thesis considers the way that Tumblr as an online space has been conceptualized and

defined by both its users and its owners. Up until this point, I have considered online spaces in

terms of their general characteristics and the communities that inhabit them. However, a

thorough study of an online space should pay particular attention to the rules and regulations that

exist within each setting. In many cases online spaces are thought of in idealistic terms and

viewed as places for absolute freedom of speech. Howard Rheingold's description of virtual

communities is one prominent example of this view of online communication as a space where

seemingly anything is allowed.[102] However, the reality of the Web is much different and there

are many rules and regulations that limit online behaviors and interactions. By studying the

announcement and implementation of a new content policy on Tumblr, this thesis examines how

online spaces are shaped in part through their various regulations. In this case, the new content

policy changed the online space so drastically that it no longer had the same meaning to its users.

---

[102] Rheingold, *The Virtual Community.*

As such, a consideration of how the Web and online spaces are regulated is necessary to fully

contextualize the impact of the Tumblr Porn Ban.

Because Tumblr is a private corporation and the First Amendment only protects

individuals from government restrictions on speech, its adult content policy is not strictly an

issue of free speech. However, it is nevertheless indicative of the complex web of law, platform

policy, and individual user beliefs that defines how online spaces are managed and regulated.

Lawrence Lessig explains that "a constitutional account of free speech that thought only of the

government would be radically incomplete."[103] In his view, online speech is regulated by

multiple rules and regulations that arise from laws, markets, societal norms, and individual

platform architectures.[104] In the case of Tumblr, its new adult content policy was created partially

in response to legal pressure to combat the spread of child pornography and partially in response

to financial pressures to make the platform more advertiser-friendly.[105] But it was enacted

against the societal norms of its own user community, and many of its users saw the new policy

as completely contrary to what the online space of platform had once meant to them.

Online corporations are particularly complicated due to the multitude of terms they use to

refer to themselves and their services. Though the words "website," "app," "service," and

"platform" are often used interchangeably, the distinction is significant and strategically used by

corporations to present themselves in certain ways. Tarleton Gillespie, for instance, describes

---

[103] Lessig, *Code 2.0*, 223.

[104] Lessig, *Code 2.0*.

[105] Lance Whitney, "The Reason Tumblr Vanished from the App Store: Child Pornography That Slipped through the Filters," Download.com, November 20, 2018, https://download.cnet.com/blog/download-blog/the-reason-tumblr-vanished-from-the-app-store-child-pornography-that-slipped-through-the-filters/; Jason Silverstein, "Tumblr App Disappears from Apple's App Store Because of Child Porn," accessed May 6, 2019, https://www.cbsnews.com/news/tumblr-app-disappears-from-apple-app-store-because-of-child-porn/.

how YouTube positions itself as a "platform" to avoid the labels, and legal implications, of "distributor" or "producer."[106] Furthermore, the term "platform" implies that it is more than just a media company, but rather a public space available to communicate in. Though SNS platforms present themselves as impartial communication forums, they are still powerful institutions with strong influences on our online spaces.[107] And as Francesca Tripodi notes, it may not even be possible for a Web platform to exist that does not exert at least some degree of control over individual speech and expression.[108] The presence of any rules and regulations that limit what is possible in online spaces does limit the extent to which the Web can truly be wholly free, open, and equal.

However, this is not to say that online spaces should be entirely free of any and all regulations. Though the Web may be idealized as place of freedom, the reality is that without regulations it can quickly become a breeding ground for offensive content and hate.[109] Julian Dibbell's account of a "Rape in Cyberspace" is an oft-cited example that underscores this reality of online communication; in the absence of clearly established rules and norms, people in online spaces can be easily taken advantage of.[110] But even if there is a sense that online spaces should

[106] Tarleton Gillespie, "The Politics of 'Platforms,'" *New Media & Society* 12, no. 3 (May 1, 2010): 347–64, https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444809342738.

[107] Tarleton Gillespie, *Custodians of the Internet: Platforms, Content Moderation, and the Hidden Decisions That Shape Social Media* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018).

[108] Francesca Tripodi, "There's No Such Thing as a Web Without Gatekeepers – Power Trip," Medium, October 18, 2018, https://medium.com/s/powertrip/theres-no-such-thing-as-a-web-without-gatekeepers-59f448b85b5e.

[109] Saul X. Levmore and Martha Craven Nussbaum, *The Offensive Internet: Speech, Privacy, and Reputation* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2010).

[110] Julian Dibbell, "A Rape in Cyberspace: How an Evil Clown, a Hatian Trickster Spirt, Two Wizards, and a Cast of Dozens Turned a Database into a Society," in *Internet Dreams: Archetypes, Myths, and Metaphors*, ed. Mark Stefik (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1996).

have some type of regulation, there is still much disagreement over what those rules ought to actually cover.

The Tumblr Porn Ban, and the controversy that it sparked, is fundamentally a question over how the online space should be regulated. And, in the case of Tumblr, there is rarely agreement between a platform's owners and its users when it comes to such regulations. By studying the communication between Tumblr and its users around the new adult content policy, this thesis examines what happens when there is significant disagreement over how online spaces ought to be regulated. Furthermore, the Tumblr Porn Ban underscores the unfinalizability of platforms. The regulations and rules of an online space are not the only aspects of a platform that can change and be redefined. Indeed, the entire definition of a platform and its online space emerges from an ongoing negotiation among its corporate owners, its users, and government regulations. In the case of Tumblr, the controversy surrounding the updated adult content policy emerged between the company and users in to form of online corporate communication and individual user blog posts. This content that emerged after the announcement and implementation of the Tumblr Porn Ban underscores the fluid and unfinalized characteristic of the Tumblr platform. Rather than conceptualizing online platforms as singular and static entities, we should consider the various stakeholders that contribute to their continual definition and reshaping.

Chapter Two – The Janus-Faced Corporation:
Tumblr's Discussion and Announcement of the New Adult Content Policy

In the months immediately following the announcement and implementation of Tumblr's new adult content policy, daily traffic to the website dropped significantly.[111] Given this decline in daily active users, and decrease in content being posted to the platform, the future of the Tumblr platform was largely unclear. As the platform's policy changed, both Tumblr users and Tumblr's corporate owners clashed over the meaning of the platform and its nature of an online space. There is an ongoing tension between these two groups and in the case of the Tumblr Porn Ban, this tension reached a tipping point when the platform's owners and its users disagreed over the meaning of the online space. The Tumblr platform is not a singular or finalized entity, but rather is continually shaped and reshaped. The conflict controversy of the Tumblr Porn Ban arose from the disagreement between company and users over how to define and regulate the online space, particularly in terms of adult content.

In this chapter I pinpoint how Tumblr Inc.—and its owners—came to describe the adult content policy. By examining Tumblr's corporate communication, as well as that of its parent companies, I show how the platform's owners conceptualized not just the platform, but its users and community as well. Put another way, the platform's corporate owners understood the nature of Tumblr as an online space primarily in terms of its profitability. And, as I describe in Chapter 3, this conceptualization of the online space vastly differed from how Tumblr users had once defined and understood the platform. In this chapter, I use a combination of digital discourse

---

[111] Shannon Liao, "After the Porn Ban, Tumblr Users Have Ditched the Platform as Promised," The Verge, March 14, 2019, https://www.theverge.com/2019/3/14/18266013/tumblr-porn-ban-lost-users-down-traffic; Mason Sands, "Tumblocalypse: Where Tumblr And Its Users Are Headed After The Ban," Forbes, December 20, 2018, https://www.forbes.com/sites/masonsands/2018/12/20/tumblocalypse-where-tumblr-and-its-users-are-headed-after-the-ban/.

analysis and political economic analysis to demonstrate that Tumblr Inc. needs Tumblr to be one singular community in order for it to be profitable/monetized but its users thrive on it not being a clearly articulated community. I argue that this conflict between how Tumblr Inc. and Tumblr users defined the platform and its online space gave rise to the significant conflict and controversy that surrounded the Tumblr Porn Ban. In online settings, the corporate and user constructions of a platform are nearly always at odds with one another. Because Tumblr Inc.'s profit incentives largely influenced its definition of the platform, its announcement and discussion of the adult content policy was Janus-faced, serving its own corporate interests in some contexts while simultaneously appearing to serve the interests of its users in others.

Methodology

Geographic and Temporal Scope

Though Tumblr is a SNS platform that reaches across national boundaries, I center my analysis of corporate power in online spaces within the United States. It is certainly the case that the laws and regulations of one jurisdiction can influence websites based even in other locations, such as the case of the European Union's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) being applicable to U.S.-based websites.[112] However, a full consideration of every nation's regulations that Tumblr falls under is unfeasible for the scope of a single thesis. In addition to Tumblr being an American company, the U.S. has historically been a dominant location within international communication networks, including the Internet.[113] Additionally, after the new adult content

---

[112] Yaki Faitelson, "Yes, The GDPR Will Affect Your U.S.-Based Business," Forbes, accessed July 25, 2019, https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbestechcouncil/2017/12/04/yes-the-gdpr-will-affect-your-u-s-based-business/.

[113] Healy, "Cyberspace and Place: The Internet as Middle Landscape on the Electronic Frontier"; Anthony M. Townsend, "Network Cities and the Global Structure of the Internet," *American Behavioral Scientist* 44, no. 10 (June 1, 2001): 1697–1716, https://doi.org/10.1177/00027640121957998.

policy was announced, many users discussed the change to the platform in terms of censorship and an infringement of their freedom of speech. For these reasons, I focus my analysis of Tumblr's corporate communication and its implications on online regulation in the context of U.S. law and notions of free speech. Though Tumblr, like all online platforms, is accessible across national borders, I have centered my analysis on Tumblr Inc. as a United States company and how it communicated the revised adult content policy and changes to the platform within that context. To this end, I have selected the English language posts on the Tumblr Staff blog, as well as the English text guidelines. I supplement my analysis of Tumblr's announcement of the content policy by reading corporate documents, including SEC filings and Investor Relations press releases. In both of these cases, I have selected only the texts relevant to Tumblr Inc. as an American corporation. And while there is significant value in studying the content that was removed from the platform—not just for the sake of internet scholarship but for the communities that were most directly affected as well—for this project I am maintaining a relatively narrow scope on the immediate conflict surrounding the announcement and implementation of the new policy.

One additional challenge of internet research is the problem of recency. Though the Tumblr Porn Ban is an issue that emerged nearly two years ago, this is still incredibly recent and the full effects on the platform and its userbase remain to be seen. Given the challenge of timing, my thesis only considers the announcement of the adult content policy and the userbase's immediate response. With this in mind, my analysis is generally limited to the epicenter of the adult content policy and its controversy by only considering announcements, blog posts, and SEC filings from November 2018 through March 2019. This brief range captures the announcement of the policy in December 2018, some of the preceding context, and the

immediate response that followed. This chosen timeframe does exclude many of the events that followed the policy's announcement, including Verizon selling off Tumblr to Automattic Inc. in August 2019.[114] However the purpose of this thesis is not to merely offer a history of Tumblr, but rather to understand the relationship between a platform and its users in shaping an online space.

Platform Terminology

As with many online platforms, names and terminology are a ripe area for ambiguity. There may easily be confusion between references to Tumblr the company and Tumblr the platform. The word "Tumblr" might refer to the website as a whole, a specific user's blog, or the company itself. To minimize potential confusion, I have endeavored to use as precise language as possible. Drawing from Tarleton Gillespie's definition and description of online platforms, I use "Tumblr Platform" to refer to the website as well as the Tumblr app. I use "Tumblr Inc." when referring to the company that owns and has control over the Tumblr platform. I generally use this latter term when discussing the broad influence of corporate power over the online space. However, it is important to note that Tumblr Inc. is not a wholly independent corporate entity. Throughout the website's history, it has been a subsidiary of Yahoo Inc. as well as Verizon Media (formerly Oath Inc.), which is itself a subsidiary of Verizon Inc. And as of August 2019, the platform is now owned by Automattic Inc.[115] I use "Tumblr Inc." when referring specifically to the direct owners of the website, but use specific company names—such as Verizon Inc., Verizon Media,

---

[114] Sarah Krouse, "Verizon to Sell Tumblr to WordPress.Com Owner," *Wall Street Journal*, August 12, 2019, sec. Tech, https://www.wsj.com/articles/verizon-to-sell-tumblr-to-wordpress-owner-11565640000.

[115] Verizon Communications Inc., "Verizon Media Announces Sale of Tumblr to Automattic," August 12, 2019, https://www.verizon.com/about/news/verizon-media-announces-sale-tumblr-automattic.

or Yahoo Inc.—when relevant. I use "Tumblr Staff" or "Tumblr Support" to refer to those specific blogs; this level of specificity is also used to distinguish the "Tumblr Community Guidelines," a specific document, from the "adult content policy," which is a more general way to reference the platform's rules and regulations. Finally, I use "Tumblr community" and "Tumblr users" to refer broadly to the groups of people that regularly visit, read, and post to the Tumblr platform. In general, this refers to people with registered user accounts, but given that many Tumblr blogs are publicly accessible on the Web, it is impossible to be certain about this limitation.

Digital Discourse and Industry Analysis

My analysis of Tumblr's updated adult content policy begins with close readings of its public announcement. Specifically, I am interested in how Tumblr Inc. communicated the policy to its users, and how this articulation compares to discussion of the platform and its policy by its parent company, Verizon Inc., to its shareholders. First, I use digital discourse analysis to probe the relationship between the platform's owners and its users, and how that relationship contributes to the overall characteristics of the platform and its construction as an online queer space. I argue that in its public announcement of the new adult content policy, Tumblr Inc. constructed its perceived audience and user base, but its own corporate personhood to communicate the new policy to its users in a way that was incompatible with its users' conceptions of the online space.

Digital discourse analysis, sometimes referred to as computer-mediated discourse analysis, considers the sociolinguistic and technical aspects of new media.[116] Crispin Thurlow

---

[116] Crispin Thurlow, "Digital Discourse: Locating Language in New/Social Media," in *The Sage Handbook of Social Media*, ed. Jean Burgess, Alice Marwick, and Thomas Poell, 1st edition (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE inc, 2017).

explains that this method "attends to both micro-level linguistic practices and more macro-level social processes."[117] Susan Herring has outlined much of the characteristics of new media language including facets of structure, meaning, interaction, and social function.[118] Digital discourse analysis also considers technological and situational variables such as synchronicity, ephemerality, the number of participants, and the specific setting. In his description of Critical Technocultural Discourse analysis, André Brock critiques "research into Internet phenomena [that] often focuses on specific, characteristic communicative functions of the technology or, alternatively, has theorized 'discourse' from a disciplinary perspective.[119] Instead, Brock calls for a holistic examination of technology, cultural ideology, and practice—and approach which has guided my analysis of Tumblr Inc.'s corporate communication.[120] This method centers around the principles of discourse, multimodality, and ideology to study not just the language of new media, but also its everyday functions and uses to define social and cultural practices.[121]

Following these frameworks, I analyze how the Tumblr corporation announced the adult content policy through specific blog posts and websites. By studying the corporation's communication within specific online contexts, I consider how it blended both casual and formal language, as well as other forms of media—such as photos and animated GIFs—to articulate its policy to its users. Because there was no one single instance where the adult content policy was

---

[117] Thurlow, 135.

[118] Susan C. Herring, *Computer-Mediated Communication: Linguistic, Social, and Cross-Cultural Perspectives* (John Benjamins Publishing, 1996).

[119] André Brock, "Critical Technocultural Discourse Analysis," *New Media & Society* 20, no. 3 (March 1, 2018): 1013, https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444816677532.

[120] Brock, "Critical Technocultural Discourse Analysis."

[121] Thurlow, "Digital Discourse: Locating Language in New/Social Media."

announced and explained, I have compiled a small body of texts that broadly encapsulate Tumblr's public-facing announcements and discussions of the new adult content policy.

First, I examine two posts on the "Tumblr Staff" blog from December 3 and December 17, 2018 which, represent an initial announcement of the policy and a clarification post the day it went into effect. I also include a post from the "Tumblr Support" blog from December 3, 2018 which also offers further explanation of what the new adult content policy's details. Next, I examine two pages from the Tumblr Help Center Website, "Adult Content" and "Reviewing and appealing content flagged as adult." Additionally, I have examined the Tumblr Community guidelines and the formal language used in this official document to define adult content. In these blog posts and web pages, Tumblr used the rhetorical strategy of corporate personhood to articulate its updated adult content policy while simultaneously asserting its power to define the platform, even when doing so was contrary to its users' desires. Tumblr Inc.'s rhetoric of corporate personhood presents the relationship between the platform and its users as seemingly equal, while simultaneously downplaying the power imbalance between the two groups.

Corporate Personhood in Tumblr Inc.'s Announcement

It is noteworthy that Tumblr's announcement of the content policy was not confined to a single setting. Rather than fully articulate the policy, its specific details, and the company's reasoning in a single web page, all of these components are split amongst multiple blogs posts, Help Center documents, and other web pages. This multi-textual nature of Tumblr's announcement influences the rhetorical circulation of the adult content policy. In Tumblr's public-facing announcement of the policy, the very notion of author and audience are in continual flux because they are being constituted through the text itself. By this, I mean that that Tumblr Inc. is resisting a singular definition of itself and of the platform community.

That the announcement is split amongst several texts necessarily means that in order to get a thorough explanation you have to visit multiple web locations. Even though Tumblr Inc. is ultimately responsible for all of these texts, the fact that some parts of the announcement exist on the "Tumblr Staff" blog and others on the "Tumblr Support" blog adds a small degree of ambiguity around authorial identity. The Tumblr corporate person exists in both blogs, despite not being explicitly named. In a sense, the Tumblr corporate person seems like any other user— sharing their views and opinions wherever they are able to on the platform. Tumblr's corporate person does not seem necessarily like one singular user, but rather has the characteristics of *any* possible user. This ambiguity and multiplicity of the Tumblr corporate voice further Tumblr Inc.'s constructed identity from that traditional top-down media broadcasters. Rather than a platform owner talking down "at" its users, the Tumblr corporate person is positioned alongside its users, talking amongst them *as if* it were equal. By splitting the announcement into multiple posts spread across the platform, Tumblr works to construct its corporate personhood seemingly alongside its users.

Furthermore, the fragmentation of the announcement creates the impression that the definition of the Tumblr platform is unfinalizable. Although Tumblr was making explicit changes to what types of content would be allowed on the platform, there remained a sense that there would be an ongoing negotiation over the platform's overall meaning. For instance, even though the Community Guidelines explicitly list adult content under "What Tumblr is not for," it only offers the brief definition of "images, videos, or GIFs that show real-life human genitals or female-presenting nipples" and content "that depicts sex acts."[122] However, to find out about the

___

[122] Tumblr, "Community Guidelines."

permitted exceptions to the policy (such as female-presenting nipples in connection with childbirth, health-related situations, written content, and nudity in art), you would have to visit the separate "Adult Content" page.[123] By not including the entire policy in a single online location, Tumblr implies that its policies are not entirely set in stone. Much as the meaning of the platform overall emerges from the totality of all its constituent blogs, posts, and users, Tumblr's content policies arise from the sum of these disparate web pages. Tumblr leaves open the possibility for its users to contribute to the definition of the platform. However, as I discuss in Chapter 4 and my discussion of the platform triad, users are never the only group responsible for the definition of an online space. And, as the Tumblr Porn Ban demonstrates, a platform's corporate owners will continue to exert influence over a given online space.

The majority of the texts appear on Tumblr blogs that are seemingly identical to what any other user would be able to post; the "Tumblr Staff" and "Tumblr Support" blogs do not get special affordances just because they are ran by the platform owners.[124] On the one hand, the decision to post the announcement on Tumblr blogs is likely pragmatic. Because the new adult content policy affects Tumblr users directly, it makes sense to publish it in a location that is easily accessible to Tumblr users. What better place than the Tumblr platform itself? But the appearance on actual Tumblr blogs has a secondary outcome as well. By posting its announcement on the blog platform, Tumblr constructed its corporate person as if were just like any other Tumblr user, thus obfuscating the imbalance of power that actually exists between the Tumblr corporate person and an individual Tumblr user. For instance, though much of the

---

[123] Tumblr Help Center, "Adult Content," Help Center, 2018, http://tumblr.zendesk.com/hc/en-us/articles/231885248-Adult-content.

[124] Tumblr Staff, "Hey Tumblr..."; Tumblr Support, "Updates to Tumblr's Community Guidelines," Tumblr Support, December 3, 2018, https://support.tumblr.com/post/180758979032/updates-to-tumblrs-community-guidelines.

announcement is published in blog posts, Tumblr isn't limited to this medium. Indeed, some

parts of the new content policy exist in other online locations–such as the community guidelines

itself, as well as the Help Center pages.[125] The fragmentation of the announcement, as well as

their specific online locations, is an important component of how Tumblr constructed its

corporate person in relation to its constituted audience to *seem* equal while hiding the inherent

power imbalance.

Although Tumblr's announcement of the new adult content policy was spread across

several disparate texts in various online locations, this is not how all of its updates have been

implemented. Earlier in 2018, Tumblr had revised its Community Guidelines to reflect "reality

of the internet and social media today and acknowledge that the things people post and share

online influence the way others think and behave."[126] In a single blog post on the "Tumblr Staff"

blog, Tumblr announced changes that were meant to clarify its policies regarding hate speech.

The entire announcement, including specific lines from the Community Guidelines that were

amended, is included in this single post:

> When it comes to hate speech, we're redrawing the line between what's uncomfortable
> and what's unacceptable, and have struck 41 words of gray area from this section in the
> Community Guidelines. It now reads:
>
> **Hate Speech:** Don't encourage violence or hatred. Don't post content for the purpose of
> promoting or inciting the hatred of, or dehumanizing, individuals or groups based on
> race, ethnic or national origin, religion, gender, gender identity, age, veteran status,
> sexual orientation, disability or disease. If you encounter content that violates our hate
> speech policies, please report it.
>
> *[DELETED: If you encounter negative speech that doesn't rise to the level of violence or*
> *threats of violence, we encourage you to dismantle negative speech through argument*

---

[125] Tumblr, "Community Guidelines"; Tumblr Help Center, "Adult Content"; Tumblr Help Center, "Reviewing and Appealing Content Flagged as Adult," Help Center, 2018, http://tumblr.zendesk.com/hc/en-us/articles/360011657153-Reviewing-and-appealing-content-flagged-as-adult.

[126] Tumblr Staff, "Our Community Guidelines Are Changing," Tumblr Staff, August 27, 2018, https://staff.tumblr.com/post/177449083750/new-community-guidelines.

rather than censorship. That said, if you encounter anything especially heinous, tell us about it.][127]

It is worth noting that virtually all SNS have restrictions on hate speech, and that policies restricting these types of speech are generally "politically safe" and receive little controversy.[128] The definition of the Tumblr platform in this instance was significantly more finalized because the corporate person was much more direct about defining what Tumblr is and who it is for. But in the case of the adult content policy, Tumblr's announcement broke from this practice and instead of announcing the change in a single blog post, scattered it across multiple locations and with greater ambiguity. In the hate speech case, both the platform's corporate owners and its user communities concurred over how the online space should be defined and regulated. But, in the case of the Tumblr Porn Ban, the company and the users' views on what the platform meant conflicted, and contributed to the ensuing conflict.

Tumblr Inc.'s Presentation of the Tumblr Platform

Throughout its blog posts and web pages, Tumblr Inc. attempts to present itself as if it were any other user. By doing so, it constructs a particular vision of what the Tumblr platform is—an online space defined by its users and their individual practices. The effect of this is that Tumblr Inc. downplays its own corporate power and ability to unilaterally change the website's content policies. In these public-facing announcements, Tumblr Inc. centers the platform's users as the primary defining characteristics of the online space. Consequently, the company also avoids direct mention of its profit motives which are a major component of how it defines and

---

[127] Tumblr Staff.

[128] Gillespie, *Custodians of the Internet*.

understands the platform. In this sense, Tumblr Inc. is operating as what John Edward Campbell

would describe as a "Janus-faced corporation."[129] On the one hand, it presents itself as serving

the interests and needs of its users. But on the other hand it is also self-serving its own corporate

interests. In the public-facing announcements of the adult content policy, Tumblr Inc. is

articulating its new policy, which is directed by profit motives, but they use familiar and joke-

like language to frame how it is presented to the platform's users. In this sense, the company is

navigating how to effectively present parts of both sides of its Janus face. However, the use of

ambivalent and ambiguous language likely contributed to the disagreement between users and

the company, particularly over how the new adult content policy was actually announced.

Whitney Phillips and Ryan Milner's describe online ambivalence as an ongoing tension

and negotiation of meaning between seriousness and playfulness.[130] Ambivalence can be marked

by instances when playfulness and humor run up against moments of "serious" communication,

as is the case in multiple instances throughout the announcement of the adult content policy.[131]

For instance, the inclusion of a brief aside in the phrase "female-presenting (yeah, we know you

hate this term) nipples" is somewhat ambivalent.[132] It is serious, in that it's an actual description

of content covered by the new policy, but humorous in that it directly acknowledges a specific

phrase that users took issue with. Similarly, the Community Guidelines include a clarification,

"this includes content that is so photorealistic that it could be mistaken for featuring real-life

---

[129] Campbell, "Outing PlanetOut."

[130] Whitney Phillips and Ryan M. Milner, *The Ambivalent Internet: Mischief, Oddity, and Antagonism Online*, 1st edition (Malden, MA: Polity, 2017).

[131] Phillips and Milner.

[132] Tumblr Staff, "Hey Tumblr..."

humans (nice try, though)."[133] These brief parenthetical asides blur the lines between playfulness

and seriousness, and make pinning down a single meaning incredibly difficult.

When Tumblr Inc. includes jokes and informal language like this in its announcement of

the new content policy, it glosses over all the people who used to post that type of content and as

a result are pushed from the platform. The people now excluded from the platform range

anywhere from LGBTQ+ people who might not identify with or see themselves in the majority

of online porn, to the discussions and communities about body positivity. The fact that these

behaviors, and by extension these people, would no longer be a part of the Tumblr community

gets overlooked because of the ambivalence and humor.

Even in cases where there the new content policy does not fully ban certain behavior

Tumblr continues to exercise significant control. The level of control that the new adult content

policy exercised on individual bodies is made most apparent through the language of the

exceptions that were made for the policy. Though the adult content policy appears as a unliteral

restriction on all "female-presenting nipples," Tumblr did include certain exceptions to the

policy. For instance, the company explained that "Written content such as erotica, nudity related

to political or newsworthy speech, and nudity found in art, specifically sculptures and

illustrations, is also stuff that can be freely posted on Tumblr."[134] Furthermore, there were

specific instances when Tumblr would allow imagery of "female-presenting nipples" to be

posted on the platform. For instance, one of the exceptions in Tumblr's adult content police

allows for imagery of "female-presenting nipples" when they appear in connection with

---

[133] Tumblr, "Community Guidelines."

[134] Tumblr Staff, "Hey Tumblr..."

breastfeeding.[135] At first glance, this may read as an inclusive and empowering exception, it also serves to categorize and exclude other bodies. If you are a mother who chooses to breastfeed, then your body is more than welcome on the Tumblr platform. But if you are a mother who does not breastfeed, or if you have "female-presenting nipples" but are not a mother at all, then your body is policed with a stricter level of scrutiny. In a similar vein, the policy allows for "female-presenting nipples" when they appear in relation to "birth or after birth moments."[136] Again, while this exception does empower certain users to continue presenting images of themselves, it also serves to position motherhood as a more "acceptable" version of femaleness. Furthermore, it values a very specific type of motherhood higher than it does others. In this way, Tumblr's adult content policy not only redefined the nature of the platform of an online space, but began to render judgment about individual bodies as well.

A similar outcome is present in the adult content policy and its relation to cases of gender dysphoria. In a blog post from December 17, 2018, Tumblr staff explained this additional exception to the broad ban on "female-presenting nipples" to allow them appear in images and videos that are connected to gender confirmation surgery.[137] While this leaves open an avenue for some bodies to continue presenting themselves on the Tumblr platform, it is not wholly inclusive to *all* individuals who may be experiencing gender dysphoria. Indeed, some of these individuals may have previously used online settings such as Tumblr to share images of their own bodies as a way to "create a queer diasporic space for the self-fashioning and self-

---

[135] Tumblr, "Community Guidelines."

[136] Tumblr Staff, "Hey Tumblr..."

[137] Tumblr Staff.

representation of gender nonconforming and racialized bodies."[138] But under the new policy, surgery is tacitly endorsed as a more acceptable choice for gender nonconforming bodies. Those who choose surgery have more opportunities to present themselves and their bodies on the Tumblr platform than individuals who chose to forego surgery. Indeed, there are still many cases where transgender individuals share self-images on the Tumblr platform.[139] A cursory search on Tumblr for the tag "trans" returns several such public posts with self-images.[140] However, because images "connected to gender confirmation surgery" are still allowed on Tumblr, certain individuals are able to share uncovered images of their chests and speak more openly about their experiences with surgery. A similar search on Tumblr for the tag "top surgery" returns significantly more self-images that contain exposed nipples.[141] In effect, people who choose not to undergo surgery find that their body is no longer allowed in the online space which had once welcomed them. Though these exceptions to the policy on "female-presenting nipples" may seem to be beneficial in that they allow some degree of individual user freedom, they are also moments where the corporation specifically reaches across online space to exercise its power over individual bodies.

---

[138] Fink and Miller, "Trans Media Moments," 617.

[139] I have included the following public Tumblr posts as a brief example to underscore the effect of Tumblr's updated adult content policy on individual user practices. For a more detailed analysis of Tumblr user posts, as well as discussion of the ethical considerations of internet research, see Chapter 3 of this thesis.

[140] bbywasp, "Hormonal Hot Mess," December 10, 2019, https://bbywasp.tumblr.com/post/189588940212; chaotic-softboy, "Transman Takes Selfies, Madness Ensues," don't wisecrack the zodiac, December 10, 2019, https://chaotic-softboy.tumblr.com/post/189593999709/transman-takes-selfies-madness-ensues-idk; danssparklyjacket, "Hey y'all i Did a Thing," Some DnP Bullshit, December 9, 2019, https://danssparklyjacket.tumblr.com/post/189588915110/hey-yall-i-did-a-thing; dickgirldiaries, "TRANNY… If You Read That and You're Cis My Cashapp Is $dickgirldiaries," dickgirldiaries, December 9, 2019, https://dickgirldiaries.tumblr.com/post/189586657664/tranny-if-you-read-that-and-youre-cis-my.

[141] coffeepotbreaker, "I Am Officially 2 Days Post Op!," Oh Devil, December 5, 2019, https://coffeepotbreaker.tumblr.com/post/189485436612/i-am-officially-2-days-post-op-in-this-picture-i; disabledfatherfigure, "Top Surgery Went Successfully and I Am Now Happier than Ever.," ♡ gentle ♡, December 5, 2019, https://disabledfatherfigure.tumblr.com/post/189489891725/top-surgery-went-successfully-and-i-am-now-happier; enbyonajourney, "6 Months Post Op!!," My Top Surgery Journey, December 5, 2019, https://enbyonajourney.tumblr.com/post/189493497137/6-months-post-op-i-still-cant-believe-this-is-my.

Through its new adult content policy, and especially through the particular exceptions to the "female-presenting nipple" phrasing, Tumblr made specific claims about how certain bodies are more acceptable than others. In this way, it entirely redefined the nature of the platform's online space by restricting what types of bodies can be made visible on the platform. This highly specific policing on the types of bodies that can appear in photos on the Tumblr platform represents the extent of control that the corporation has. But all of this is obscured through the ambivalence of their online communication as it wavers between seriousness and playfulness. Online communication's ambivalence in the context of Tumblr's announcement has several outcomes. It constitutes the Tumblr userbase, it contributes to the construction of the corporate person, and it contributes to the implicit exclusion of certain people from the broad category of "the Tumblr community."

Tumblr Inc. claims that "We love Tumblr and the communities that call Tumblr home. *You are Tumblr.* This place has always been a reflection of the voices and communities that thrive here."[142] But through the very nature of the Tumblr platform, and the fact it is controlled by its corporate owners, there are clear limitations on what voices and communities are able to be reflected in the platform, and who is allowed to thrive. Thus, an unavoidable outcome of any content restriction policy is that certain people will be pushed out of the community. Though a Tumblr Support page asserts "we're removing content, not people," it is important to keep in mind that Tumblr users are largely defined in terms of their content, and that Tumblr has largely defined itself and its community through its blogs and its content.[143] In a roundabout way, even though Tumblr frames its new policy as the removal of content, it necessarily results in the

---

[142] Tumblr Staff, "Hey Tumblr..."

[143] Tumblr Support, "Updates to Tumblr's Community Guidelines."

49

removal of individual users' identities and autonomy as well. Even though the policy was not an overt removal of LGBTQ+ people from the platform, the limitations on their behaviors achieved a similar effect. Adult content was one of the reasons that LGBTQ+ people came to the Tumblr platform, largely because it was not as accessible in other places. This includes overt pornography, but other content that gets classified as "adult," such as nudity related to expressing body positivity and gender confirmation. By removing adult content, pornography and otherwise, Tumblr also removed what the platform had previous meant to these individuals. It forces these people to either change their behaviors, or leave the platform entirely.

When Tumblr Inc. just glosses over how these policy changes will have material effects on actual people, it misrepresents its specific role and power for defining the platform. Through its public-facing announcements and discussion of the new adult content policy, Tumblr Inc. employed a rhetorical strategy of corporate personhood and incorporated ambivalent language. By doing so, the company was operating as a "Janus-faced" corporation and presenting only one facet of itself and its relationship to the Tumblr platform. Tumblr Inc. attempted to place itself alongside its users and with equal power to define the online space of the platform, even though the corporation actually has significant power to change the platform policies in response to its own profit motives. Put another way, the company presented the Tumblr platform as a unique and open online space defined by its individual users and their practices. But in reality, the platform was still a corporate enterprise that was situated within its parent company's broader media businesses and strategies. As such, the platform policies were deeply influenced by monetary incentives and other outside forces. This broader context is not present within the public-facing announcement of the adult content policy, and thus to understand the other side of

Tumblr Inc.'s "Janus face" it is necessary to turn to a political economic analysis of the corporate

reality of the Tumblr platform and how it fits within its corporate owners' business practices.

Tumblr Inc. as a "Janus-faced" Corporation

Up until this point, I have considered primarily Tumblr Inc.'s public-facing

announcements and discussions of its new adult content policy. However, this represents only

one side of the "Janus-faced corporation" and the way that it defines the online platform. If I

were to limit my analysis to the public-facing discourse coming from the Tumblr corporation in

online settings, I would only partially encapsulate how the company was positioning itself and

articulating the new adult content policy. While much of Tumblr's public-facing announcements

were written as if it were an individual user like anyone else, I am mindful of the potential to

simply treat the company as if it were any other person. Because the Tumblr platform is still a

media product and influenced by corporate interests, I supplement my digital discourse analysis

with a political economic analysis to understand how the company was operating and what

factors may have influenced its new content policy. Vincent Mosco writes, "one of the more

persistent myths throughout the development of communication technology is that it would

transform politics as we know it by bringing power closer to people. The computer is certainly

not the first technology to carry this promise."[144] The Tumblr Porn Ban demonstrates that even

within the context of online communication, corporate power is still a significant factor. The

practices of user communities alone does not define an online space. To pinpoint how Tumblr

Inc. understood and defined the Tumblr platform, I turn here to a political economic analysis of

its corporate communication, which Jonathan Hardy defines as "a broad field of work drawing

---

[144] Vincent Mosco, *The Digital Sublime: Myth, Power, and Cyberspace*, 1. paperback ed (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 2005), 190.

on economics, political science, communication and cultural analysis."[145] Following Janet

Wasko's description of political economy as "a critical orientation to the study of the media,

challenging unjust and inequitable systems of power," my analysis of the communication

surrounding the Tumblr Porn Ban attends to the relationship of the platform, its users, and its

corporate owners.[146]

The documents that I consider in this section are public, just as the online blog posts

discussed earlier. However, they are targeted at a completely different group of people. Whereas

one side of Tumblr Inc.'s "Janus face" emphasizes the announcements and websites that speak to

the Tumblr userbase and public at large, this other side attends to a different group: investors.

Within this different context, the platform is discussed completely differently by Tumblr Inc. and

the centrality of profit motives is much more apparent. Specifically, I examine corporate

documents published by Tumblr Inc.'s parent company in the months surrounding the

announcement and implementation of the adult content policy. Tumblr Inc. had previously been

owned by Yahoo Inc., but in June 2017, Verizon Inc. announced its agreement to purchase

Yahoo Inc., including Tumblr and its other subsidiaries.[147] Therefore, I conducted analyses of

Verizon Inc.'s corporate communications—including SEC filings and investor relations press

releases. These types of texts are common to political economic analyses of traditional media

corporations, but are applicable to new media studies as well. As Wasko explains, "digital media

appear not as a primary lever of change but as a new field of struggle dominated by long-

standing battles and combatants. The sites and terms of engagement may shift, but the stakes

---

[145] Hardy, *Critical Political Economy of the Media*, 6.

[146] Janet Wasko, Graham Murdock, and Helena Sousa, eds., *The Handbook of Political Economy of Communications*, Global Handbooks in Media and Communication Research (Chichester, West Sussex ; Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 4.

[147] Goel, "Verizon Completes $4.48 Billion Purchase of Yahoo, Ending an Era."

remain the same."[148] To this end, I look at Verizon's 2018 Annual Report (Form 10-K), 2018 Q3

and 2019 Q1 reports (Form 10-Q), two current reports (Form 8-K) from 12/11/2018 and

1/29/2019, and one press release on the Verizon Media website.

Though the Tumblr platform itself is rarely mentioned directly in these documents, even

the tangential and indirect references to Tumblr Inc. are significant because they demonstrate the

corporate influences upon the definition of the online space. Though Tumblr users and

communities had previously understood the platform as an online queer space, the corporate

influence on the platform and its content policies has but one primary concern—the platform's

profitability and ability to be monetized.

Indirect Discussion of the Tumblr Platform

Throughout these documents, there is very little discussion of the Tumblr platform at all.

In all of the SEC filings, the word "Tumblr" never appears; instead, the website is only discussed

in composite with other media products which are grouped under the "Verizon Media" brand.

For instance, the 2018 Q3 quarterly report states that "Oath, our organization that combined

Yahoo's operating business with our pre-existing Media business, includes diverse media and

technology brands that engage users around the world."[149] Later, Verizon Inc. explains in its

annual report that "Our Media business, Verizon Media, which operated in 2018 under the

"Oath" brand, includes diverse media and technology brands that serve the global community

using powerful technology, trusted content and differentiated data."[150] The way that Verizon

---

[148] Wasko, Murdock, and Sousa, *The Handbook of Political Economy of Communications*, 5.

[149] Verizon Communications Inc., "Form 10-Q Current Report for the Period Ending 9/30/18" (Securities and Exchange Commission, October 30, 2018), 36, EDGAR.

[150] Verizon Communications Inc., "Form 10-K Annual Report for the Period Ending 12/31/18" (Securities and Exchange Commission, February 5, 2019), 11, EDGAR.

Media is discussed within these SEC filings underscores Verizon Inc.'s overall priorities. Verizon Media, and all its subsidiaries, is situated within a much larger multi-billion dollar corporate structure.

Thus, Tumblr Inc. and the Tumblr platform are only important as a means to an end. The specifics of the online space, including its user community, are really only relevant insofar as they fit within Verizon Inc.'s overall strategy for its media businesses, which is "built on providing consumers with owned and operated search properties and finance, news, sports and entertainment offerings and providing other businesses and partners access to consumers through digital advertising platforms."[151] In other words, Verizon Inc.'s general strategy for its media products is one of synergy and homogenization. Media synergy is an important strategy because it enables all of a company's media holdings to be effectively monetized.[152] Janet Wasko notes that "over the past few decades, the possibilities for synergy have expanded even further with the addition of cable, home video, and other new media outlets."[153] Verizon's acquisition of Tumblr and its incorporation into its Verizon Media subsidiary represents the continued relevance of media synergy for internet companies. Verizon Inc. uses its various media products to sell targeted advertising, and therefore it is important that all of its products, including Tumblr, were able to effectively serve this end.[154] It is possible that Tumblr's updated adult content policy was at least partially in an attempt to better bring the platform into alignment with the broader

---

[151] Verizon Communications Inc., "Form 10-Q Current Report for the Period Ending 03/31/19" (Securities and Exchange Commission, April 26, 2019), 31, EDGAR.

[152] Janet Wasko, *How Hollywood Works* (London ; Thousand Oaks, Calif: SAGE, 2003).

[153] Wasko, 171.

[154] Verizon Communications Inc., "Verizon Q3 2018 Quarterly Report," 13.

corporate strategy. This seems highly likely, especially given the frequent discussion of Verizon Media's profitability and revenue trends.

Revenue and Profitability

Given that the bulk of my analysis centers on SEC filings, it is unsurprising that there is significant discussion of cash flows and profitability. After all, these documents *are* meant to create accountability in the company's treatment of money that comes from publicly traded investments. With this in mind, though, the discussion of Verizon Media and its subsidiaries in terms of profitability provides important context for how the Tumblr platform fits within a broader corporate structure and strategy.

Verizon's SEC filings underscore what the corporation views as significant financial risks and opportunities, which influences its decisions for how to manage its business practices and how it chooses to operate its various media holdings, including the Tumblr platform. In its Annual Report, Verizon Inc. explains that it "has significant debt, which could increase further if Verizon incurs additional debt in the future and does not retire existing debt."[155] This suggests that Verizon Inc. was acutely aware of potential cash flows and the profitability of its various business segments. The company did note that the purchase of Yahoo Inc. did increase the operating revenues of Verizon Media, but given the recency of the acquisition, Verizon Inc. would likely be mindful of how best to incorporate Yahoo's holdings, including Tumblr, into the broader Verizon Media strategy in order to maximize profitability.[156]

---

[155] Verizon Communications Inc., "2018 Annual Report," 19.

[156] Verizon Communications Inc., 79.

Indeed, the Yahoo Inc. acquisition ended up not generating the profit that Verizon Inc. had initially hoped for. In fact, the SEC documents specifically discuss the loss of value within the Verizon Media business segment. In the 12/11/2018 Current Report, Verizon Inc. explains that it "completed a comprehensive five-year strategic planning review of Oath's business prospects resulting in unfavorable adjustments to Oath's financial projections."[157] As a result of these unfavorable adjustments, the company recorded a goodwill impairment charge of $4.6 billion for its media holdings.[158] Goodwill refers to the value of a company's intangible assets, and a multi-billion dollar impairment represents a significant loss of value. In other words, the amount of money that Verizon spent on the Yahoo Inc. acquisition did not result in an equivalent increase in Verizon Media's value. This loss of value continued in 2019, where Verizon Inc. explained that "For fourth-quarter 2018, Verizon Media revenues were $2.1 billion, down 5.8 percent year over year."[159] Additionally, "Corporate and other revenues decreased $120 million, or 4.4%, during the three months ended March 31, 2019 compared to the similar period in 2018. The decrease in revenues was primarily due to a decrease of $137 million in revenues within our Media business."[160] I am mindful when reading these documents to maintain a wide and zoomed-out mindset. In this context of corporate communication, Verizon Inc. is speaking about its individual business segments in very broad terms; the SEC filings refer to all of the company's media holdings in total rather than Tumblr individually. Nevertheless, the continued loss of value and revenue from 2018 through 2019 underscores the lens through which Verizon

---

[157] Verizon Communications Inc., "Form 8-K Current Report for the Period Ending 12/11/18" (Securities and Exchange Commission, December 11, 2018), 3, EDGAR.

[158] Verizon Communications Inc., "2018 Annual Report," 91.

[159] Verizon Communications Inc., "Form 8-K Current Report for the Period Ending 1/29/2019" (Securities and Exchange Commission, January 29, 2019), 3, EDGAR.

[160] Verizon Communications Inc., "Verizon Q1 2019 Quarterly Report," 32.

Inc. had viewed its media businesses. Despite the company's attempts to incorporate Yahoo's prosperities into its broader strategy of synergy and monetization, the Verizon Media business segment had been continuing to lose money. While this significant loss of revenue was hardly entirely a result of Tumblr Inc.'s operations, it nevertheless represents the corporate context through which the Tumblr platform would be defined. These documents demonstrate that rather than view the online space in terms of what it had meant for its users and communities, Verizon Inc. had primarily been considering profit and cash flows in terms of decisions regarding its media products.

Ultimately, Verizon has an incredibly distant relation to its individual platform holdings. Relatively distant and disconnect statements throughout the SEC filings show just how disconnected the ultimate corporate owners are from the actual day-to-day operations and interaction of its users on its various platforms. While this corporate distancing is inherent to any large corporation and its relationship to its online platforms, it is particularly significant in the case of Tumblr because it contrasts so greatly with how its users had viewed the platform. For many Tumblr users, the online space had one been something deeply personal and intimately connected to issues of identity construction and performance. But for Tumblr Inc. and its corporate owners, the platform had only ever been viewed in terms of its potential profitability. These underlying profit motives articulated by Tumblr Inc. are echoed in other advertising industry discourses as well. Reporting on the newly announced adult content policy, Business Insider predicted that Tumblr would lose a significant number of users, and noted that "the move seems to have shaken user confidence in Verizon's stewardship of Tumblr."[161] AdAge expressed

---

[161] Paige Leskin, "Tumblr Is Banning All NSFW Content — and People Are Worrying It's the Beginning of the End for the Verizon-Owned Website," Business Insider, December 8, 2018, https://www.businessinsider.com/tumblr-bans-nsfw-content-and-users-say-the-platform-will-suffer-2018-12.

similar concerns that the new policy could potentially cut into the profitability of Tumblr for Verizon, and questioned how long the platform could continue to exist with these new regulations.[162] These examples from advertising industry discourses, along with Verizon Inc.'s SEC filings, underscore how the corporate and industrial understandings of an online platform are separate and often wholly different from how that platform's users understand and interact with the same online space.

"A Safe Place for Communities for all Kinds to Thrive"

Throughout Verizon Inc.'s SEC documents, there is no mention of the word "Tumblr" whatsoever. At the highest levels of the corporation, the platform is only valued in terms of how it fits within the overall business strategy of Verizon Media. However, that is not to say that there are no mentions of Tumblr entirely throughout Verizon's corporate communications. In an announcement about the rebranding of Oath as Verizon Media, there is a brief mention of the Tumblr platform.[163] There, in a single bullet point at the end of the press release, the company merely states that "We made the important decision to change our policy on Tumblr to better position the brand to deliver on its promise: to provide a safe place for communities of all kinds to thrive."[164] This bullet point is the *only* place that Verizon Inc. directly mentions Tumblr at all, perhaps in an attempt to distance itself from the platform and maintain at least some semblance of the Tumblr platform as an online space unaffected by corporate power and monetary interests.

---

[162] Angela Doland, "Tumblr's Porn Ban. Plus, a Super Bowl Ad Update: Tuesday Wake-Up Call," Ad Age, December 4, 2018, https://adage.com/article/news/wake-call-news-tumblr-super-bowl-youtube/315844; Garett Sloane, "Tumblr to Ban All Porn from Its Platform Starting Dec. 17," Ad Age, December 3, 2018, https://adage.com/article/digital/tumblr-rid-porn-left/315843.

[163] Guru Gowrappan, "Introducing Verizon Media," Verizon Media Press, December 18, 2018, https://www.verizonmedia.com/press/2018/12/18/introducing-verizon-media.

[164] Gowrappan.

The fact that this announcement does not even explicitly refer to Tumblr's adult content policy and only vaguely states "our policy," further underscores the company's distancing from Tumblr and the controversial Porn Ban. Additionally, the phrasing of "a safe place for communities for all kinds" relates to calls to "protect children" that were common throughout earlier attempts to regulate adult content.[165] And, most notably, the effect of Tumblr's new adult content policy may actually be the limitation of the platform as a "safe place for communities of all kinds to thrive."

Among the public-facing announcement of Tumblr's adult content policy in the form of blog posts and the disconnected top-level discussion of the platform in Verizon Inc.'s corporate documents there are two radically different modes of communication. However, taking the two sets of texts in tandem can present a more comprehensive view of how the Tumblr platform is defined and viewed by its corporate owners. Completely separate from how its users came to understand the platform as an online queer space, Tumblr Inc.'s understanding of the website is one dictated by corporate power and profit motives. Following John Edward Campbell, Tumblr Inc. operates as a "Janus-faced" corporation as it balances these two seemingly conflicting views of the Tumblr platform.[166] Most significantly, however, is that Tumblr Inc. and Verizon Inc.'s conception and construction of the platform's identity and infrastructure is wholly separate from individual user experiences and practices.

For Tumblr Inc. and Verizon Inc. to best serve their profit incentives, the Tumblr platform needs to exist as one singular space as much as possible. If the platform has one primary identity and overall look and feel, it becomes possible to most effectively monetize the

[165] Peter Alilunas, *Smutty Little Movies: The Creation and Regulation of Adult Video* (Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2016), 167.

[166] Campbell, "Outing PlanetOut."

platform, and integrate it into the larger Verizon Media corporate strategy. Yet at the same time, it needs to maintain as large a user base as possible. In the case of Tumblr, this is achieved through Tumblr Staff's broad appeals that "*You* are Tumblr," and that the platform is defined by its individual users and their blog content.[167] But these two definitions of the Tumblr platform are necessarily at odds with one another. It is never possible for the platform to have a singular identity while simultaneously presenting itself as a malleable space to be inhabited and defined by its users and their communities. The vastly different modes of communication in the public-facing announcements and the corporate documents demonstrates the impossibility of reconciliation for the Tumblr platform. As shown by the controversy that emerged in the wake of the new adult content policy, Tumblr Inc. and Tumblr users fundamentally understand the nature of the online space differently. This is the case for virtually all SNS platforms and online spaces.[168] Tumblr Inc.'s definition of the platform did not include space for viewing its users as autonomous individuals, which contributed to the significant conflict that arose after it unilaterally changed the website's adult content policies. Though it attempted to balance its corporate nature with its user interests as a "Janus-faced" corporation, perhaps the conflict with its users was somewhat inevitable. Especially because Tumblr's content policies had *specifically* been so laissez-faire and Tumblr Inc. had tried so hard to—publicly, at least—define itself in terms of its users and blogs, the new adult content policy so radically changed what Tumblr had once meant to its users, that conflict and widespread user protest is entirely unsurprising.

---

[167] Tumblr, "About"; Tumblr Staff, "Hey Tumblr..."

[168] For instance, see: Couldry and Mejias, *The Costs of Connection*.

Chapter Three – Tumblr Users Respond to the Porn Ban

In the weeks that followed the announcement of the adult content policy, as well as after its implementation, many Tumblr users expressed their attitude toward the new policy. They made their opinions clear through brief posts such as "FUCK YOU TUMBLR."[169] Other users took specific aim toward Tumblr Staff: "Tumblr you fuck Good job you absolute piece of trash @staff."[170] And it was not uncommon for users to mock the specific language and phrasing from the blog posts announcing the content policy, such as "We're still waiting on that 'better more positive Tumblr' You utter fucking failures."[171]

At first glance, it may be easy to over-generalize Tumblr users' response as a case of fervent disagreement. But while it is true that the majority of Tumblr users expressed anger and disappointment toward the platform's new adult content policy, the user response to the porn ban is significant beyond the simple fact that most users were upset. Although many users were upset because they had lost their primary source of pornography, much of the user response underscores a more salient issue. In the wake of the new adult content policy, many Tumblr users and communities felt a deep sense of betrayal by Tumblr staff and the platform's owners. For them, the new stance toward adult content was more than just a change in the website's content policies, but rather was a complete upheaval in what the platform and the characteristics of its online space had once been.

---

[169] Throughout my writing, I have transcribed Tumblr posts as they were originally written, including any spelling and grammar errors. sprez1983, "FUCK YOU TUMBLR," December 16, 2018, https://sprez1983.tumblr.com/post/181164440006/fuck-you-tumblr.

[170] rooftoprodent, "Tumblr You Fuck," well Shit, December 23, 2018, https://rooftoprodent.tumblr.com/post/181358132822/tumblr-you-fuck.

[171] thesorority, "Still Getting Followed by Porn-Bots," Sorority Life, December 26, 2018, https://thesorority.tumblr.com/post/181434548101/staff.

In this chapter, I argue that Tumblr users felt betrayed by new policies that applied uniform rules to a platform that had previously been defined by its multiplicity. Though many users expressed this betrayal in direct connection to pornography and other adult content, it was not the platform's content that was specifically at the root of the disagreement. Instead Tumblr's users felt betrayed because the platform's earlier relatively lax policy that broadly aligned with LGBTQ+ expression and contributed to the platforms overall identity as an online queer space. The revised policy, then, applied uniform rules to a platform that had once been characterized by multiplicity. The user posts that emerged in response to the announcement and implementation of the Tumblr Porn Ban show that the platform's users and its corporate owners defined and understood the online space differently.

Put another way, the updated platform policy's restrictions on adult content represent the curtailment of individual user autonomy and freedom. Describing the regulation of the adult video industry, Peter Alilunas writes that, "the threat that pornography had long represented to such images [of the family] was intensified in unpredictable, chaotic, and profound ways the moment it found a new, more visible entry point into the home."[172] The threat of pornography is that it presents a counternarrative to stable and normative family structures; controlling and regulating such content is a means to maintain heteronormativity and patriarchy. For Tumblr, which had previously been characterized as platform for individual expression, the sudden policy update was a significant change for how its users perceived the online space.

The term "platform" seems to imply somewhat of a singular space. It refers to a singular location that an individual may visit, one common place that multiple people can meet and

---

[172] Alilunas, *Smutty Little Movies*, 159.

interact. However, for an online platform such as Tumblr, there is no one singular space. By that, I mean that each user and each community has their own unique mode of engagement with the Tumblr website and with each other. For its users, Tumblr is not so much as one singular space but rather multiple individual spaces for each user. There was one facet of Tumblr that had been for the sharing of pornography, yet in other corners of the website users engaged in highly specific fandom communities. Each of these facets was a unique individual online space. Yet Tumblr's infinite individuality must exist alongside commonality. The Tumblr platform simultaneously *is* a shared space, one inhabited by a plethora of different users and communities, as well as one that can be unilaterally redefined by the website's owners. This contradictory simultaneity of a platform being both an individual *and* a shared space is perhaps an inherent quality of online settings, and contextualizes much of the user response that emerged after the announcement of Tumblr's new adult content policy.

Methodology

In this chapter, I use digital discourse analysis of Tumblr users' posts to demonstrate the multiple definitions that Tumblr's users and communities had once held about the platform and its online space. In the weeks following the announcement of the adult content policy and after its implementation, Tumblr users expressed what the space had once meant to them along with how they perceived it changing in the wake of the new content policy. The meaning of an online platform emerges from the tension between its users and its owners. Despite the website's owners' attempt to exercise complete control over the website, Tumblr users have always had, and will continue to have, a significant role in defining the characteristics of the online space. Crispin Thurlow describes digital discourse analysis as a method that attends to both the specific

63

textual content as well as the use of specific platform affordances.[173] Particularly for a platform such as Tumblr, which has been noted for its multi-modality, it is critical to select a method that most wholly encapsulates the users' methods of expression.[174] My methodology here does not necessarily capture a singular conversation in the traditional sense. Though many Tumblr users were expressing their disagreement and anger toward Tumblr Staff and the platform's owners, it is not really the case that any users were speaking directly to the platform owners. Thus, the digital discourse analysis encapsulates how Tumblr users made full use of the Tumblr platform, including its multi-modality and affordances such as reblogging, post tags, and user "@" tags, to express their discontent toward Tumblr Staff.

The updated adult content policy was discussed across many other platforms, as well as in popular press articles. However, by looking at Tumblr content specifically I can be sure that I am getting actual Tumblr users' responses, and not opinions from those outside of Tumblr's user base. In this thesis, I am not necessarily concerned with identifying what content was removed from the Tumblr platform but rather how Tumblr users understood and talked about the new adult content policy. For instance, the phrase "female-presenting nipple" emerged as a common example cited by many users to articulate why they felt that the new adult content policy represented a breaking point between the corporation and its users over how they understood definitions of gender and sex.

In my digital discourse analysis of how Tumblr users responded to the adult content policy, I consider not only what was said but *how* it was said as well. Crispin Thurlow explains that "language is not neatly bounded in digital discourse and studies must always attend to—and

---

[173] Thurlow, "Digital Discourse: Locating Language in New/Social Media."

[174] Bourlai and Herring, "Multimodal Communication on Tumblr."

account properly—for [sic] the ways it intersects with and relies on other modes of communication."[175] In social media contexts, it is much more possible for various modes of communication to overlap, and to appear alongside images, videos, and other content. For the purposes of this project, I focus on how individuals used Tumblr's affordances to express their opinions on the adult content policy. Tumblr users often did this by blending casual or personal language with more formal language to appeal directly to Tumblr Staff and the website's corporate owners. Another common user strategy was to mix this written language with images, links, and other Web content. André Brock reminds us that multimodality "reflects the Internet's simultaneity as infrastructure, service, platform, application, object, subject, action, and discourse."[176] And, as Thurlow notes, this multimodal discourse is also intertwined with ideology; the textual practices of individual Tumblr users demonstrate how each user views the platform.[177] Additionally, these textual practices also demonstrate how each user understands their relationship to other users, as well as to the platform's owners.

When examining how Tumblr users discussed the new adult content policy in their posts, I have been mindful of not just the post content but the additional platform affordances as well. Thurlow explains that effective digital discourse analysis must consider technological and situational variables in addition to just linguistic characteristics.[178] Nancy Baym identifies seven specific concepts that are useful for the definition and comparisons of different media types: interactivity, temporal structure, social cues, storage, replicability, reach, and mobility.[179] For

[175] Thurlow, "Digital Discourse: Locating Language in New/Social Media," 142.

[176] Brock, "Critical Technocultural Discourse Analysis," 1023.

[177] Thurlow, "Digital Discourse: Locating Language in New/Social Media."

[178] Thurlow.

[179] Nancy K. Baym, *Personal Connections in the Digital Age* (Cambridge, UK ; Malden, MA: Polity, 2010), 7.

instance, the specific affordances of the Tumblr platform as well as the context of the content

policy all contribute to the user-generated discourse. The Tumblr reblog enables users to quickly

repost and add commentary to other discussions of the policy, or to share examples of content

that may have been erroneously flagged. Yet simultaneously, given the platform's new

restrictions on adult content, it is not always possible for Tumblr users to post examples of

images that would fall under the content policy, as these would likely be removed. However, this

was not always the case, such as one user that posted an image of their breasts with digitally-

added drawings.[180] As I describe in my specific discussion of Tumblr user responses, the

opposition to the Porn Ban was in the form of both images and text. To this end, both *what* users

said as well as *how* they said it are salient for identifying how Tumblr users saw the online space

was changing.

By considering affordances and technological capabilities as a form of discourse, my

analysis of Tumblr posts identifies how users defined the online space and how they saw it

changing in the wake of the Porn Ban. And, adapting a social shaping lens, I also consider how

the changing definition of Tumblr's online space also influences individual user practices.

Brock's critical techno-discourse analysis "examines how actors shape technologies and

themselves in response to the technologies they use; these technologies in turn are shaped by

those who design and market them."[181] With this in mind, I contend that there are three primary

actors for the shaping and definition of an online platform: the users, the corporate owners, and

finally government and state power. In the case of the Tumblr Porn Ban, it was primarily the

---

[180] sexwithaninja, "I have produced this reference image," December 5, 2018,
https://sexwithaninja.tumblr.com/post/180829741602/i-have-produced-this-reference-image-to-help

[181] Brock, "Critical Technocultural Discourse Analysis," 1019.

platform's users and its owners that were in direct disagreement, and in this chapter specifically I assemble a body of Tumblr user posts to question how the online space of the platform as well as the individual practices of its users were changing. How did Tumblr users describe and characterize their response to the announcement and implementation of the new adult content policy? Specifically, what terminology were they using and what were the main concerns that were identified? Additionally, how do they articulate a definition or understanding of the Tumblr community and the Tumblr platform? And how, if at all, do they refer to Tumblr Staff or its corporate owners? Through this reading of Tumblr posts, I show that Tumblr users had once viewed the platform as a highly customizable and individualized online space; the updated adult content policy was not just a change in the website's rules, but a significant change in what the online space had previously represented to its users. The platform's overall characteristics were changing, and not just because of the content that was no longer allowed but primarily from the sudden restrictions on individual user freedom and autonomy.

Ethics of Studying User Content

When doing research in online settings, several ethical considerations inevitably arise. One primary concern is whether Internet research qualifies as human subjects research and is thus subject to additional requirements and limitations. While informed consent is typically required for electronic interviews or surveys, the ethical use of material posted publicly online can be unclear.[182] However, it is generally accepted that any content that is publicly accessible and

---

[182] John W. Creswell and J. David Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, Fifth edition (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2018), 92.

viewable does not require permission from the original poster to be used by researchers.[183]

Joseph Walther explicitly states that "the analysis of Internet archives is not human subjects

research, if a researcher does not record the identity of the message poster, and if the researcher

can legally and easily access such archives."[184] Though these ethical guidelines would allow me

to use any content posted to a public Tumblr blog with effectively no limitations, I remain

mindful of the ways that I have incorporated user content into my work.

The Association of Internet Researchers (AoIR) have published guidelines for conducting

research on publicly available online information. I have chosen to follow these guidelines and

ethical considerations in my research design. AoIR views research ethics as an on-going process,

rather than a one-time consideration, and suggest a case-by-case approach that includes "the sorts

of question that researchers, as well as their oversight boards, should ask in order to (a) better

discern the primary ethical issues in play within a given research approach and context, and (b)

to inspire precisely the dialogical reflection usually needed for developing both individual and

collective *judgments* as to the best resolutions of core ethical challenges."[185] Some of AoIR's

recommended questions include the specific characteristics of the online venue and what

expectations its users may hold.

For instance, even though the content that I examine is publicly accessible, I am mindful

of the potential harm that might come from the publication and distribution of the content

beyond the Tumblr platform itself. If a Tumblr user posted something to their blog under the

---

[183] Thomas R. Lindlof and Bryan C. Taylor, *Qualitative Communication Research Methods*, Fourth edition (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2017), 158–59.

[184] Joseph B. Walther, "Research Ethics in Internet-Enabled Research: Human Subjects Issues and Methodological Myopia," *Ethics and Information Technology* 4, no. 3 (September 1, 2002): 207, https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1021368426115.

[185] AoIR Ethics Committee, "Internet Research: Ethical Guidelines 3.0," October 6, 2019, 7, https://aoir.org/reports/ethics3.pdf.

expectation that it would remain confined to the Tumblr platform alone, it would be unethical for me to reproduce that information, even here in an academic setting. To this end, AoIR recommends reading each platform's specific regulations and Terms of Service (TOS) to determine how the context of the online space is defined.[186] Tumblr's TOS are clear—once something has been publicly posted, it is accessible by third parties as well as via the Tumblr API.[187] There are no explicit restrictions on using public content for research purposes within the Tumblr TOS. Tumblr even reminds its users within its TOS: "One thing you should consider before posting: When you make something publicly available on the Internet, it becomes practically impossible to take down all copies of it."[188] To this end, I have limited myself to content that is posted publicly and is viewable to the Web at large. Tumblr affords its users with several options to limit and manage the visibility of their content, including limiting content to only registered Tumblr users.[189] As part of my data analysis, I tested URLs to verify that the content was publicly accessible via the Web and that it had not been removed. If a user did not specifically post something for public view, I have not considered that data, nor referenced it within my writing. Although this did result in the exclusion of potentially salient user responses to the adult content policy, maintaining user privacy and potential individual safety is a much higher priority than research alone.

The AoIR Ethics Guidelines also underscore the importance of considering the specific vulnerability of the population being studied, noting that "the greater the vulnerability of our

---

[186] AoIR Ethics Committee, "Ethical Decision-Making and Internet Research 2.0: Recommendations from the AoIR Ethics Working Committee," September 2012, 8, https://aoir.org/reports/ethics2.pdf.

[187] Tumblr, "Terms of Service," May 15, 2018, https://www.tumblr.com/policy/en/terms-of-service.

[188] Tumblr.

[189] Tumblr Help Center, "Privacy Options," Help Center, accessed August 9, 2019, http://tumblr.zendesk.com/hc/en-us/articles/115011611747-Privacy-options.

subjects, the greater our responsibility and obligation to protect them from likely harms."[190]

Given that my research questions stem from the use of Tumblr as an online queer space for individuals who might not have had such a space in other settings, this is something that I am especially mindful of. In fact, the AoIR explicitly discusses the risk of inadvertent "outing" as a potential ethics consideration.[191] Given the very real risks of personal injury, death, and other personal threats that LGBTQ+ people may face in the wake of inadvertent outing, I have been purposeful about the extent of information that I include in my writing. I only use public Tumblr usernames and blog titles to reference specific posts and do not use any real names—even if they are present on the blog page. In a similar vein, I only directly quote from blog posts in a limited fashion. Given the ease by which a person could search for a direct quote and locate the original post, and its original author, I instead paraphrase user posts more than what might be typical for other internet research projects. Additionally, I have avoided including images and other visual content from blog posts. I have also redacted any full names, identifiable photos, and any other potential personal information that inadvertently appears within the text of individual blog posts.

Per AoIR's recently updated guidelines, the ethical considerations of internet research are an ongoing process. As the research project develops, so too should the ethical considerations. Therefore while I entered into the Tumblr scraping process with these broad considerations in mind, I view research ethics and protecting individual users as a continuing and ongoing responsibility. As I have read individual user posts, I have strived to consider the possible consequences of reproducing user content in this setting. And, in cases where the potential

---

[190] AoIR Ethics Committee, "Internet Research: Ethical Guidelines 3.0," 17.

[191] AoIR Ethics Committee, "Ethical Decision-Making and Internet Research 2.0: Recommendations from the AoIR Ethics Working Committee," 10.

outcomes are uncertain, I have erred on the side of caution and sought to protect individual user's privacy and security.

Automated Tumblr Tag Scraper

Online platforms often pose unique methodological issues, particularly in terms of locating specific objects of study. Given the prominence of user content and sheer volume of individual user blogs, Tumblr is no exception to this challenge. Because the Tumblr platform does not provide a simple archive method, nor a reliable method to return to blogs on the website as they existed at a particular time, researchers must develop methods to accommodate the sheer number of blog posts as well as the website's dynamic nature.[192] The Tumblr website does include a basic search function, which returns public posts that match a given query. However, this function would require the researcher to manually click through several pages of search results and manually save local copies of any relevant results. Instead, for the sake of convenience and efficiency I developed a basic python script that uses Tumblr's public API (Application Programming Interface) to automatically perform a search query and return the results in a searchable CSV (comma-separated values) spreadsheet. The code for this Tumblr post scraper is available online via my public GitHub profile.[193]

Accessing Tumblr content via a scraper is an entirely different mode of interaction than how most users interact with the website. Because user content is generally publicly accessible, when people post on Tumblr, they have a reasonable expectation that anyone can read their posts. However, these same users may not expect that a researcher will use an automated

---

[192] Attu and Terras, "What People Study When They Study Tumblr."

[193] Ben Pettis, *Tumblr-Scraper*, 2019, https://github.com/boilingpenguin/tumblr-scraper.

scraping tool to compile and write about their posts when taken in combination with others. Especially for public posts that have a small number of likes and comments, recreating that content in formal writing may significantly increase its overall exposure—which changes the context in which the user experience is reflected. Furthermore, compiling only posts that are related to the Tumblr Porn Ban decontextualizes the posts by removing them from their original setting. The majority of Tumblr users read posts within a stream of other content within their dashboard. Their content appears alongside other posts; it may be the case that a person is *only* posting about the Tumblr Porn Ban, but it may also be the case that a user creates only a single post about the adult content policy before continuing to interact with the Tumblr platform in other ways. This decontextualization is one of the limitations of using an automated tag scraper to compile content, but it is outweighed by the benefits of efficiently identifying a large volume of user content.

Tumblr's API provides a wealth of opportunities for Internet researchers. While many of the API functions are accessible by the general public, the "Get posts by Tag" method that I use requires a registered Tumblr account and API key for authentication.[194] This requirement carries with it some additional considerations for handling the user content. Tumblr users can set their blog to be only viewable to other Tumblr users, and not to the public at large. Because my script is effectively searching *as if* it were a signed-in Tumblr user, some of the results are not fully public-facing. In these instances where the original user had posted with the understanding that the content would only be viewable to other Tumblr users, I do not include any specific identifying information, including titles, post text, and usernames. Instead, I only quote directly

---

[194] Tumblr, "API," accessed August 2, 2019, https://www.tumblr.com/docs/en/api/v2; Tumblr, "Application Developer and API License Agreement," accessed August 2, 2019, https://www.tumblr.com/docs/en/api_agreement.

from posts that are publicly accessible to anybody on the web via the post's URL. Furthermore, given the sheer volume of user content, it is simply impractical to directly quote from the majority of users; for much of my analysis I have consolidated similar post themes and have quoted from specifically noteworthy posts or representative examples.

Using my Tumblr scraper, I performed several searches for Tumblr content posted within certain dates to approximately capture how Tumblr users were discussing the new adult content policy at different points in time. The first time period includes posts between December 3, 2018 and December 17, 2018, which is after the policy was initially announced but before it had been officially implemented. The second time frame includes content posted between December 17, 2018 and January 17, 2019, to see how the adult content policy was discussed in the month immediately following its implementation. While Tumblr's adult content policy continued to be the subject of discussion throughout 2019, I restricted my work to these months to maintain a narrow and manageable scope.

Within these two time periods, I scraped posts matching specific tags: "porn ban," "tumblr staff," "female presenting nipples," and "community guidelines." Post tags are a critical component of how users situate their content within the online space. Yukari Seko and Stephen Lewis explain that on Tumblr, "users are able to recognize how their self-presentations are connected to others (perhaps in serendipitous ways) and express their interests by using specific tags or reblogging particular posts accordingly."[195] That said, the use of post tags as my primary search criteria is not without its limitations and it is certainly the case that many Internet

---

[195] Yukari Seko and Stephen P Lewis, "The Self—Harmed, Visualized, and Reblogged: Remaking of Self-Injury Narratives on Tumblr," *New Media & Society* 20, no. 1 (January 1, 2018): 183, https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444816660783.

researchers tend to over-rely on tags as search criteria.[196] Bruns et al. characterize tag-based datasets as the "low-hanging fruit in social media data" and call for researchers to properly contextualize tag use.[197] Because post tags are selected by each individual user, my planned search does not necessarily return every post that discusses the adult content policy. However, this method does accurately identify posts where the user specifically intended to connect their content to the policy, as indicated by the specific choice to use a particular tag. Because I am specifically interested in user content that directly responds *to* Tumblr's announcement of the content policy, and not merely user content that is broadly *about* the policy, the reliance on post tags to identify content is appropriate.

Table 1: Scraped Tumblr Posts by Tag

	Pre-Ban Posts *12/3 – 12/17*	*Post-Ban Posts* *12/17– 1/16*
"community guidelines"	320	186
"female presenting nipples"	1,760	491
"porn ban"	160	85
"tumblr staff"	2,869	2,298

Based on my chosen tags and time frames, I scraped a total of 8,169 Tumblr posts. The overwhelming majority of these posts were tagged with "tumblr staff," which suggests that there

---

[196] Ysabel Gerrard, "Beyond the Hashtag: Circumventing Content Moderation on Social Media," *New Media & Society* 20, no. 12 (December 2018): 4492–4511, https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444818776611.

[197] Axel Bruns et al., "Towards a Typology of Hashtag Publics: A Large-Scale Comparative Study of User Engagement across Trending Topics," *Communication Research and Practice* 2, no. 1 (January 2, 2016): 21, https://doi.org/10.1080/22041451.2016.1155328.

was a significant response by Tumblr users that was specifically directed toward the platform's staff and owners. The specific breakdown of posts by tag and time frame is shown in Table 1.

It is important to note that while my searches did return a large volume of user content, a significant amount of these posts were duplicated. Because a Tumblr user can apply multiple tags to each post, many posts were tagged with both "community guidelines" and "female presenting nipples," for instance. After collating the posts that matched a given search term, I searched for any posts that also contained the same tag in the remaining sets of posts; these duplicated posts were hidden from subsequent spreadsheets. For each set of returned posts, I read the raw comment text and made basic notes about its content. When necessary, I returned to the original URL to view the post's original formatting, images, and other details that may have been lost in the raw text format. These collective tools and methods reveal how users reacted to the adult content policy, as well as how they used the platform itself to express how they understood the platform and saw its online space as changing.

Tumblr User Responses

Rather than assemble a comprehensive timeline of Tumblr user posts, I have chosen to organize the significant volume of posts into broad major themes. There are some notable differences in the user content that emerged after the announcement of the adult content policy and that which was posted after it actually went into effect. However, I have avoided a strict chronological presentation of the user response to the policy because there is not necessarily one single representative experience of how the broad amalgamation of Tumblr users responded to the announcement. Though there was an overwhelming negative response, the ways in which this disagreement was explicitly articulated varied greatly among users and communities.

The varied user responses to the website's new adult content policy show that both before and after the ban, there existed a multiplicity of meanings for the Tumblr platform and what it represented to its users and communities. These posts underscore the impossibility of a singular definition of what Tumblr is as an online space. For instance, it is worth noting that disagreement with the adult content policy was not universal and there were a small number of user posts expressing support for Tumblr Staff and the newly restrictive content policy. Indeed, one user specifically celebrated the coming removal of pornography from the website. "I try to express myself in the best way because I love Tumblr, I love to exercise my freedom of expression, but pornography is not freedom of expression. Pornography is disgusting!"[198] Similarly, another user bemoaned the widespread negative response and viewed the new policy as an affirmation of what they would prefer the online space to be, stating "Fuck these people. Peddle your shit on dedicated porn sites."[199] However, these types of posts were the overwhelming minority of user responses; most Tumblr users wrote about the new adult content policy with extreme disapproval, anger, and a feeling of betrayal. But even among the disagreement, there were many specific issues that different users identified as well as different means by which users expressed their discontent. Along with the small number of users that supported the policy, the highly varied user responses underscores the multiple understandings of Tumblr's online space.

Throughout the content posted in the weeks following the policy's announcement as well as following its implementation, there is a general sense that users felt a significant change in what the Tumblr platform itself even was. The multiple ways that they had once understood the

---

[198] diariobizarrices, "THIS IS NOT FREEDOM OF SPEECH," December 3, 2018, https://diariobizarrices.tumblr.com/post/180765361031/manifesto-of-repudiation-for-those-who-dont-like

[199] rapscallop, "Since the Age of like 12 I Have Been Getting into Fandom Spaces," December 4, 2018, https://rapscallop.tumblr.com/post/180805778019/since-the-age-of-like-12-i-have-been-getting-into.

online space of the platform was suddenly upended. Most significantly, however, users did not have any agency in how the online space was being rewritten by Tumblr Staff and its corporate owners. The separate themes that I detail next outline how many Tumblr users and communities experienced and expressed a profound sense of betrayal over what the platform had once represented for them.

"Fuck You Tumblr"

Much of what Tumblr users were posting in response to the updated adult content policy expressed their overall disagreement with the policy and disappointment in Tumblr Staff's handling of the entire situation. However, rather than articulate specific reasons for their disappointment, many users simply took to the platform to voice their immediate reactions in simple and general terms. One of the major themes that appeared throughout all of the search tags, and across both time frames, was a broad sense of betrayal. These Tumblr users felt as if they were no longer being served or represented by Tumblr Staff and the website policies, and directed this feeling of betrayal into a variety of posts.

Notably, many of these user posts existed somewhat independently of one another. Though some users may have chosen to tag the "@staff" account or link to the Tumblr Staff post that initially announced the adult content policy, the majority of these user responses were seemingly isolated. While it is possible for someone to click a link and be taken to other related content, these are not explicitly part of just one single network or posts. However, even without a direct link or response to other users, the main target of these users' ire was fairly evident, which underscores how widespread the negative response to the content policy truly was. Often, this

took the form of very short posts such as "SUCK MY TITTIES, TUMBLR!!!"[200] Perhaps one

unintended consequence of the adult content policy and the ensuing response was the creation of

sentences that had likely never graced computer screens ever before, as in the case of

"Hey,Tumblr staff, GET FUCKED WITH A CACTUS !!"[201] Some of these brief user outbursts

did incorporate the platform's multimodal affordances. Tumblr user scorch-xiv shared a

screenshot of an image that had been erroneously flagged as adult content by the website's

algorithm, described how they felt as if Tumblr Staff was pushing its users from the platform,

and ended the post with a simple "fuck you."[202] These short posts are indicative of the general

anger and raw emotion than many users felt toward Tumblr Staff and the platform's new content

policy. And, the use of profanity and vulgar language can itself be read as a protest against the

new policy and its attempt to "clean up" the platform. The online space was being significantly

changed for these users and groups, and it is fairly evident toward whom this blame was directed.

A similar sentiment is present in the somewhat longer posts that other users wrote. Much

like the terse responses discussed above, these more detailed Tumblr posts express a similar

feeling of betrayal. These posts demonstrate an overall sense of disbelief; many Tumblr users did

not understand why Tumblr Staff was choosing to employ what they viewed as overly drastic

steps to redefine the platform. One user questioned why a blanket ban on adult content was even

necessary, especially given the platform's previous use of a "safe mode" feature to protect

---

[200] julie-of-the-jungle, "SUCK MY TITTIES, TUMBLR!!!," December 3, 2018, https://julie-of-the-jungle.tumblr.com/post/180775691624/suck-my-titties-tumblr

[201] hourglass-eyes, "Hey,Tumblr staff, GET FUCKED WITH A CACTUS !!" December 3, 2018, https://hourglass-eyes.tumblr.com/post/180774255626/heytumblr-staff-get-fucked-with-a-cactus

[202] scorch-xiv, "Dear Tumblr" December 4, 2018, https://scorch-xiv.tumblr.com/post/180793608409/dear-tumblr

underage users.[203] This confusion suggests that despite Tumblr Staff's attempts to explain and

justify the adult content policy to its users, there were still significant differences between the

platform's owners and its users over how the website ought to be controlled and managed.

Another user expressed their shock over Tumblr Staff suddenly changing the platform's

previously laissez-faire approach to adult content regulation.[204] Tumblr user

originalgangstabenni asked, "Where is this coming from all of a sudden? Why does Tumblr

have a stick up its ass about seeing real-life human genitals ? WTF?"[205] The confusion expressed

in this post shows that Tumblr Staff's newly announced adult content policy came as somewhat

of a surprise to many of the platform's users. The way that Tumblr users understood the online

space was entirely different than how Tumblr Staff viewed and managed the website. While

Tumblr Inc.'s discussion of the content policy reflected its profit motives and legal pressures,

most users were unaware or uninterested in the political economy of the platform, its owners,

and its institutional mandates. Therefore, in the wake of the adult content policy, many users

expressed a strong feeling of betrayal as they saw the definition of the platform and its online

space changing.

In these kinds of posts, Tumblr users expressed their overall disagreement with the policy

but without necessarily articulating their specific reasoning for the distaste. Perhaps there were

several factors that influenced these users' anger and disappointment, but in these posts the most

---

[203] horny-for-ratboy, "Just fine-tune safe mode you jackasses," December 8, 2018, https://horny-for-ratboy.tumblr.com/post/180921985218/just-finetune-safe-mode-you-jackasses-we-shouldnt

[204] Many Tumblr users had embraced this previously lax attitude toward adult content and pornography, which had been articulated, for instance, through statements from Tumblr founder David that "I'm not into moderating this stuff. Tumblr's an excellent platform for porn, which I don't personally have any moral opposition to." See: Cheshire, "Tumbling on Success."

[205] originalgangstabenni, "Where is this coming from all of a sudden?" December 11, 2018, https://originalgangstabenni.tumblr.com/post/181019587263/where-is-this-coming-from-all-of-a-sudden-why

prominent themes are of shock, surprise, and betrayal. As I discuss later on, it is these feelings—along with users that outlined their disagreement with specific aspects of Tumblr Staff's announcement—that contribute to the rift between the platform's users and its owners when it came to shaping and defining the online space.

"Female Presenting Nipples" – Yeah, We Definitely Hate that Phrase

Tumblr Staff's blog post from December 17th 2018, the day the adult content policy went into effect, specifically references the phrase "female-presenting nipples" and jokingly states that "yeah, we know you hate this term."[206] Indeed, many of the user posts that emerged in the weeks following the policy's announcement and its implementation discuss this phrase specifically. Some users viewed Tumblr Staff's use of the phrasing of "female-presenting nipples" as possible virtue signaling while others simply pointed out the inherent arbitrariness of attempting to assign a gender to a non-gendered body part. Despite its silliness, the "-presenting" phrase may have been an attempt by Tumblr staff to mitigate its users' response. That they thought such a phrase would make people less angry further underscores just how little Tumblr staff understood its user base, as well as how the platform's owners and its users saw the online space differently. Regardless of the specific sentiment, the fact that many Tumblr users zeroed in on this phrase specifically while Tumblr Staff attempted to make jokes about it demonstrates the significant disconnect between the platform's owners and users that was made apparent in the wake of the Tumblr Porn ban.

For many Tumblr users, the use of the term "female-presenting" was seen as an attempt to present the otherwise-restrictive adult content policy as still appearing as progressive and

---

[206] Tumblr Staff, "Hey Tumblr..."

inclusive. Ostensibly, the "-presenting" suffix acknowledges that gender does not exist as a

binary but rather exists on a spectrum that may range from "maleness" to "femaleness"

depending on the specific performance(s) of masculinity or femininity. But this supposed

inclusiveness is completely counteracted by the policy's privileging of certain nipples over

others. Or, as one user puts it, "banning female presenting nipples is both woke and not."[207]

Another user quotes their partner's assertion that, "the phrase 'female presenting nipples' just

screams 'I dont know what I'm talking about and I've never had sex.'"[208] And another post

specifically questioned the new policy by asking "or are we just gonna keep letting non binary

bodies be labeled as inappropriate?"[209] It is entirely possible that Tumblr Staff wrote the adult

content policy to include the "-presenting" suffix in an attempt to attend to non-binary

individuals. But, as many users pointed out, Tumblr Staff was in the same breath writing a policy

that was not applied equally to all genders.

In a similar vein, many Tumblr users the arbitrariness of the "female-presenting"

phrasing. Beyond the "-presenting" suffix potentially being a case of virtue-signaling, nipples

themselves are not inherently gendered. Thus, in response to Tumblr's policy that only applied to

so-called "female-presenting nipples," several user posts questioned how Tumblr Staff planned

to distinguish which nipples were acceptable and which were to be removed from the platform.

One post suggested that there was a ratio of areola to nipple size that could determine their

[207] normalhumanparanoia, "Banning female presenting nipples is both woke and not," December 3, 2018,
https://normalhumanparanoia.tumblr.com/post/180784181424/banning-female-presenting-nipples-is-both-woke-and

[208] improbablyhope, "My roommate's boyfriend said it best." December 3, 2018,
https://improbablyhope.tumblr.com/post/180779749710/my-roommates-boyfriend-said-it-best-the-phrase

[209] memexdaddy, "so @staff if a trans dude posted a picture," December 5, 2018,
https://memexdaddy.tumblr.com/post/180827783236/so-staff-if-a-trans-dude-posted-a-picture-of-his

nipples' supposed genders.[210] In another case, a user posted an extreme close-up image of their own pierced nipple and simply asked, "@staff male or female?"[211] This post was still visible in January of 2020, so evidently the algorithm hadn't been able to determine an answer. Tumblr users continued to critique the term "female-presenting" and its arbitrary definition in a more humorous fashion. One user described a fictional interaction with Tumblr Staff, and how they circumvented the adult content policy by naming their nipple "Greg."[212] In another case, Tumblr user sexwithaninja posted an image depicting a pair of breasts with visible nipples.[213] The image was edited with a digitally-drawn moustache over one breast, and a set of lipstick and hat emojis over the other. Again, given that this image was still publicly available on the Tumblr platform a full year after the implementation of the stricter adult content policy, the arbitrariness of the policy and difficulty of applying the "female-presenting standard" is increasingly apparent.

These posts that discuss the specific "female-presenting" phrase represent one of the major themes that emerged across my tag search term throughout both time periods. For these users, Tumblr Staff and its announcements could not necessarily be taken at face value. Despite claiming to be implementing the policy in the interests of a "better, more positive Tumblr," the specific phrasing of the adult content policy caused these users to distrust Tumblr Staff's intentions and doubt the efficacy of implementation and enforcing the new content policy.

---

[210] ophelia-moonfang, "Is there are ratio of areola to nipple size to determine my nipples' gender?" December 3, 2018, https://ophelia-moonfang.tumblr.com/post/180773464265/is-there-a-ratio-of-areola-to-nipple-size-to

[211] 17sunsets, "@staff male or female?" December 3, 2018, https://17sunsets.tumblr.com/post/180769478362/staff-male-or-female

[212] with-both-my-hearts, "posts picture containing nipple," December 4, 2018, https://with-both-my-hearts.tumblr.com/post/180775164471/me-posts-picture-containing-nipple-tumblr

[213] sexwithaninja, "I have produced this reference image," December 5, 2018, https://sexwithaninja.tumblr.com/post/180829741602/i-have-produced-this-reference-image-to-help

The Ineffectiveness of the Porn Ban

One of the other common themes that emerged throughout the user posts was the policy's overall ineffectiveness. Tumblr Staff had announced that it would be using an automated content detection and flagging system, but it quickly became apparent that the system was ineffective at accurately identifying adult content. Additionally, users noted the continued presence of many problems with the Tumblr website; some noted that they had actually seen an increase in pornography after December 17th, 2018, and others indicated they felt that the website had more pressing issues than adult content, such as white nationalism and other hate speech. Overall, this theme shows that in addition to the broad disagreement with the new content policy on its principle, other users responded negatively to Tumblr Staff's actions simply because they did not actually succeed in improving the platform and its online space(s).

After the adult content policy was announced on December 4th, 2018, the new content detection system began reviewing and flagging posts that potentially contained adult content. Although such posts would not actually be removed until after December 17th, 2018, this nevertheless gave Tumblr users a preview of how ineffective the proposed content detection system was going to be. Many users described their experiences with erroneously flagged content, often in the form of screenshots of otherwise innocent content topped with a red bar stating, "your post was flagged." Examples of wrongly flagged content include images of sand dunes, cats, a shelf of Pokémon figurines, a tattoo, several webcomics, a person holding an armful of plastic water bottles, and a screenshot of Tumblr Staff's own "A better, more positive Tumblr" post. In one instance, a photo of two men holding hands was marked as adult content.[214]

---

[214] vanragrag, "hi tumblr this very thinly veiled homophobia," December 4, 2018, https://vanragrag.tumblr.com/post/180779669155/hi-tumblr-this-is-very-thinly-veiled-homophobia

For Tumblr users, these examples of the website's new content flagging system stoked significant skepticism in the platform owners' ability to actually manage the website in any meaningful and effective way. The adult content policy was presented as being in the interests of the Tumblr community and improving the website, yet many users noted the numerous inaccuracies in the content detection system and viewed them as a sign of a deepening rupture between how Tumblr Staff views the platform and how its users understood the online space.

While a majority of user posts that critiqued Tumblr Staff's ability to moderate the platform homed in on the content detection system inaccuracies, there were problems with the policy's implementation beyond the detection and flagging of so-called adult content. For example, many users bemoaned the continued proliferation of blogs entirely dedicated to pornography. Many users pointed out that not only was there a perceived *increase* in the amount of porn on Tumblr, but that much of these blogs appeared to be from automated bot accounts.[215] Given that Tumblr Staff had pitched the new policy as a means to improve the platform and benefit its user communities, the increase in porn blogs especially underscored the policy's overall ineffectiveness. One user expressed their frustration in the form of a haiku: "Pictures of cats flagged / But there's still porn on my dash / Go suck a dick, staff."[216]

From the majority of the posts I read, it appears that most users were not necessarily offended by the continued presence of pornography; instead, it simply was interpreted as demonstrating the hypocrisy of Tumblr Staff. Indeed, some users pointed out that in some ways the platform was actually *less* safe for certain groups after the policy's implementation. For

---

[215] For instance: cynicallyromanticcrap, "female presenting nipples hypocrisy," December 5, 2018, https://cynicallyromanticcrap.tumblr.com/post/180839429172/female-presenting-nipples-hypocrisy

[216] beetles acquired, "pictures of cats flagged" January 6, 2019, https://beetlesacquired.tumblr.com/post/181794179963/pictures-of-cats-flagged-but-theres-still-porn-on

example, minors on the website were now actually *more* likely to encounter adult content given that the website's "safe mode" option had been disabled.[217] Despite their promises to improve the community, one of the supposed problems that the new adult content policy was meant to address was actually worsened after its implementation. Indeed, this indifference to pornography reminds us that the user response to Tumblr's adult content policy wasn't *really* actually about the adult content itself. If the only reason that most Tumblr users were upset with the Porn Ban was the removal of pornography and other adult content, then the continued presence of such content should have been widely lauded. But the fact that this content was met with indifference suggests that central to the conflict was not necessarily the content itself, but rather the broader disconnect between platform owner and platform user.

Furthermore, there were many posts that accused Tumblr Staff of not taking other aspects of the platform's content moderation more seriously. For many users, the presence of adult content, including pornography, was not necessarily a major concern. However, the existence of hate speech, Nazi-sympathizers, and outright illegal content was a priority for users. The fact that the policy was instead targeting adult content further fueled the distrust that many users felt toward Tumblr Staff and the platform's corporate owners. One user characterized Tumblr Staff's position as, "Female nipples are dangerous, russian bots and nazis are not."[218] Another user specifically accused Tumblr Staff of "introducing a non-sensical and poorly worded new policy, one that really does nothing to address the actual problems on your platform (like nazis)."[219] And

[217] Tumblr Support, "Updates to Tumblr's Community Guidelines."

[218] kirbos, "The world according to tumblr," December 4, 2018, https://kirbos.tumblr.com/post/180789422209/the-world-according-to-tumblr

[219] itsalilah, "By the way, thanks tumblr," December 4, 2018, https://itsalilah.tumblr.com/post/180795108871/by-the-way-thanks-tumblr-for-once-again

many others criticized the adult content policy for its ineffectiveness at actually creating the improved platform that Tumblr Staff had promised, such as Tumblr user staykyra's pithy and sarcastic statement that "Tumblr sure is a better place. @staff."[220] These posts, and many other similar ones, represent the significant disagreement that Tumblr users felt toward Tumblr Staff. Not only did many users and communities disagree with the newly-implemented draconian stance toward adult content, but they also felt that Tumblr Staff was turning a blind eye toward what they perceived as the actual threats to the platform.

Whether it was for the adult content detection algorithm's inaccuracies, the increase in pornographic content on the platform, or for the persistence of other content that users found objectionable, much of the response to Tumblr's new adult content policy indicated that many users and communities viewed it as generally ineffective at accomplishing its goals. Tumblr Staff had promised that the new policies were being implemented in the interest of creating a "better, more positive Tumblr."[221] However, as indicated by much of the posts in the weeks following its announcement and implementation, many users and communities felt that the policy fell short of this promise in many ways. Underlying this failed promise is the growing disconnect between Tumblr Staff and the platform's users. Put another way, Tumblr's users and communities had a significantly different relationship to the platform and online space than Tumblr Staff and the corporate owners. By delineating the perceived ineffectiveness of the policy, these users also were also expressing a lack of confidence in Tumblr Staff to manage the platform and its online space while also maintaining the interests of its users. The online space no longer had its same

[220] staykyra, "Can't believe pedophiles and fucking Nazis can be on this site," December 10, 2018, https://staykyra.tumblr.com/post/180996443558/cant-believe-pedophiles-and-fucking-nazis-can-be

[221] Tumblr Staff, "A Better, More Positive Tumblr," Tumblr Staff, December 3, 2018, https://staff.tumblr.com/post/180758987165/a-better-more-positive-tumblr.

characteristics, and as others would note in specific detail, Tumblr was no longer the online queer space that it had once been to many of its users and communities.

Loss of Tumblr as an Online Queer Space

For many of Tumblr's users and communities, the platform had once represented and important online queer space. The website's affordances and user communities made possible the exploration and performance of unique identities. And, thanks to the previously lax adult content policy, it was possible for Tumblr users to talk openly about issues of gender identity and sexuality; furthermore, the ability to post and engage with adult content provided opportunities for these users and communities to make visible non-heteronormative sexualities. In the weeks following the announcement and subsequent implementation of Tumblr's new adult content policy, many users expressed their disagreement and specifically emphasized the loss of what the online space once was. To be sure, the loss of Tumblr as an online queer space was not the only reaction to the adult content policy. Every user and community had their own individualized modes of engagement with the website and therefore their own understandings of what the space had once meant. However, given that Tumblr had previously been differentiated among SNSs for its LGBTQ+ communities, the loss of the platform as an online queer space is a significant theme among the user responses to the adult content policy.

Many posts specifically pointed out that the new adult content policy would have a direct and significant impact on LGBTQ+ people and their experiences on the platform. For instance, some users pointed out the flagging algorithm's its perceived targeting of terms such as "trans, bi, lesbian, or gay."[222] It is unclear whether the content detection system actually was developed

---

[222] eddiesgazebos, "@staff if you're really going through with this nsfw ban," December 3, 2018, https://eddiesgazebos.tumblr.com/post/180780074214/staff-if-youre-really-going-through-with-this

to target these terms, but given the black box nature of algorithms, some users drew their own conclusions based on the kinds of posts that *had* been marked as inappropriate. While some posts described the flagging of LGBTQ+ content as indicative of a poorly developed algorithm, others floated the possibility that the policy was developed with malicious intent. "Maybe the shitty AI is flagging exactly what it's meant to flag," Tumblr user thebookworm0001 wrote.[223] In another post, Tumblr user lady-ganja took a similar conspiratorial stance toward Tumblr Staff: "And y'all KNOW that they're using this as a way to censor LGBT as well, basically saying that anything queer is inherently sexual and should be censored."[224] In another case, the new adult content policy was compared to other SNSs and their attempts to limit and constrain their users' engagements with the platform. Drawing comparisons to Twitter and Facebook, one user wrote, "By doing this, by having their bot flag LGBT materials, by having it flag legitimate concerns and issues… they're purposefully kicking us out. They're breaking up the clamor."[225] Among these users, there were many varied responses, but among all of them one central critique emerged, which was the content policy's specific impact on LGBTQ+ users and communities. These reactions show that even if there wasn't overt censorship, people still perceived the newer and more restrictive content policy as such. This perception is significant because it underscores the disconnect between the platform's owners and its users. Though appearing to outsiders as a singular entity, the platform is actually a fluid and continually redefined online space—shaped in part both by its corporate polices as well as its individual user practices.

---

[223] thebookworm0001, "not to get all conspiracy theorist here," December 4, 2018, https://thebookworm0001.tumblr.com/post/180809933472/not-to-get-all-conspiracy-theorist-here-but-is-it

[224] lady-ganja, "It's so crazy to me that all this is going on like," December 4, 2018. https://lady-ganja.tumblr.com/post/180808318935/its-so-crazy-to-me-that-all-this-is-going-on

[225] magicalmilly, "I feel like there's some political shit going on," December 3, 2018, https://magicalmilly.tumblr.com/post/180777689470/i-feel-like-theres-some-political-shit-going-on

One common thread throughout much of the user responses was a sense that Tumblr's new policy was eliminating what the online space had once been. Though the Tumblr platform would still exist after the adult content policy was implemented on December 17, 2018, there was an overwhelming perception that the website and its user communities' modes of engagement would never be wholly the same. One user described what the space had once been for non-heteronormative minorities by noting, "here, their sexuality is valid, seen and represented. the way fandoms transform movies or tv shows (which, let's be honest here, are often the product of a straight, white, cismale point of view) into empowering narratives for minorities."[226] Another user described how Tumblr had previously played a central role in validating and making visible their own identity by showing "sex that looked like mine" and offering an "introduction to platonic friendships where we discussed sex or sexuality."[227] For this user, "Tumblr's porn, and its users' propensity for sharing about their sex lives is part of a culture which is being lost."[228] Again, it is important to bear in mind that these are only a few individual users describing their experiences with the platform, and how they felt them changing in the wake of the new adult content policy; they are not wholly representative of every user's perception of the changing online space. However, as Tumblr user ifeelplain explained, the loss of the platform as an online queer space had impacts for nearly all users and communities: "So here we are, about to lose a space to share and explore. The benefits of this site are vast, even for people who don't share the varied tastes of the communities who make a living here."[229]

---

[226] saturnmond, "log off-protest," December 16, 2018, https://saturnmond.tumblr.com/post/181177854217/log-off-protest

[227] ruthlessandstormyeyed, "Tumblr was the first place I ever saw a dick," December 16, 2018, https://ruthlessandstormyeyed.tumblr.com/post/181175837136

[228] ruthlessandstormyeyed.

[229] ifeelplain, "Sexual Citizenship and Science," December 4, 2018, https://ifeelplain.tumblr.com/post/180791345139/sexual-citizenship-and-science

Tumblr is not so much one singular platform or online space, but rather a highly customizable experience for each of its users. These individualistic modes of engagement foster community building and coalescing of similar groups—each of which has its own portion of the platform's online space. However, despite this multitude of meanings, the implementation of a stricter adult content policy affected all of its users' understandings of the space. Specifically, the platform had once represented a rich and vibrant online queer space for many of its users and communities, which was no longer possible in the wake of the new adult content policy. What the platform is for Tumblr Staff is very different than what it is for its individual users and communities. And, in the wake of the adult content policy, many viewed the once free and open online space as being closed off. The new content policy raised questions of *who* defines a platform and its overall ethos, a question which was also raised by individual users posting about their relationship to the platform and its owners.

"We Want Back Our Tumblr"

The Tumblr Porn Ban made apparent a rupture between the platform's users and its owners, particularly in terms of how each group understood the meaning of the online space. One of the final themes that was common throughout the scraped posts was this disconnect between Tumblr users and Tumblr Staff. Furthermore, these posts represent the complex relationship that Tumblr users had with the platform itself. Echoing my prior discussion of the challenges of terminology, many user posts demonstrate the multi-faceted meaning of "Tumblr" itself. By this, I mean that many users felt an affinity toward the platform community while simultaneously indicating discontent with the website, its content policies, and its owners. For many users, Tumblr felt like a platform that was truly their own space and thus the abruptly changed adult content policy represented a significant betrayal. The announcement and implementation of the new content

policy then represented a flashpoint in the complex relationship between the platform's users and the website, its owners, and its policies. Though these specific posts respond to the adult content policy, they are also indicative of the role of individual user experiences and practices in defining an SNS platform and its online space(s).

One aspect of the users' tangled relationship with the platform owners is that it was not one based solely in conflict and disagreement. In fact, some posts did include an acknowledgement of Tumblr Inc.'s legal liability and pressure to regulate the platform to remove child pornography. Indeed, it was the presence of child pornography on the Tumblr platform that resulted in its app being removed from the iOS app store.[230] Many Tumblr users were aware of these political economic pressures. For instance, one user explained their stance on the newly announced adult content policy as follows:

> I'm all for making fun of the adult content ban of tumblr but like, I'd like to add the nuance to it that they did it because of CP. Apparently Tumblr was being used to distribute it and I believe most of us can agree that's pretty terrible. It's a lot easier to avoid CP if you drop porn altogether, which is most likely their reasoning, and I think that's a valid point.
>
> Now back to our regularly-scheduled shitposting.[231]

However, the acknowledgement of Tumblr Inc.'s political economic pressures was not always articulated in such an understanding and accepting manner. For other users, the crackdown on pornography and other adult content was viewed as Tumblr Inc. capitulating to the monetary pressures of Verizon Inc., its parent company. For them, the new policy was not in the interests

---

[230] Silverstein, "Tumblr App Disappears from Apple's App Store Because of Child Porn"; Whitney, "The Reason Tumblr Vanished from the App Store."

[231] In this post, and many others discussing Tumblr's updated adult content policy, "CP" refers to child pornography. ilfaudaleurdire, "I'm all for making fun of the adult content ban," December 4, 2018, https://ilfaudraleurdire.tumblr.com/post/180782255487/im-all-for-making-fun-of-the-adult-content-ban-of

of Tumblr users at all, but simply to create additional profits for Verizon.[232] As one user described it, "With this change, tumblr is hurting itself in the long run. All to satisfy their Verizon shareholders and Apple."[233] While a majority of Tumblr users and communities saw the website as their own space, they did still acknowledge the influence of Tumblr Inc. and other corporate pressures in defining the platform and its policies.

The relationship of Tumblr users to the platform is further complicated by the numerous ways they refer to the website itself. Despite loving the community and regularly engaging with the platform, there were many users that referred to Tumblr with overwhelmingly negative terms. Tumblr user hillbilly-n0ir calls it a "god forsaken website" and a "shitshow," while simultaneously explaining how much time and energy they have poured into the platform.[234] And for another, the entirety of Tumblr was simply a "hellsite."[235] The use of these types of negative terms shows that the response to the new adult content policy was not simply a case of anger and disagreement. It is not really the case that Tumblr users universally supported and enjoyed every aspect of the platform, and the conflict that emerged in the wake of the new policy further exemplifies the complex relationship between an SNS platform and its users. Despite Tumblr being a "hellsite" or a "god forsaken website," and despite not being fully satisfied with it, many users still felt as if the online space had once been their own and thus reacted strongly to the perceived intrusion by Tumblr Staff.

[232] crystalball23, "today, my dashboard is getting an ad pounding from verizon ads," December 12, 2018, https://crystalball23.tumblr.com/post/181070353128/today-my-dashboard-is-getting-an-ad-pounding-from

[233] m-78nebula, "Tumblr Staff Are Idiots…" December 3, 2018, https://m-78nebula.tumblr.com/post/180772479469/tumblr-staff-are-idiots

[234] hillbilly-n0ir, "I've been on this god forsaken website for nine fucking years," December 5, 2018, https://hillbilly-n0ir.tumblr.com/post/180846047637

[235] punk wildebeest, "I mean if this hellsite had to die," December 4, 2018, https://punkwildebeest.tumblr.com/post/180810213135/i-mean-if-this-hellsite-had-to-die-and-it-did-so

Although some users did acknowledge the platform's ownership by Tumblr Inc., and by extension Verizon Inc., several others still viewed the online space as their own. Even if the website was technically owned by these companies, many user posts indicated that they did not welcome the role of these corporate owners. For them, Tumblr Inc., Verizon Inc., as well as the entirety of Tumblr Staff, were viewed as distant and disconnected from what the platform *really* meant to them. One user mocked the platform's owners and staff: "Listen to our users? Never. Run our selves into the ground? I'll drink to that."[236] For many users, the adult content policy indicated that Tumblr Staff and the corporate owners' priorities for the platform did not align with its users, which perhaps made the decline of the platform seemingly inevitable. As another user wrote, "I'm not about to pull a "tumblr is oppressing me!!!" card, but I will say that adult content isn't the problem on this site. It's a lack of knowledgable and experienced programmers and developers. It's a lack of leadership and communication. It's a blatant disregard for feedback and reviews. It's a total lack of respect for users."[237] Succinctly encapsulating the multiple meanings of the word "Tumblr" and the relationship that users had with the platform, user east-of-novel stated, "I don't think Tumblr knows what Tumblr is."[238] As these posts demonstrate, there is no one singular understanding of what the Tumblr platform actually is. Its owners and staff had one understanding of the online space, and the updated content policy was a moment that made wholly apparent the different view that its users and communities held.

---

[236] tempestuouseevee, "I cant help but love how salty the entire community of tumblr users," December 13, 2018, https://tempestuouseevee.tumblr.com/post/181091366614/i-cant-help-but-love-how-salty-the-entire

[237] perfectlite, "tldr: @ staff the site sucks because you suck," December 4, 2018, https://perfectlite.tumblr.com/post/180784549028/tldr-staff-the-site-sucks-because-you-suck

[238] east-of-novel, "Adult content," December 4, 2018, https://east-of-novel.tumblr.com/post/180772231299/adult-content

As part of viewing the Tumblr platform as a space of their own, many Tumblr users attempted to organize a protest to demonstrate their feelings of betrayal and the perceived loss of space. On December 17, 2018, the date the new adult content policy went into effect, countless users logged out of the Tumblr website and abstained from the platform for a full 24 hours. The hope was to create a noticeable drop in user traffic to express their disagreement, and possibly urge Tumblr Staff to reconsider the new policy.[239] The protest was ultimately ineffective—other people continued using the platform so there was not a measurable drop in traffic, and Tumblr staff did not reverse course on its policy. These factors reinforce just how little most users truly have in relation to the platforms that they use frequently. However, it nevertheless shows that users view the online space as their own and that they want to exercise control over the platform. Users have a complicated relationship with their platforms and despite not actually having much control over it, view the online space as wholly their own.

In the weeks following the announcement of the new adult content policy, as well as in the weeks immediately following its implementation, many users posted to the platform itself to express their broad reactions. Even among posts expressing anger and disagreement, the response was still widely varied. Yet throughout these numerous themes that emerged, the common issue at hand is the question of *who* gets to define what Tumblr and its online space should be. As one user explained, "We want back our Tumblr. @staff I am truly done with your

---

[239] For instance: coughsyrupsstuff, "I'm logging off until tumblr becomes good again," December 5, 2018,https://east-of-novel.tumblr.com/post/180772231299/adult-content; iamnotshazam, "lo it is only two days unto the Boobocalpyse remember to log off," December 15, 2018, https://iamnotshazam.tumblr.com/post/181143758698/lo-it-is-only-two-days-unto-the-boobocalypse; thestrugglesarestruggle, "Honestly if you guys want to actually make a difference," December 17, 2018, https://thestrugglesarestruggle.tumblr.com/post/181199062562/honestly-if-you-guys-want-to-actually-make-a

bullshit."[240] The specific us of the phrase "our Tumblr" to describe the website encapsulates the inherent tension between a platform and its users. For many users, the online space truly felt like it was their own, despite the website being owned and controlled by Tumblr Inc. and Verizon Inc. It is this disconnect between users and owners over the definition of the platform that contributed to the significant reaction to the adult content policy, and why many users felt such a deep sense of betrayal.

A Platform's Relationship to its Users

Tumblr users had, and continue to have, a complex relationship to the platform and its online space(s). However, in the wake of the updated adult content policy, what these spaces had once meant to their users and communities was suddenly changed and called into question. For a site that had once felt like it was their own, the users suddenly had it ripped out of their hands by the platform owners, all in the name of corporate profit. Especially given that Tumblr had once been somewhat of a unique corner of the Internet that users and communities had carved out for themselves, the significant user response that emerged in the wake of the adult content policy is not just a case of users being upset/mad, but a deeply-felt sense of betrayal.

Tumblr is not so much one platform and one singular online space, but rather *many* unique modes of engagement. Every user and community had once had their own unique experience with the platform, and understanding of what the Tumblr online space had once been. What that space *is* comes from a constant push and pull between users and the platform's owners. And, for the majority of the website's history, the platform's owners had had a very

---

[240] x-avantgarde-x, "We want back our Tumblr," January 10, 2019, https://x-avantgarde-x.tumblr.com/post/181897933124/we-want-back-our-tumblr

limited role in defining the online space. This had once contributed to the perception of Tumblr as an online queer space, where users and communities could carve out their own space and create their own forms of identity construction and expression. But, in the wake of the newly restrictive adult content policy, virtually *all* of Tumblr's unique spaces and experiences became redefined. The redefinition of Tumblr's online space, and the deep betrayal expressed by its users, demonstrates the tension between a platform, its owners, and its users. The definition of a platform and its online space(s) is never a finalized definition, but rather constantly negotiated and susceptible to change.

Chapter Four – The Platform Triad and the Future of Tumblr

The public announcements of Tumblr's new adult content policy and the user posts that emerged in response suggest that the website's owners and users have a tangled relationship to each other, as well as to the platform overall. Though the two groups generally disagreed over how it should be enacted in policy, there was—partially, at least—a shared sense that the online space should contribute to fostering community. Though Tumblr's owners and users disagreed over the adult content policy, there were some areas of overlap and agreement. Yet in much of the popular discourse surrounding the implementation of Tumblr's new adult content policy, the relationship between the platform and its users had often described as wholly confrontational. Even phrases such as "the porn ban" suggest that Tumblr users and Tumblr were entirely at odds with one another. The word "ban" implies a clear delineation between the creator of a policy and the group that it is applied to. Indeed, even the structure of this thesis itself may serve to reinforce this framing. Separating the company's discourse on the adult content policy and its user's reactions into two separate chapters may be a useful organizational strategy, it follows much of the popular press in representing the Tumblr Porn Ban as a wholly oppositional relationship between users and company. While there certainly is tension between these two groups over the characteristics of the platform, it is not always a wholly confrontational relationship. The actual definition of an online platform and its overall ethos is much more fluid.

The Tumblr Porn Ban and its ensuing controversy demonstrate that online spaces are continually defined and reshaped by multiple groups. An online platform is partially defined by its corporate owners and their enforcement of particular policies which act upon its individual users. However, individual users are simultaneously embedded within the online SNSs that they regularly use. Indeed in the 21st century it is not uncommon for much of our lives to be lived

97

within such online spaces. And because of this, the individual users are able to shape and define online platforms in the same way that their own practices are influenced by the online settings then inhabit. In the case of Tumblr, there were significant tensions between the platform's users and its corporate owners over how that online space would be shaped and defined. The case of Tumblr and its adult content policy, then, indicates the fluidity of online space and the continual process of definition and redefinition that characterize online platforms.

A platform is not a monolithic entity that simply "pops" into existence one day. Though a website or particular SNS *is* often developed by a single person or single company, the actual definition and overall characteristics of that online space emerge through a continual negotiation between the triad of the corporate owners, individual users, and government power. Each of these three parties exerts influence on a given online space, and contributes to its overall ethos. This "platform triad" of company, user, and government engenders an ongoing push and pull through which the meaning of any given online platform is in a constant state of redefinition; an online space is never finalized or fully static. And though the balance of power amongst this triad is never wholly equal, individual users nevertheless still have some ability to contribute to the ongoing reshaping and redefinition of the platform.

In this platform triad, the balance of power is often tilted in favor of government power or corporate interests in the sense that they have more direct influence over the characteristics of the online space. A government is able to implement and enforce laws, and a company is able to unilaterally change various technical components of a platform. However, because the individual users remain a component, the future development of the internet and online spaces does not necessarily have to be one in which one where the most powerful institutions hold power over the people. The early foundational myths of the internet as a technology of empowerment may

have been overly idealistic, but they are not necessarily fully unrealistic. There remains, even in the 21st century, the possibility for individual users to carve out an online space for self-expression and community-building. When it comes to the continual definition of an online platform, the three components of the triad cannot be taken wholly in isolation. Corporate interests, government power, and individual users are always interwoven in online spaces. In the case of Tumblr and its adult content policy, the redefinition of the online space was primarily a tension between the company and users. However, as I explain later, albeit indirect there was potentially some influence from government and laws upon the redefinition of the platform's adult content policy and subsequent reshaping of the online space. Tumblr's adult content policy and the controversy that it sparked, then, serves as a useful model for how the triad of company, government, and user contributes to the definition of an online platform.

Pinpointing the overlaps between these three groups as well as the continual tensions that exist among them is a way to make visible a positive path forward for the internet. Rather than viewing the internet negatively as a technology of control and the loss of individual autonomy, this platform triad makes visible the place of the user, and their individual ability to stake out an online space where their own interests and desires might be realized. By doing so perhaps at least some of the early foundational myths of the internet can be partially realized.

In this chapter, I argue that the characteristics of a platform are not defined solely from institutions such as state power and corporate policy, and that the individual users of that platform represent an important third stakeholder in defining the platform's online space. Rather than having a singular and fixed definition, the characteristics of an online space emerges through a platform triad of company, user, and government. Because of this continued influence of a platform's users, the early foundational myths of the internet as entirely free, open, and

99

equal are not necessarily fully lost. Though individual freedom is somewhat limited in online spaces because of government and corporate influence, the future of the internet does not necessarily need to be wholly pessimistic. While Tumblr's adult content policy did represent a significant closing off of the space and loss of individual autonomy, the future of the platform does not necessarily have to be wholly negative. While its users did lose a significant amount of agency and autonomy, they remain a part of that platform triad and may still be able to contribute to the ongoing shaping of the online space.

I use the Tumblr Porn Ban and its associate controversy to describe this platform triad and how it contributes to the continual definition and reshaping of online spaces. Though the Tumblr Porn Ban was primarily an issue that arose from the tension between users and company, I briefly note a few instances where government and state power contributed to the shaping of the Tumblr platform. By considering the new adult content policy through the lens of freedom of speech and developing standards for indecency, I demonstrate that online spaces complicate the definition of a singular platform. From this complexity of defining the Tumblr platform and its associated community, I conclude by discussing the possible future of Tumblr as an online queer space. Though the adult content policy represented a significant shift in the platform and its online space, the platform triad makes possible future change and redefinition, which may leave at least some space for the early idealistic myths of the internet to be at least partially realized.

The Platform Triad of Company, Users, and Government

My examination of Tumblr and its updated adult content policy has shown the complexity of defining a particular SNS platform. In the case of Tumblr, the meaning and characteristics of its platform's online space had come into question. In his seminal work on the "Politics of Platforms," Tarleton Gillespie acknowledges that online platforms can have

meanings that are computational, architectural, figurative, or political, and that the platform's

overall definition can arise from all of these: "Drawing these meanings together, 'platform'

emerges not simply as indicating a function shape: it suggests a progressive and egalitarian

arrangement, promising to support those who stand upon it."[241] Yet Gillespie also cautions

against a rigid and fixed understanding of platforms, and notes that the same platform can have

different meanings for users, advertisers, and owners.[242] The Tumblr Porn Ban reiterates this

framing and demonstrates that platforms are fluidly defined and unfinalized. Online platforms

are in a continual state of flux because they are defined not by a single entity, but through what I

describe here as the platform triad of company, users, and government.

The platform triad that I describe here is a useful model for how a specific online

platform is defined. Comprising a website's corporate owners, its users, and the influence of

state power, the triad is the reason that the characteristic of any given online space may seem

fleeting and continually in a state of flux. Users, through their individual day to day practices,

shape a platform. However, the platform's owners also have a direct role in shaping and defining

that online space, and so too do government laws and regulations. These three parties continually

push and pull upon one another. And while there may be times of equilibrium amongst them, the

ongoing connections and tensions between company, user, and governments contributes to the

construction and definition of platforms and online space.

For Tumblr, users had been the most dominant forceful of the three groups for the

majority of the website's history. Tumblr Staff had promoted the platform largely in terms of its

users, such as its splash page that invited people to "come for what [they] love" and to "stay for

---

[241] Gillespie, "The Politics of 'Platforms,'" 350.

[242] Gillespie, 353.

what [they] discover."[243] When the new adult content policy was announced and implemented, there was a sudden shift in the overall balance of the triad. The company, which had previously taken a very hands-off approach, was suddenly directly involved in enforcing what content was permissible, and by extension what the overall characteristics of the online space could be. This sudden shift contributed largely to the significant magnitude of the overall user response. However, just because there was a sudden and unexpected change in the definition of the Tumblr platform by the company, the other two parts of the platform triad remain present. This means that there is still the possibility for the online space to be redefined by either its users or through state power.

Though I describe user, company, and government as the three separate components of the platform triad, it is important to note that the power relationship between these parties is not necessarily equal. Indeed, I would be surprised to identify an instance in which it is a wholly equal balance of power between the three. The platform triad is an analytical tool that can be applied to different online spaces, and in each case, there will be a different power relationship among the three components. In the case of the Tumblr Porn Ban, the corporation exercised significantly more control over the platform than its users. Despite the numerous posts expressing disagreement (as well as the attempted log-out protest), users were not able to counteract the company's ability to unilaterally change the website's policies. In most cases, I suspect, corporations and state power will factor more heavily in the shaping of on online space. However, even if their influence is significantly smaller, the role of individual users and their practices cannot be overlooked.

---

[243] Tumblr, "Sign Up."

Government Influence on Tumblr's Online Space

For Tumblr and its adult content policy, the primary source of tension over the platform's definition came from the relationship between Tumblr users and the company. These two segments of the platform triad had greatly differing stances on how the platform ought to be defined. However, given the interconnectedness the platform triad, it is never really possible to take any of the three components wholly in isolation. Even though the primary tension emerged from the users and the company, all three components of the triad exert at least some influence upon the overall definition of the platform. Thus, while my primary focus has been upon the role of users and company in the conflict surrounding Tumblr's adult content policy, a brief consideration of the possible role of state power in the platform triad is necessary.

For instance, Tumblr may have been under some legal pressure to tighten its stance on obscene content and policing of illegal materials. In November 2018, the Tumblr app was removed from the iOS App store, prompting speculation that Tumblr had somehow violated Apple's guidelines.[244] After the app was eventually restored, Tumblr Staff explained that despite comparing all uploaded content to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children's (NCMEC) database, some instances of child pornography had made it through the site's filters.[245] Though U.S. law is generally favorable to online platforms, child pornography is content that is generally not subject to safe harbor provisions.[246] Tumblr, and indeed Apple with its iOS App Store platform, may have risked legal liability if they did not take swift action to

---

[244] Chance Miller, "Tumblr for IOS Mysteriously Disappears from the App Store, Company Investigating," 9to5Mac, November 18, 2018, https://9to5mac.com/2018/11/18/tumblr-for-ios-mysteriously-disappears-from-the-app-store-company-investigating/.

[245] Tumblr Help Center, "Issues with the IOS App," Help Center, December 12, 2018, http://tumblr.zendesk.com/hc/en-us/articles/360012260613-November-16-2018-Issues-with-the-iOS-app; Whitney, "The Reason Tumblr Vanished from the App Store."

[246] See, for instance: Communications Decency Act (47 U.S.C. § 230); Gillespie, *Custodians of the Internet*.

remove the content in question. These potential legal liabilities may have been a factor that Tumblr Staff considered when deciding to implement a stricter adult content policy. Though the majority of the controversy surrounding Tumblr's new adult content policy emerged from disagreement between the platform's corporate owners and its users, these legal liabilities signal the influence, albeit indirect, of state power upon the platform's definition.

Albeit indirect in this instance, government and state power is nevertheless a component of the platform triad that defines the characteristics of an online space. At different times and within different contexts, each point of the triad may have varying degrees of influence as compared to the others. Though in the case of the Tumblr Porn Ban the online space primarily came into question as a result of the tension between company and users, it is worth bearing in mind that government laws and regulation nevertheless did have at least some minor influence. Furthermore, each component of the platform triad does not always act wholly independently. For instance, though state power had a limited and indirect role in shaping the Tumblr platform, there were many users that evoked the ideas of government regulation in their response to the newly announced adult content policy. Though the platform triad is useful for untangling the fluid nature of online spaces, the user framing of the Porn Ban as an issue of free speech thus underscores the unfinalizable complexity of defining an online platform.

Freedom of Speech

In the weeks that followed Tumblr Staff's announcement of the new adult content policy, several users expressed a sense that their rights to freedom of expression were being violated by

the new policy.[247] However, because Tumblr Inc. is a private company and not associated with the government, the way that it chooses to enforce policies within its online space is not strictly a free speech issue. Nevertheless, the freedom of speech in online spaces merits brief consideration because many users turned to the First Amendment to justify and explain their disagreement with the newly updated adult content policy. Additionally, though framing Tumblr's adult content policy as a freedom of speech issue would likely not pass constitutional muster, it signals the indirect role of government power within the platform triad and the shaping of Tumblr's platform and online space.

As many legal scholars are quick to note, the First Amendment does not provide blanket permission for any person to say anything they would like.[248] The colloquial example of shouting "fire!" in a crowded theater is one such case; speech that poses a clear and present danger is not protected. Additionally, indecent and obscene speech have consistently been restricted and limited through government action, and these forms of regulation have been upheld as constitutional. An additional layer of complexity emerges from the fact that although "indecency" and "obscenity" may be used interchangeably in everyday conversations, they have distinct legal meanings.[249] Obscene speech is *never* protected under the First Amendment, whereas indecent speech is generally protected in most circumstances.[250] The complexity of

---

[247] For example: dinofreddy, "Freedom of expression is a human right," December 7, 2018,https://dinofreddy.tumblr.com/post/180892588734/freedom-of-expression-is-a-human-right-and-tumblr; scripture homosexuality, "Update: Why This Blog Has Been Silent," January 6, 2019, https://scripturehomosexuality.tumblr.com/post/181782128805/update-why-this-blog-has-been-silent-and-this

[248] Steven H. Shiffrin, *What's Wrong with the First Amendment?* (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

[249] This ambiguity of language is further compounded by terms such as "inappropriate" and "NSFW" that are often employed by online platforms. While these words do not have the same legal implications as "indecent" or "obscene," they are nevertheless key components of how speech is regulated by non-government entities and are typically articulated in terms of the specific community standards.

[250] Miller v. California, 413 U.S. 15 (1973); Federal Communications Commission v. Pacifica Foundation, 438 U.S. 726 (1978).

regulating speech is compounded within most settings, but especially for online platforms,

because there are factors beyond state power alone that can restrict individual speech.[251] In the

case of Tumblr and its updated adult content policy, there may have been some indirect influence

of state power upon the website's policies, but the overall definition of the platform also emerged

in part from the users and Tumblr's corporate owners as well.

Though Tumblr's updated content policy is not a violation of the First Amendment, a

brief consideration of the controversy through the lens of freedom of speech, can elucidate the

fluidity of defining an online platform through the triad of company, users, and government. For

instance, the malleable definitions of community standards for indecency often come into

question wherever speech is regulated. And, when considering how speech is regulated in the era

of Internet platforms, we must look beyond the law and also consider company and users. As

Lawrence Lessig writes, "a constitutional account of free speech that thought only of the

government would be radically incomplete."[252] In his view, online speech is regulated by an

amalgamation of codes arising from laws, markets, societal norms, and platform architectures.[253]

And when it comes to regulating speech, many of these codes still rely on the nebulous definition

of "community standards" in some form or another. In offline settings, the boundaries or

confines of the particular community are typically fairly evident. The community standards in

Lancaster, Pennsylvania are separate from the community standards in Las Vegas, Nevada, for

---

[251] When considering the role of state power, the Supreme Court has established that online indecency should be policed similarly to broadcast television. But, beyond state power, online communication may be regulated by countless other parties. ACLU v. Reno (521 U.S. 844); Ashcroft v. ACLU (542 U.S. 656).

[252] Lawrence Lessig, *Code Version 2.0* (New York: Basic Books, 2006), 223.

[253] Lessig, *Code Version 2.0.*

instance. Applying separate standards of freedom of speech and indecency within these communities is not too tall an order.

But in online settings, the crux here is the boundaries of a given "community." On an online platform, what constitutes the community? Is it even possible for there to be a singular set of community standards applies evenly across an entirely online space? Part of the reason that online platforms and spaces are so fluid and ambiguous is because there often is not on singular community, but rather an amalgamation of smaller users groups and communities that coexist within the same online space. Because of this, there is ample opportunity for each part of the platform triad to continually contribute to the shifting definition and characteristics of the platform and its online space. Because a platform's overall meaning emerges from tensions and negotiations between its users, its corporate owners, and governments, it is always shifting. Given this unfinalizability, perhaps the disagreement over the Tumblr Porn Ban was inevitable. Even if it had not resulted from the adult content policy specifically, there was always the opportunity for disagreement over the definition of the Tumblr platform. However, the platform triad does not have to only make possible conflict and disagreement; because the online space is constantly being shaped and reshaped, the future of Tumblr is not wholly decided and there remain many opportunities for it to change.

The Future of Tumblr

Throughout the bulk of this thesis, I have directed my attention toward the past. Though the Tumblr Porn Ban played out just a few years ago, it is nevertheless a past event. In my analysis of both the corporate communication and the user responses, I have aimed to identify the controversy surrounding the new adult content policy, and employed digital discourse analyses to pinpoint why the conflict which emerged had been so strong. I have used the model

107

of the platform triad to explain how the definition and characteristic of an online space emerge

not from a single source but rather from the tensions between user, company, and governments.

However, to conclude I would like to turn from the past and shift toward the future. Though the

new adult content policy represented a significant change in what the platform had once meant,

this platform triad signals that the definition of the platform is never finalized. So, what might be

in store for the future of Tumblr?

Prior to the implementation of the new adult content policy, Tumblr had represented an

online queer space—an SNS platform that was distinct from other popular platforms such as

Facebook or Twitter. As compared to these more mainstream websites, Tumblr had more of an

alternative identity, and through its affordances and individual user practices had become an

important online queer space where LGBTQ+ individuals and communities could explore and

express facets of their individual identities. I have suggested that in the wake of the adult content

policy, the platform had lost its characteristics as the online queer space. However, the reason

that the platform and its online space changed is only partially a direct result of the removal of

adult content. And, though the Porn Ban represented an instance where the platform's corporate

owner's significantly reshaped the online space, the fact that individual users remain part of the

platform triad suggests that the possibility for Tumblr to be an online queer space once again is

not wholly closed off.

The Tumblr platform still has the potential to serve as a space for LGBTQ+ people and

groups, as well as continue living up to its "alternative" identity as compared to mainstream SNS

websites. Despite the influence of powerful institutions in the form of the company policy as

well as possible government regulation, the platform triad still includes the individual users. As

such, there remains the possibility for user groups to contribute to the definition and reshaping of the platform by carving out space and defining it through their own practices.

Even in the wake of the adult content policy it is still possible for the platform to be an online queer space because it was never entirely the pornography that had made Tumblr queer. Though adult content had been a component of this characteristic, it was not everything. Instead, what the porn represented is what had contributed more directly to Tumblr as an online queer space. The freedom within the earlier policy to post and share adult content represented individual user autonomy. The previously lax policy, by explicitly allowing content that was often restricted on other platforms, empowered individual users to explore and express their own identities. Even for users that never posted or engaged with adult content on Tumblr, the potential to do so still contributed to the previous characteristic of the online space. Put another way, the prior policy toward adult content left users with a prominent role in the triad of user, company, and government.

Thus, when the adult content policy was suddenly changed, not only was pornographic content lost, but so too was user autonomy and agency. The conflict, at its surface, was about porn and adult content. But what this adult content policy really represented was a significant shift in the balance of power within the platform triad. Because of the users' continued role in the platform triad, Tumblr will still exist. While many users left the platform after the adult content policy, many chose to remain. And those individuals that continue to use Tumblr can continue to try to shape the online space so it serves them, and not just the company or government. Though Tumblr may have lost its characteristic as an online queer space because of the loss of user autonomy through the adult content policy, there remains the possibility for individual user practices to reshape the platform so it can be an online queer space once more.

The platform triad is not only present in the case of Tumblr and its updated adult content policy. The relationship and tension among users, companies, and governments is something that is present for all online platforms. Of course, the particular balance of each of the three groups will be different for each website and within any given context. Perhaps it is inevitable that a platform will eventually face conflict and tension over what the balance among each part of this triad should be. However, despite the influence of corporate and state power, the future of a platform does not necessarily have to be negative for its users. Individual user practices can still carve out an online space and contribute to the definition of the platform. However, the characteristics of an online platform are never wholly set in stone and individual user practices can always be affected by the other two parts of the triad. But just because users may be affected, they are never wholly removed. Users will always be a part of the platform triad that defines an online space. Though it may be easy to accept things online as largely negative and limiting of individual user autonomy. But by acknowledging the involvement of individual users in the platform triad it becomes possible to ask ourselves what we would like our online spaces to be, and how we as individuals might contribute to making those visions possible.

It is in this vein that I envision the platform triad being most useful. This model provides a useful analytical tool to study online spaces. The platform triad is not necessarily intended to provide an exact explanation of how a platform comes to be, but rather is a lens through which researchers and practitioners can approach and map out various online spaces. The platform triad expands on Gillespie's understanding on platforms, in which he explains that the term "platform" may be employed strategically by companies to present a website and web services in different

ways to different audiences.[254] Similarly, my conceptualization of the platform triad

acknowledges that what is seemingly one singular online space may actually have several

different definitions and purposes for its various audiences and stakeholders. A single-faceted

approach to studying a platform may miss the full nuances of what the online space represents; a

consideration of the users, the company, and state power as offered by the platform triad offers a

useful analytical tool for researchers of online spaces. And, for individual users, the platform

triad may provide a useful means to make visible their relationship to corporate and state power

as well as carve out claim their own individual autonomy.

Throughout this thesis, I have used the platform triad to analyze Tumblr's updated adult

content policy and its ensuing controversy. The platform triad contextualizes how Tumblr Inc.

and Tumblr users experienced conflicting views over what the platform ought to be. However, as

an analytic tool, the platform triad can be applied to additional online spaces as well, including

cases where the balance of power among the three points of the triad are different. For instance,

take the online content aggregation website Voat, which is often considered a more fringe

alternative to Reddit.[255] When Reddit banned five subreddits characterized by hatefulness and

harassment, many users flocked to Voat.[256] Applying the platform triad to this example of

content regulation by Reddit, we can see that once again user practices and corporate power were

in contention. And, in the case of Voat at least, it was the individual users that had more control

---

[254] Tarleton Gillespie, "The Politics of 'Platforms,'" *New Media & Society* 12, no. 3 (May 1, 2010): 347–64, https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444809342738; Tarleton Gillespie, "Regulation of and by Platforms," in *The SAGE Handbook of Social Media*, by Jean Burgess, Alice Marwick, and Thomas Poell (London: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2018), 254–78, https://doi.org/10.4135/9781473984066.n15.

[255] Adi Robertson, "Welcome to Voat: Reddit Killer, Troll Haven, and the Strange Face of Internet Free Speech," The Verge, July 10, 2015, https://www.theverge.com/2015/7/10/8924415/voat-reddit-competitor-free-speech.

[256] Emma Woollacott, "Users Flock To Voat As Reddit Shuts Harassing Groups," Forbes, June 11, 2015, https://www.forbes.com/sites/emmawoollacott/2015/06/11/users-flock-to-voat-as-reddit-shuts-harassing-groups/.

over defining and shaping the online space. Another future direction of research in which the

platform triad could be useful is Facebook's soon-to-be implemented Oversight Board.[257] In

response to recent controversies of Facebook's content moderation, including CEO Mark

Zuckerberg testifying before Congress, the Oversight Board was announced to "uphold the

principle of giving people a voice while also recognizing the reality of keeping people safe."[258]

Though a separate legal entity from the Facebook corporation, this review board nevertheless

reflects the intertwined interests of users, company, and government when it comes to the

shaping of online space. The platform triad I have sketched out here can be a useful analytical

tool to approach these forms of online regulation.

The Future of the Internet

      To conclude, I would like to revisit some of the initial hopes, dreams, and possibilities of

the early days of the internet. The Tumblr Porn Ban has been an opportunity to reconsider the

role of individual users in shaping their online spaces, which calls into question these idealistic

view of the internet as a positive force. Though many of these early myths have since been

refined and critiqued, I contend that we need not entirely throw them to the curb. Through the

platform triad of user, company, and government, it is always possible for our online spaces to

be redefined and reshaped. And, by acknowledging these many forces that may influence the

definition of a platform, it is possible for us as individual users to pave the way for a better and

---

[257] Brent Harris, "Preparing the Way Forward for Facebook's Oversight Board," *Facebook* (blog), January 28, 2020, https://about.fb.com/news/2020/01/facebooks-oversight-board/.

[258] Camila Domonoske, "Mark Zuckerberg Tells Senate: Election Security Is An 'Arms Race,'" NPR.org, accessed May 4, 2020, https://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2018/04/10/599808766/i-m-responsible-for-what-happens-at-facebook-mark-zuckerberg-will-tell-senate; Mark Zuckerberg, "A Blueprint for Content Governance and Enforcement," Facebook, November 15, 2018, https://www.facebook.com/notes/mark-zuckerberg/a-blueprint-for-content-governance-and-enforcement/10156443129621634/?hc_location=ufi.

more positive future internet. Howard Rheingold predicted that through the internet we would now have "access to a tool that could bring conviviality and understanding into our lives and might help revitalize the public sphere" and that this so-called "electronic agora" would revitalize democracy.[259] Essentially, he put forth a narrative of citizen empowerment—an improvement of individual lives made possible through technology.

In recent years, media studies scholars have acknowledged that these positive and idealistic visions of the internet are not wholly realistic and have begun to acknowledge their negative consequences. There has been significant scholarship and writing about the problematic politics and cultural implications of new media technologies. Safiya Noble, for instance, has delineated the inherent inequalities and prejudiced effects of seemingly neutral search engines.[260] And Sarah T. Roberts has examined the dismal conditions of human labor within the somewhat hidden world of online content moderation.[261] Discussing online communication more broadly, Nick Couldry and Ulises A. Mejias describe that, "the Internet, understood as an infrastructure of connection, has reconstituted social space in a fundamental way," and has transformed individual human lives into the raw inputs for capitalism and colonialism.[262]

However the internet and its future does not necessarily have to be automatically framed in such bleak and pessimistic terms. There are still many possible benefits and positive outcomes of the internet and SNS platforms. The platform triad of user, company, and government demonstrates the myriad ways that an online space can continually be redefined. In this way, it

---

[259] Rheingold, *The Virtual Community*, 14.

[260] Safiya Umoja Noble, *Algorithms of Oppression: How Search Engines Reinforce Racism* (New York: New York University Press, 2018).

[261] Sarah T. Roberts, *Behind the Screen: Content Moderation in the Shadows of Social Media* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019).

[262] Couldry and Mejias, *The Costs of Connection*, 21.

becomes possible to more accurately map out and understand our various online spaces. Indeed, it is possible to be cautiously optimistic and recognize, as Couldry and Mejias have, that "hundreds of millions of people have adapted their lives in response to the existence of platforms, and much use of social media and data processing is productive and well-meaning."[263] Though much of the headlines concerning the internet in the 21st century may seem to be overwhelmingly negative, the fact that the individual user remain part of the platform triad may offer a sliver of hope.

A platform is not simply the result of its corporate owners and government power. Individual users and their day-to-day practices in online spaces also contributes to the definition and characteristics of the platform. The three components of the platform triad are always interwoven and cannot necessarily be taken wholly in isolation. Pinpointing their overlaps and overall push and pull is a way to make visible a more positive path forward for the future of the internet. We live so much of our lives in online spaces and therefore we owe it to ourselves, and to each other, to interrogate what we want that space to be.

---

[263] Couldry and Mejias, 193.

Bibliography

Ahmed, Sara. *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2006.

Alilunas, Peter. *Smutty Little Movies: The Creation and Regulation of Adult Video*. Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2016.

Ankerson, Megan Sapnar. *Dot-Com Design: The Rise of a Usable, Social, Commercial Web*. New York: New York University Press, 2018.

Anzaldúa, Gloria, Norma Cantú, and Aída Hurtado. *Borderlands / La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. 4 edition. San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 2012.

AoIR Ethics Committee. "Ethical Decision-Making and Internet Research 2.0: Recommendations from the AoIR Ethics Working Committee," September 2012. https://aoir.org/reports/ethics2.pdf.

———. "Internet Research: Ethical Guidelines 3.0," October 6, 2019. https://aoir.org/reports/ethics3.pdf.

Attu, Rose, and Melissa M. Terras. "What People Study When They Study Tumblr: Classifying Tumblr-Related Academic Research." *Journal of Documentation* 73, no. 3 (March 24, 2017): 528–54. https://doi.org/10.1108/JD-08-2016-0101.

Barbrook, Richard, and Andy Cameron. "The Californian Ideology." *Science as Culture* 6, no. 1 (1996): 44–72. https://doi.org/10.1080/09505439609526455.

Barlow, John Perry. "A Declaration of the Independence of Cyberspace." Electronic Frontier Foundation, February 8, 1996. https://www.eff.org/cyberspace-independence.

Baym, Nancy K. *Personal Connections in the Digital Age*. Cambridge, UK ; Malden, MA: Polity, 2010.

Becker, Ron. *Gay TV and Straight America*. New Brunswick, N.J: Rutgers University Press, 2006.

Bell, David, Jon Binnie, Julia Cream, and Gill Valentine. "All Hyped up and No Place to Go." *Gender, Place & Culture* 1, no. 1 (March 1, 1994): 31–47. https://doi.org/10.1080/09663699408721199.

Bercovici, Jeff. "Tumblr: David Karp's $800 Million Art Project." Forbes, January 2, 2013. https://www.forbes.com/sites/jeffbercovici/2013/01/02/tumblr-david-karps-800-million-art-project/.

Booth, Paul. "Reifying the Fan: Inspector Spacetime as Fan Practice." *Popular Communication* 11, no. 2 (April 1, 2013): 146–59. https://doi.org/10.1080/15405702.2013.779505.

Bourlai, Elli, and Susan C. Herring. "Multimodal Communication on Tumblr: 'I Have So Many Feels!'" In *Proceedings of the 2014 ACM Conference on Web Science*, 171–175. Bloomington, Indiana: ACM, 2014. https://doi.org/10.1145/2615569.2615697.

boyd, danah. ""Real Names" Policies Are an Abuse of Power." apophenia, August 4, 2011. http://www.zephoria.org/thoughts/archives/2011/08/04/real-names.html.

———. "Social Network Sites as Networked Publics: Affordances, Dynamics, and Implications." In *Networked Self: Identity, Community, and Culture on Social Network Sites*, edited by Zizi Papacharissi, 39–58, 2010. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203876527-8.

boyd, danah, and Nicole B. Ellison. "Social Network Sites: Definition, History, and Scholarship." *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 13, no. 1 (2007): 210–30. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1083-6101.2007.00393.x.

Brammer, John Paul. "RIP Tumblr Porn. You Made Me Who I Am." Washington Post, December 4, 2018. https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2018/12/04/rip-tumblr-porn-you-made-me-who-i-am/.

Brock, André. "Critical Technocultural Discourse Analysis." *New Media & Society* 20, no. 3 (March 1, 2018): 1012–30. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444816677532.

Bruns, Axel, Brenda Moon, Avijit Paul, and Felix Münch. "Towards a Typology of Hashtag Publics: A Large-Scale Comparative Study of User Engagement across Trending Topics." *Communication Research and Practice* 2, no. 1 (January 2, 2016): 20–46. https://doi.org/10.1080/22041451.2016.1155328.

Bucher, T., and A. Helmond. "The Affordances of Social Media Platforms." In *The SAGE Handbook of Social Media*, 233–53. Sage Publications, Inc, 2018.

Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York : Routledge, 1999.

Campbell, John Edward. "Outing PlanetOut: Surveillance, Gay Marketing and Internet Affinity Portals." *New Media & Society* 7, no. 5 (October 1, 2005): 663–83. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444805056011.

Cavalcante, Andre. "Tumbling Into Queer Utopias and Vortexes: Experiences of LGBTQ Social Media Users on Tumblr." *Journal of Homosexuality*, September 20, 2018, 1–21. https://doi.org/10.1080/00918369.2018.1511131.

Chang, Yi, Lei Tang, Yoshiyuki Inagaki, and Yan Liu. "What Is Tumblr: A Statistical Overview and Comparison." *ACM SIGKDD Explorations Newsletter* 16, no. 1 (September 2014): 21–29. https://doi.org/10.1145/2674026.2674030.

Cherny, Lynn. "Gender Differences in Text-Based Virtual Reality." In *Cultural Performances: Proceedings of the Third Berkeley Women and Language Conference. Berkeley: Berkeley Women and Language Group*, 102–15, 1994.

Cheshire, Tom. "Tumbling on Success: How Tumblr's David Karp Built a £500 Million Empire." *Wired UK*, February 2, 2012. https://www.wired.co.uk/article/tumbling-on-success.

Cho, Alexander. "Queer Reverb: Tumblr, Affect, Time." In *Networked Affect*, edited by Ken Hillis, Susanna Paasonen, and Michael Petit. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2015.

Coletto, Mauro, Luca Maria Aiello, Claudio Lucchese, and Fabrizio Silvestri. "Pornography Consumption in Social Media." In *Proceedings of the 10th International AAAI Conference on Web and Social Media*. Cologne, Germany, 2016. http://arxiv.org/abs/1612.08157.

Couldry, Nick, and Ulises Ali Mejias. *The Costs of Connection: How Data Is Colonizing Human Life and Appropriating It for Capitalism*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2019.

Creswell, John W., and J. David Creswell. *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*. Fifth edition. Los Angeles: SAGE, 2018.

Delo, Cotton. "Tumblr Announces First Foray Into Paid Advertising." Ad Age, April 18, 2012. https://adage.com/article/special-report-digital-conference/social-media-tumblr-announces-foray-paid-ads/234214/.

Dibbell, Julian. "A Rape in Cyberspace: How an Evil Clown, a Hatian Trickster Spirt, Two Wizards, and a Cast of Dozens Turned a Database into a Society." In *Internet Dreams: Archetypes, Myths, and Metaphors*, edited by Mark Stefik. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1996.

Doland, Angela. "Tumblr's Porn Ban. Plus, a Super Bowl Ad Update: Tuesday Wake-Up Call." Ad Age, December 4, 2018. https://adage.com/article/news/wake-call-news-tumblr-super-bowl-youtube/315844.

Domonoske, Camila. "Mark Zuckerberg Tells Senate: Election Security Is An 'Arms Race.'" NPR.org. Accessed May 4, 2020. https://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2018/04/10/599808766/i-m-responsible-for-what-happens-at-facebook-mark-zuckerberg-will-tell-senate.

Facebook. "Facebook - Log In or Sign Up," 2019. https://www.facebook.com/.

Faitelson, Yaki. "Yes, The GDPR Will Affect Your U.S.-Based Business." Forbes. Accessed July 25, 2019. https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbestechcouncil/2017/12/04/yes-the-gdpr-will-affect-your-u-s-based-business/.

Ferreday, Debra, and Simon Lock. "Computer CRoss-Dressing: Queering the Virtual Subject." In *Queer Online: Media Technology and Sexuality*, edited by Kate O'Riordan and David J. Phillips, 155–74. New York: Peter Lang Inc., International Academic Publishers, 2007.

Fingas, Jon. "Tumblr Founder and CEO David Karp Resigns." Engadget, November 27, 2017. https://www.engadget.com/2017/11/27/tumblr-founder-david-karp-resigns/.

Fink, Marty, and Quinn Miller. "Trans Media Moments: Tumblr, 2011–2013." *Television & New Media* 15, no. 7 (November 1, 2014): 611–26. https://doi.org/10.1177/1527476413505002.

Fraser, Vikki. "Queer Closets and Rainbow Hyperlinks: The Construction and Constraint of Queer Subjectivities Online." *Sexuality Research and Social Policy* 7, no. 1 (March 1, 2010): 30–36. https://doi.org/10.1007/s13178-010-0006-1.

Gauntlett, David. *Media, Gender and Identity: An Introduction*. 2nd ed. New York: Routledge, 2008.

Gerrard, Ysabel. "Beyond the Hashtag: Circumventing Content Moderation on Social Media." *New Media & Society* 20, no. 12 (December 2018): 4492–4511. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444818776611.

Gillespie, Tarleton. *Custodians of the Internet: Platforms, Content Moderation, and the Hidden Decisions That Shape Social Media*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018.

———. "Regulation of and by Platforms." In *The SAGE Handbook of Social Media*, by Jean Burgess, Alice Marwick, and Thomas Poell, 254–78. London: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2018. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781473984066.n15.

———. "The Politics of 'Platforms.'" *New Media & Society* 12, no. 3 (May 1, 2010): 347–64. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444809342738.

Goel, Vindu. "Verizon Completes $4.48 Billion Purchase of Yahoo, Ending an Era." *The New York Times*, December 22, 2017, sec. Technology. https://www.nytimes.com/2017/06/13/technology/yahoo-verizon-marissa-mayer.html.

Gowrappan, Guru. "Introducing Verizon Media." Verizon Media Press, December 18, 2018. https://www.verizonmedia.com/press/2018/12/18/introducing-verizon-media.

Graham, Mark. "Geography/Internet: Ethereal Alternate Dimensions of Cyberspace or Grounded Augmented Realities?" *The Geographical Journal* 179, no. 2 (June 1, 2013): 177–82. https://doi.org/10.1111/geoj.12009.

Graham, Mark, and Matthew Zook. "Visualizing Global Cyberscapes: Mapping User-Generated Placemarks." *Journal of Urban Technology* 18, no. 1 (January 1, 2011): 115–32. https://doi.org/10.1080/10630732.2011.578412.

Gray, Mary L. *Out in the Country: Youth, Media, and Queer Visibility in Rural America*. Intersections : Transdisciplinary Perspectives on Genders and Sexualities. New York: New York University Press, 2009.

Hardy, Jonathan. *Critical Political Economy of the Media: An Introduction*. Communication and Society. London ; New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2014.

Hayles, N. Katherine. "Virtual Bodies and Flickering Signifiers." *October* 66 (1993): 69–91. https://doi.org/10.2307/778755.

Healy, Dave. "Cyberspace and Place: The Internet as Middle Landscape on the Electronic Frontier." In *Internet Culture*, edited by David Porter, 55–68. New York: Routledge, 1997.

Herring, Susan C. *Computer-Mediated Communication: Linguistic, Social, and Cross-Cultural Perspectives*. John Benjamins Publishing, 1996.

———. "Gender and Democracy in Computer-Mediated Communication." In *Computerization and Controversy (2nd Ed.)*, edited by Rob Kling, 476–89. Academic Press, Inc., 1996.

Kahn, Richard, and Douglas Kellner. "Oppositional Politics and the Internet: A Critical/Reconstructive Approach." *Cultural Politics* 1, no. 1 (March 1, 2005): 75–100. https://doi.org/10.2752/174321905778054926.

Keeling, Kara. "Queer OS." *Cinema Journal* 53, no. 2 (2014): 152–57.

Krouse, Sarah. "Verizon to Sell Tumblr to WordPress.Com Owner." *Wall Street Journal*, August 12, 2019, sec. Tech. https://www.wsj.com/articles/verizon-to-sell-tumblr-to-wordpress-owner-11565640000.

Laukkanen, Marjo. "Young Queers Online: The Limits and Possibilities of Non-Heterosexual Self-Representation in Online Contexts." In *Queer Online: Media Technology and Sexuality*, edited by Kate O'Riordan and David J. Phillips, 81–100. New York: Peter Lang Inc., International Academic Publishers, 2007.

Leskin, Paige. "Tumblr Is Banning All NSFW Content — and People Are Worrying It's the Beginning of the End for the Verizon-Owned Website." Business Insider, December 8, 2018. https://www.businessinsider.com/tumblr-bans-nfsw-content-and-users-say-the-platform-will-suffer-2018-12.

Lessig, Lawrence. *Code Version 2.0*. New York: Basic Books, 2006.

Levmore, Saul X., and Martha Craven Nussbaum. *The Offensive Internet: Speech, Privacy, and Reputation*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2010.

Liao, Shannon. "After the Porn Ban, Tumblr Users Have Ditched the Platform as Promised." The Verge, March 14, 2019. https://www.theverge.com/2019/3/14/18266013/tumblr-porn-ban-lost-users-down-traffic.

———. "Tumblr Porn Vanishes Today." The Verge, December 17, 2018.
https://www.theverge.com/2018/12/17/18141106/tumblr-porn-ban-adult-content-appeal.

———. "Tumblr's Adult Content Ban Means the Death of Unique Blogs That Explore
Sexuality." The Verge, December 6, 2018.
https://www.theverge.com/2018/12/6/18124260/tumblr-porn-ban-sexuality-blogs-unique.

Lindlof, Thomas R., and Bryan C. Taylor. *Qualitative Communication Research Methods*.
Fourth edition. Los Angeles: SAGE, 2017.

Mahtani, Minelle. "Judith Butler." In *Key Thinkers on Space and Place*, edited by Phil Hubbard
and Rob Kitchin, 65–71. London: Sage Publications, 2010.

McCann, Hannah, and Whitney Monaghan. *Queer Theory Now: From Foundations to Futures*.
1st ed. 2020 edition. Red Globe Press, 2019.

McChesney, Robert W. *Digital Disconnect: How Capitalism Is Turning the Internet Against
Democracy*. New York: The New Press, 2013.

McIlwain, Charlton. "Racial Formation, Inequality and the Political Economy of Web Traffic."
Information, Communication & Society 20, no. 7 (July 3, 2017): 1073–89.
https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2016.1206137.

Miller, Chance. "Tumblr for IOS Mysteriously Disappears from the App Store, Company
Investigating." 9to5Mac, November 18, 2018. https://9to5mac.com/2018/11/18/tumblr-
for-ios-mysteriously-disappears-from-the-app-store-company-investigating/.

Milner, Ryan M. "Pop Polyvocality: Internet Memes, Public Participation, and the Occupy Wall
Street Movement." *International Journal of Communication* 7, no. 0 (October 30, 2013):
34.

Mosco, Vincent. *The Digital Sublime: Myth, Power, and Cyberspace*. 1. paperback ed.
Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 2005.

Nakamura, Lisa. "Race in/for Cyberspace: Identity Tourism and Racial Passing on the Internet."
Works and Days 13, no. 1–2 (1995): 181–93.

Noble, Safiya Umoja. *Algorithms of Oppression: How Search Engines Reinforce Racism*. New
York: New York University Press, 2018.

Noble, Safiya Umoja, and Brendesha M. Tynes, eds. *The Intersectional Internet: Race, Sex,
Class, and Culture Online*. Peter Lang International Academic Publishers, 2016.

O'Riordan, Kate. "From Usenet to Gaydar: A Comment on Queer Online Community." *ACM
SIGGROUP Bulletin* 25, no. 2 (February 1, 2005): 28–32.
https://doi.org/10.1145/1067721.1067727.

O'Riordan, Kate, and David J. Phillips. "Introduction." In *Queer Online: Media Technology and Sexuality*, edited by Kate O'Riordan and David J. Phillips. New York: Peter Lang Inc., International Academic Publishers, 2007.

———, eds. *Queer Online: Media Technology and Sexuality*. New York: Peter Lang Inc., International Academic Publishers, 2007.

Petersen, Line Nybro. "Sherlock Fans Talk: Mediatized Talk on Tumblr." *Northern Lights: Film & Media Studies Yearbook* 12, no. 1 (2014): 87–104. https://doi.org/10.1386/nl.12.1.87_1.

Pettis, Ben. *Tumblr-Scraper*, 2019. https://github.com/boilingpenguin/tumblr-scraper.

Phillips, Whitney, and Ryan M. Milner. *The Ambivalent Internet: Mischief, Oddity, and Antagonism Online*. 1st edition. Malden, MA: Polity, 2017.

Poster, Mark. "Cyberdemocracy: Internet and the Public Sphere." In *Internet Culture*, edited by David Porter, 201–18. London: Routledge, 1997.

Powell, Jessica. "The Problem With Banning Pornography on Tumblr." *The New York Times*, December 7, 2018, sec. Opinion. https://www.nytimes.com/2018/12/06/opinion/tumblr-adult-content-pornography-ban.html.

Harris, Brent. "Preparing the Way Forward for Facebook's Oversight Board." *Facebook* (blog), January 28, 2020. https://about.fb.com/news/2020/01/facebooks-oversight-board/.

Rheingold, Howard. *The Virtual Community: Homesteading on the Electronic Frontier*. Revised Edition. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2000.

Robards, Brady, and Paul Byron. "There's Something Queer about Tumblr." The Conversation, May 29, 2017. http://theconversation.com/theres-something-queer-about-tumblr-73520.

Roberts, Sarah T. *Behind the Screen: Content Moderation in the Shadows of Social Media*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019.

Robertson, Adi. "Welcome to Voat: Reddit Killer, Troll Haven, and the Strange Face of Internet Free Speech." The Verge, July 10, 2015. https://www.theverge.com/2015/7/10/8924415/voat-reddit-competitor-free-speech.

Roderick, Leonie. "More than Half of LGBT+ Community Feels 'invisible' in Advertising." *Marketing Week*, April 5, 2017. https://www.marketingweek.com/lgbt-community-advertising/.

Romano, Aja. "Tumblr's Adult Content Ban Hurts All of Internet Culture." Vox, December 4, 2018. https://www.vox.com/2018/12/4/18124120/tumblr-porn-adult-content-ban-user-backlash.

Rosenberg, Eli. "Tumblr's Nudity Ban Removes One of the Last Major Refuges for Pornography on Social Media." Washington Post, December 3, 2018. https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2018/12/04/tumblrs-nudity-crackdown-means-pornography-will-be-harder-find-its-platform-than-nazi-propaganda/.

Sands, Mason. "Tumblocalypse: Where Tumblr And Its Users Are Headed After The Ban." Forbes, December 20, 2018. https://www.forbes.com/sites/masonsands/2018/12/20/tumblocalypse-where-tumblr-and-its-users-are-headed-after-the-ban/.

Savage, Dan. "Savage Love: Where to Find Porn after the Tumblr Ban." Detroit Metro Times. Accessed July 9, 2019. https://www.metrotimes.com/detroit/savage-love-where-to-find-porn-after-the-tumblr-ban/Content?oid=19039711.

Seko, Yukari, and Stephen P Lewis. "The Self—Harmed, Visualized, and Reblogged: Remaking of Self-Injury Narratives on Tumblr." *New Media & Society* 20, no. 1 (January 1, 2018): 180–98. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444816660783.

Shiffrin, Steven H. *What's Wrong with the First Amendment?* Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2016.

Shirky, Clay. "The Political Power of Social Media." *Foreign Affairs*, December 20, 2010. https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2010-12-20/political-power-social-media.

Silverstein, Jason. "Tumblr App Disappears from Apple's App Store Because of Child Porn." Accessed May 6, 2019. https://www.cbsnews.com/news/tumblr-app-disappears-from-apple-app-store-because-of-child-porn/.

Sloane, Garett. "Tumblr to Ban All Porn from Its Platform Starting Dec. 17." Ad Age, December 3, 2018. https://adage.com/article/digital/tumblr-rid-porn-left/315843.

Stefik, Mark, ed. *Internet Dreams: Archetypes, Myths, and Metaphors*. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1996.

Stone, Allucquere Rosanne. "Will the Real Body Please Stand Up?" *Cyberspace: First Steps*, 1991, 81–118.

Thrasher, Steven W. "What Tumblr's Porn Ban Really Means." The Atlantic, December 7, 2018. https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2018/12/tumblr-adult-content-porn/577471/.

Thurlow, Crispin. "Digital Discourse: Locating Language in New/Social Media." In *The Sage Handbook of Social Media*, edited by Jean Burgess, Alice Marwick, and Thomas Poell, 1st edition. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE inc, 2017.

Tiffany, Kaitlyn. "When Tumblr Bans Porn, Who Loses?" Vox, December 4, 2018. https://www.vox.com/the-goods/2018/12/4/18126112/tumblr-porn-ban-verizon-ad-goals-sex-work-fandom.

Tiidenberg, Katrin. "Boundaries and Conflict in a NSFW Community on Tumblr: The Meanings and Uses of Selfies." *New Media & Society* 18, no. 8 (September 1, 2016): 1563–78. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444814567984.

———. "Bringing Sexy Back: Reclaiming the Body Aesthetic via Self-Shooting." *Cyberpsychology: Journal of Psychosocial Research on Cyberspace* 8, no. 1 (March 1, 2014). https://doi.org/10.5817/CP2014-1-3.

Townsend, Anthony M. "Network Cities and the Global Structure of the Internet." *American Behavioral Scientist* 44, no. 10 (June 1, 2001): 1697–1716. https://doi.org/10.1177/00027640121957998.

Tripodi, Francesca. "There's No Such Thing as a Web Without Gatekeepers – Power Trip." Medium, October 18, 2018. https://medium.com/s/powertrip/theres-no-such-thing-as-a-web-without-gatekeepers-59f448b85b5e.

Tumblr. "About." Tumblr, 2019. https://www.tumblr.com/about.

———. "API." Accessed August 2, 2019. https://www.tumblr.com/docs/en/api/v2.

———. "Application Developer and API License Agreement." Accessed August 2, 2019. https://www.tumblr.com/docs/en/api_agreement.

———. "Community Guidelines," December 17, 2018. https://www.tumblr.com/policy/en/community.

———. "Sign Up." Tumblr, 2019. http://www.tumblr.com.

———. "Terms of Service," May 15, 2018. https://www.tumblr.com/policy/en/terms-of-service.

Tumblr Help Center. "Adult Content." Help Center, 2018. http://tumblr.zendesk.com/hc/en-us/articles/231885248-Adult-content.

———. "Issues with the IOS App." Help Center, December 12, 2018. http://tumblr.zendesk.com/hc/en-us/articles/360012260613-November-16-2018-Issues-with-the-iOS-app.

———. "Privacy Options." Help Center. Accessed August 9, 2019. http://tumblr.zendesk.com/hc/en-us/articles/115011611747-Privacy-options.

———. "Reviewing and Appealing Content Flagged as Adult." Help Center, 2018. http://tumblr.zendesk.com/hc/en-us/articles/360011657153-Reviewing-and-appealing-content-flagged-as-adult.

Tumblr Staff. "A Better, More Positive Tumblr," December 3, 2018. https://staff.tumblr.com/post/180758987165/a-better-more-positive-tumblr.

———. "A Better, More Positive Tumblr." Tumblr Staff, December 3, 2018.
https://staff.tumblr.com/post/180758987165/a-better-more-positive-tumblr.

———. "Hey Tumblr..." Tumblr Staff, December 17, 2018.
https://staff.tumblr.com/post/181199101690/hey-tumblr-a-couple-of-weeks-ago-we-announced-an.

———. "Our Community Guidelines Are Changing." Tumblr Staff, August 27, 2018.
https://staff.tumblr.com/post/177449083750/new-community-guidelines.

Tumblr Support. "Updates to Tumblr's Community Guidelines." Tumblr Support, December 3,
2018. https://support.tumblr.com/post/180758979032/updates-to-tumblrs-community-guidelines.

Turner, Fred. "Where the Counterculture Met the New Economy: The WELL and the Origins of
Virtual Community." *Technology and Culture* 46, no. 3 (2005): 485–512.

Twitter. "Twitter. It's What's Happening," 2019. https://twitter.com.

Van Alstyne, Marshall, and Erik Brynjolfsson. "Global Village or Cyber-Balkans? Modeling and
Measuring the Integration of Electronic Communities." *Management Science* 51, no. 6
(June 2005): 851–68. https://doi.org/10.1287/mnsc.1050.0363.

Verizon Communications Inc. "Form 8-K Current Report for the Period Ending 1/29/2019."
Securities and Exchange Commission, January 29, 2019. EDGAR.

———. "Form 8-K Current Report for the Period Ending 12/11/18." Securities and Exchange
Commission, December 11, 2018. EDGAR.

———. "Form 10-K Annual Report for the Period Ending 12/31/18." Securities and Exchange
Commission, February 5, 2019. EDGAR.

———. "Form 10-Q Current Report for the Period Ending 03/31/19." Securities and Exchange
Commission, April 26, 2019. EDGAR.

———. "Form 10-Q Current Report for the Period Ending 9/30/18." Securities and Exchange
Commission, October 30, 2018. EDGAR.

———. "Verizon Media Announces Sale of Tumblr to Automattic," August 12, 2019.
https://www.verizon.com/about/news/verizon-media-announces-sale-tumblr-automattic.

Walther, Joseph B. "Research Ethics in Internet-Enabled Research: Human Subjects Issues and
Methodological Myopia." *Ethics and Information Technology* 4, no. 3 (September 1,
2002): 205–16. https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1021368426115.

Wasko, Janet. *How Hollywood Works*. London ; Thousand Oaks, Calif: SAGE, 2003.

Wasko, Janet, Graham Murdock, and Helena Sousa, eds. *The Handbook of Political Economy of Communications*. Global Handbooks in Media and Communication Research. Chichester, West Sussex ; Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011.

Whitney, Lance. "The Reason Tumblr Vanished from the App Store: Child Pornography That Slipped through the Filters." Download.com, November 20, 2018. https://download.cnet.com/blog/download-blog/the-reason-tumblr-vanished-from-the-app-store-child-pornography-that-slipped-through-the-filters/.

Williams, Shirley A., Melissa M. Terras, and Claire Warwick. "What Do People Study When They Study Twitter? Classifying Twitter Related Academic Papers." *Journal of Documentation* 69, no. 3 (2013): 384–410.

Wilson, Robert E., Samuel D. Gosling, and Lindsay T. Graham. "A Review of Facebook Research in the Social Sciences." *Perspectives on Psychological Science* 7, no. 3 (2012): 203–20.

Woollacott, Emma. "Users Flock To Voat As Reddit Shuts Harassing Groups." Forbes, June 11, 2015. https://www.forbes.com/sites/emmawoollacott/2015/06/11/users-flock-to-voat-as-reddit-shuts-harassing-groups/.

Xu, Jiejun, and Tsai-Ching Lu. "Inferring User Interests on Tumblr." In *Social Computing, Behavioral-Cultural Modeling, and Prediction*, edited by Nitin Agarwal, Kevin Xu, and Nathaniel Osgood, 458–63. Lecture Notes in Computer Science. Springer International Publishing, 2015.

Yarow, Jay. "Yahoo's Board Approves $1.1 Billion Purchase Of Tumblr." Business Insider, May 19, 2013. https://www.businessinsider.com/yahoos-board-approves-11-billion-purchase-of-tumblr-2013-5.

Zeglin, Robert J., and Julie Mitchell. "Using Social Media to Assess Conceptualizations of Sexuality." *American Journal of Sexuality Education* 9, no. 3 (July 3, 2014): 276–91. https://doi.org/10.1080/15546128.2014.933994.

Zuckerberg, Mark. "A Blueprint for Content Governance and Enforcement." Facebook, November 15, 2018. https://www.facebook.com/notes/mark-zuckerberg/a-blueprint-for-content-governance-and-enforcement/10156443129621634/?hc_location=ufi.