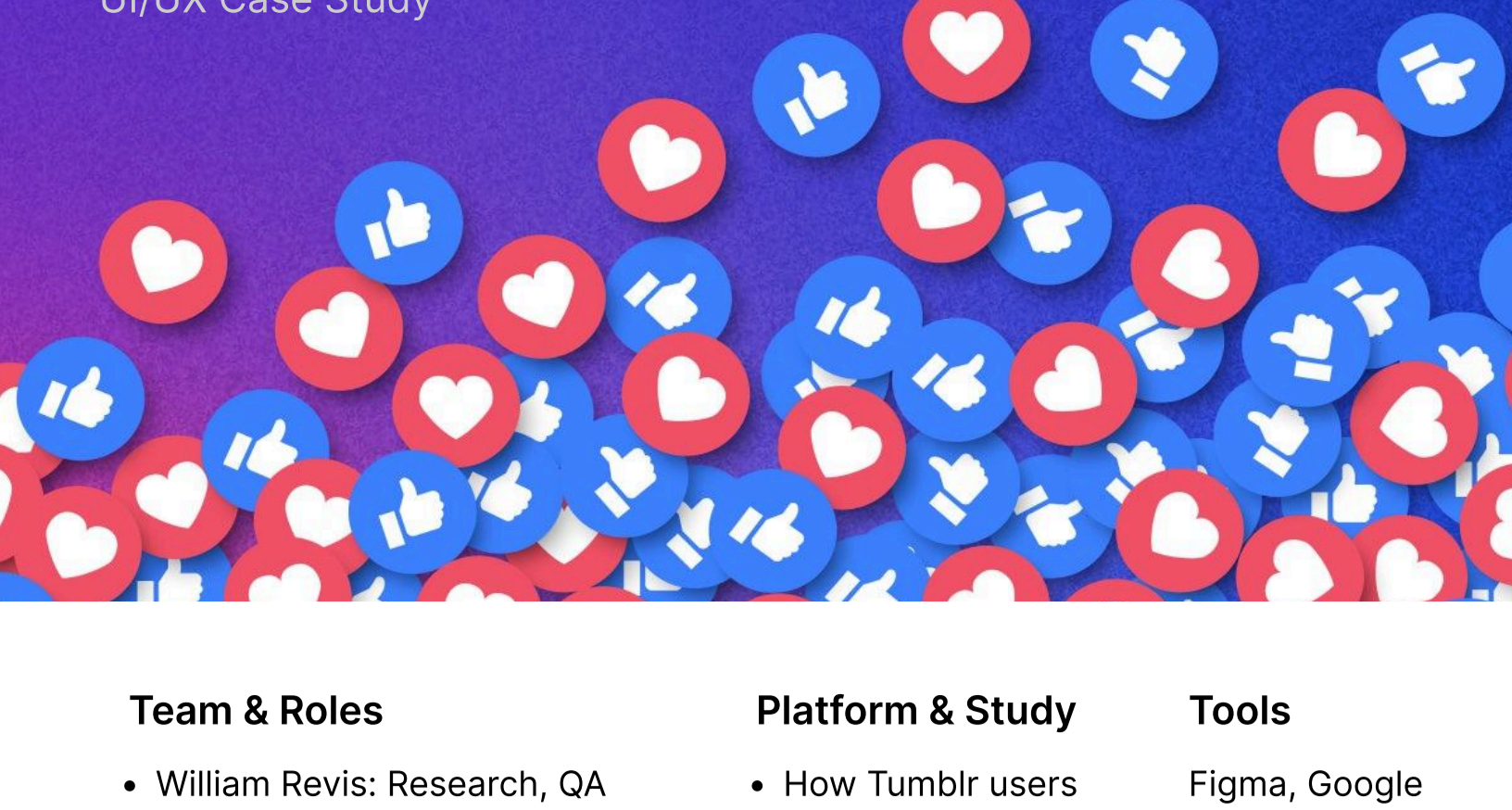


Tumblr

Overpersonalization

UI/UX Case Study



Team & Roles

- William Revis: Research, QA
- Megan Talghader: Research, QA

Platform & Study

- How Tumblr users respond to their algorithm

Tools

Figma, Google docs

Introduction

Tumblr is a social media platform that is most known for its shared content within fandom communities. Like many other social media, Tumblr has an algorithm based "For You" page.

This project was created as a behavioral study to find out how users understand and respond to their algorithmic system on Tumblr.



Research Plan

Tumblr is known for its content on anything related to fan media or hobbies. People will discuss scenes in tv shows/books/movies, recommend fanfiction recommendations, share gifs or memes, post fanart, etc. Tumblr's algorithm on the "For You" page picks which posts to recommend users. We researched how Tumblr users behave online in response to this algorithm.

01

Research Methods

- Google survey (online form)
- In-person interview
- Research online

02

Recruitment Plan

Recruit 8 users who are or were previously active Tumblr users.

03

Data Analysis

Find trends in how users understand their algorithms vs. in-app behavior

Data and Key Findings

● Finding applies to the user

● Finding does not apply to the user

01

Lack of Control



Users perceive a lack of control when interacting with the algorithm. Many participants express a dislike towards what's seen on their "for you" page based on the algorithm.

02

Lack of Trust



Due to the lack of control users face, they distrust Tumblr's algorithm in its entirety, and many stop using the "For You" page feature altogether.

03

Preference Control



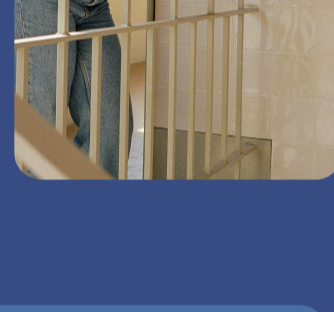
To make up for the loss of the "For You" page, users prefer to substitute the page through the use of other platform features. One common example of this is the "following" tab.

Implications:

In order to study user behavior it's best to question participants in two categories: general knowledge and response. Designers can learn how to adapt their design once trends reveal themselves. In this case, **Tumblr's algorithm needs improvement in adapting to the personal taste of the user.**

Persona: Samantha Bailey

Samantha is a fandom Tumblr user who has been active in nature fairy communities for the past few years. She enjoys creative minimalist content, and an organized content flow. She prefers using Tumblr as a calm artistic outlet rather than heavily relying on its algorithmic patterns and feed. She is **26 years old** and has **7+ years of experience using Tumblr, and creating fairy nature fandoms.**



Behaviors

- Avoids For You feed
- Curates via tags & Following
- Blocks irrelevant tags

Motivations

- Control content flow
- Stable, predictable feed
- Reduce algorithm noise

Frustrations

- Algorithm overpersonalizes
- Feed shifts after one like
- Low trust in recommendations

Goals

- Fully controllable feed
- Simple, relevant content
- Customization tools

Surprising & Unexpected Findings

From the evaluation and analysis of the platform and persona some unexpected findings were regardless of **algorithm distrust it doesn't reduce the users loyalty to the platform, instead of quitting or leaving the platform users find bypassing systems or tools, and finally that manual user manipulation replaces the "For You" feed.**

Research Proposal

i Research Activity & Method

The proposed research activity would be a participatory design research where users. Users would be asked to purpose a quick addition or tool and allowed to sketch this feature about how they believe that the feed works and then allowed to sketch and map how they want to feed to work.

ii Research Focus and Questions

The focus of this research would build off of earlier findings, around algorithmic influence and manipulation. Key questions would include:

- How users mentally map the current feed?
- Where the confusion occur around feed recommendations and manipulations?
- How tools or manipulations would help users manipulate feed?

iii Target Recruitment, Participants, Consent

The ideal participants would be 18-28, recruitment would occur thorough tumblr with post directly to the feed or on external websites like reddit, and other social platforms. Of course participants would be asked consensually and remain anonymous.

Conclusion

a) Overall from the conducted research and data we can conclude that from the user behaviors are avoiding the main for you feed, and attempting to manipulate content. We can conclude that from studying the theory and by conducting the interviews and analysis that Tumblr users are manipulating their content feed to avoid algorithmic overload.

We can also understand and conclude that from the platform design perspective that Tumblr does provide a way unironically to manipulate and bypass algorithmic recommendations and content. Although this does provide confusion because users are having to use platform curated tools which creates a problem for the user. The user is ultimately using platforms unintentional tools to work around relying on default features and content.

Although from a social computing standard perspective tumblr is a social platform for peace, comfort, expression, and involving yourself in a safe space and community. Users do view this social application as a protective barrier for their expression of their own interest and themselves.

We can also conclude that users just want overall a place to express themselves in content driven manner that isn't overwhelming. They want to discover their social content and discover new content and ideas related to their own personal interest.

b) Overall we can conclude in a broader spectrum, that overall that users want control and this can lead to unintended patterns of manipulation and use. This research highlights the overwhelming pattern of misguidance and signals. These users want ways to use the platform in their own pathway, and want a way to manipulate it to their own accord rather than having to constantly resist the algorithm.

Regardless, there should be a more clear distinction of how users are being shown content especially a more clear pattern and pathway around curated algorithmic content.