

SOC

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Introduction**Tumblr**

This is a social media platform that allows users to create mini-blog versions called tumblelogs. The site allows users to post different content in their blogs, including videos, photos, links, Vimeo, music, among others. Its manifest social function is to connect, entertain, educate, and inspire. ¹ Manifest functions are “the intended and easily recognized ways in which an institution or social phenomenon operates” (Cumming, 2020, p 64). The latent or unintended functions of Tumblr, just like other social media, are advocacy and online harassment. People present their ideas and views on Tumblr, which could be subject to online harassment and lead to advocacy for human and animal rights. Tumblr connects users to various blogs depending on their interests and exposes them to content that ranges from relevant to irrelevant depending on the blogger. The information is arranged by subject; a user can easily search a topic and get links to various bloggers on the topic searched. Tumblr works by allowing users to create and post content that can be viewed, liked, reposted, or re-owned by other users. However, the users can also copyright their posts to prevent them from being used without their permission.

The registration to the Tumblr site is very swift and requires very little information. After entering an email address and a password, there is a need for a blog name; the site provides some examples to choose from. This shows that the users do not have to use their own identity, but it may be subject to identity fraud if they do. After login, one has to select their interests, which are unlimited as one can select all categories. The dashboard displays content from the selected interest areas and allows users to follow specific bloggers in their topics of choice. The most

evident social norms in Tumblr are following, re-blogging, commenting, liking, and forwarding. Following allows users to connect with other users on the site who post content relevant to their interests. There are blogs on the site based only on re-blogging other people's posts, and they still get a following from other users. Topics connect users with similar interests and allow them to form a virtual social group where they can post and respond to other people's posts.

Tumblr employs an inclusive social structure. Cumming (2020) defines social structure as "the organized pattern of social relationships..." (p. 42). The structure in Tumblr allows users to form relationships with whoever they choose. This applies across all users, and the ability to form more or fewer relationships depends solely on the user. Tumblr allows users to have both public and private interactions. The public interactions are mainly through notes and replies left by followers on blog posts. Though this is not very interactive, it allows various users to express their feelings, thoughts and attitudes towards the content on the site. Private interactions are mainly done through the messaging feature. The user can get direct reactions to posts or messages directly to their inbox. Only the recipient and the sender can view messages shared in the inbox, giving the site some sense of privacy. The abilities to gain followers and following on Tumblr are mainly based on innovation and diffusion. The most innovative posts get the innovators more following. Additionally, the ability of other users to find and re-blog such innovative posts also gain the diffusers followers.

Culture on Tumblr is expressed mainly through symbols. Images show culture mainly through dressing and food. There is also language whereby users may prefer to use their native language in their posts or comments. Through symbols, some cultural universals like the universal meaning of emojis are identified. Even if a user posts in a foreign language, another user can easily guess the mood and theme in the post by interpreting the symbols used. The

social butterfly effect is common in Tumblr. This means that people form close relationships due to similar interests. Additionally, there are many conflicts resulting from competition in that a good post in the right segment can earn a user more notes and followers. For instance, a blog post on the #food section could earn more followers for someone who reposts it to the #health & fitness section. The butterfly effect is also evident in the competition, as one viral post can earn the user several followers to their blog for all their future posts. There is also social mobility whereby users can unfollow a blogger because of a post they consider against their views or beliefs. The followers gained by a user become their significant others in that the followers significantly shape how the followed interact in Tumblr. The followers and followed share social capital that can easily be lost. A user with many followers can quickly lose them depending on what they post.

Tumblr provides a platform for people with different characteristics, preferences, and values to interact and express themselves openly. However, this is subject to stereotypes. For instance, in a blog post by Siir Poesia on September 16th 2021, the user asked followers to reblog his post if they were transgender, bisexual, lesbian, gay, pansexual or a supporter (Poesia, 2021). The post received various notes ranging from cultural relativism, culture shock, to ethnocentrism. Based on previous posts by the #health and fitness blogger on Tumblr, one can identify him as belonging to one of the mentioned posts. The post garnered more notes than all his other posts, and reactions were mainly of people supporting, ridiculing, or objecting to the contents of the post. The cultural relativists supported the concept, arguing that everyone can make their sexual preferences in society. Others expressed cultural shock by posting notes that showed that the open communication of such sexual preferences was new to them. Other followers expressed open stereotypes by terming the post inappropriate and the sexual

preferences evil. Ethnocentrism was evident when some followers argued that homosexuality was evil and that all people should embrace heterosexuality.

However, the social interactions in Tumblr cannot compare to those in Facebook. As proof, in Facebook, a user interacts with family and friends. This means that the interactions are personal and with people well known to the users. Contrarily, nearly every account in Tumblr is a pseudo. For instance, I signed in using the blog name “Screechingbananadonut”, which was among the suggestions given during sign-up. The interactions may therefore be considered anonymous. However, a user can choose whichever blogs they like to follow without bothering about the user’s real identity. Additionally, Facebook allows users to join groups with similar interests where one is exposed to numerous views from the group members. Tumblr, on the other hand, only allows users to follow single blog posts. There are no similar interest groups. Though Facebook offers users more private posts, blog posts on Tumblr can be viewed by anyone who has similar interests. Lastly, Tumblr does not have the tagging feature as in Facebook. The feature allows a user to post the same thing in different accounts with the permission of the account holders.

Conclusion

Tumblr has both manifest and latent functions. The quick and easy registration process is meant to attract more users to the platform. The displayed content is mainly interest-based. The medium employs an all-inclusive social structure as it does not recognize race, gender, social class or age. The site grows on social conflict as there is constant competition among the users to attract the most followers to their blogs.

References

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