

Tumblr Heuristic Evaluation Abridged Version

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Introduction & Context

Tumblr is a microblogging and social networking platform founded by David Karp in 2007 and owned by Yahoo! Inc. since May 20, 2013. According to Business Insider, Tumblr users are young and extremely engaged (3). Tumblr is especially popular among young adults between ages 18-29 (5).

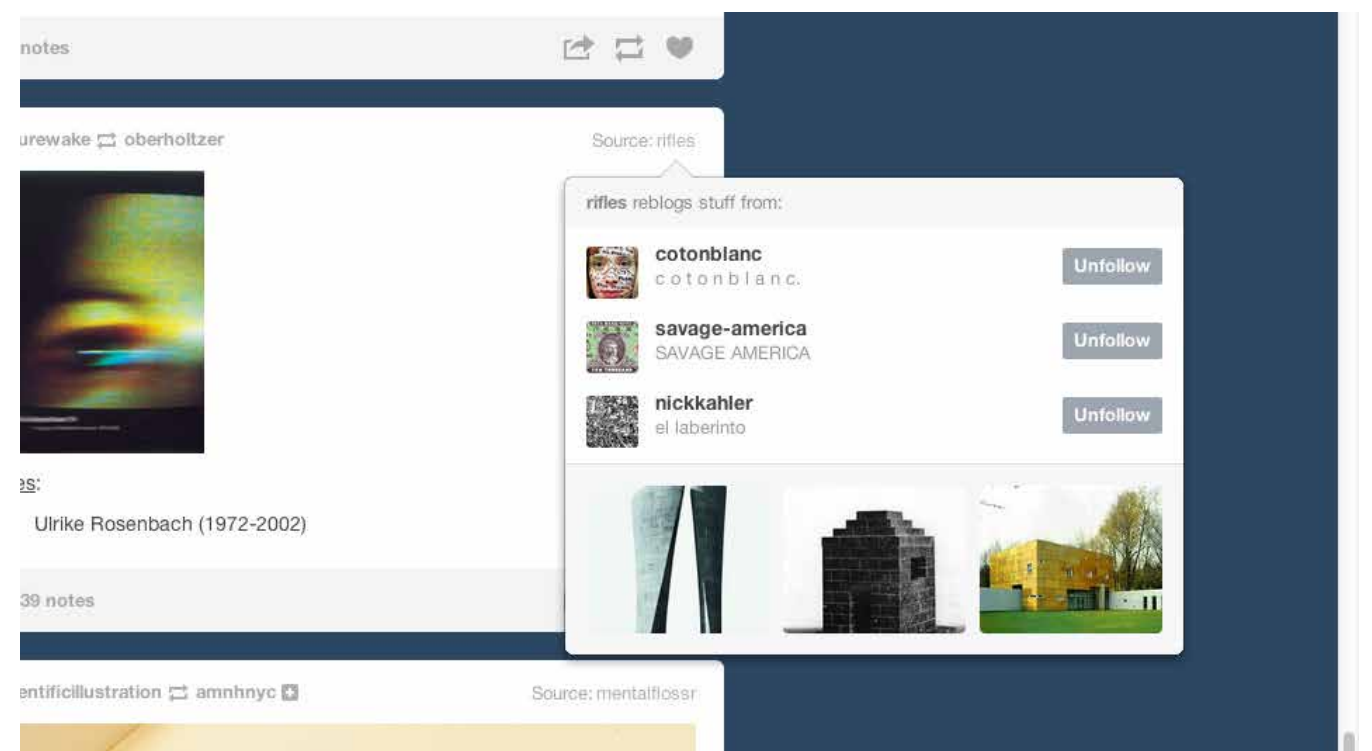
The site is extremely user friendly and offers useful functionality for both beginner and advanced users. Auto-formatting of text, photo, gif, quotes, link, chat, audio, and video content facilitates fast posting for users of all experience levels and customization through code editing and API forwarding provides advanced users total creative freedom.

Tumblr integrates the experiences of processing content and curating content.

Users can find content by browsing the dashboard feed (which continuously updates to include posts from following tumblrs), start following who the user's following tumblrs follow, and see users who have liked or reblogged a post. Tumblr's dashboard facilitates content curation and content sharing.



Tumblr Dashboard



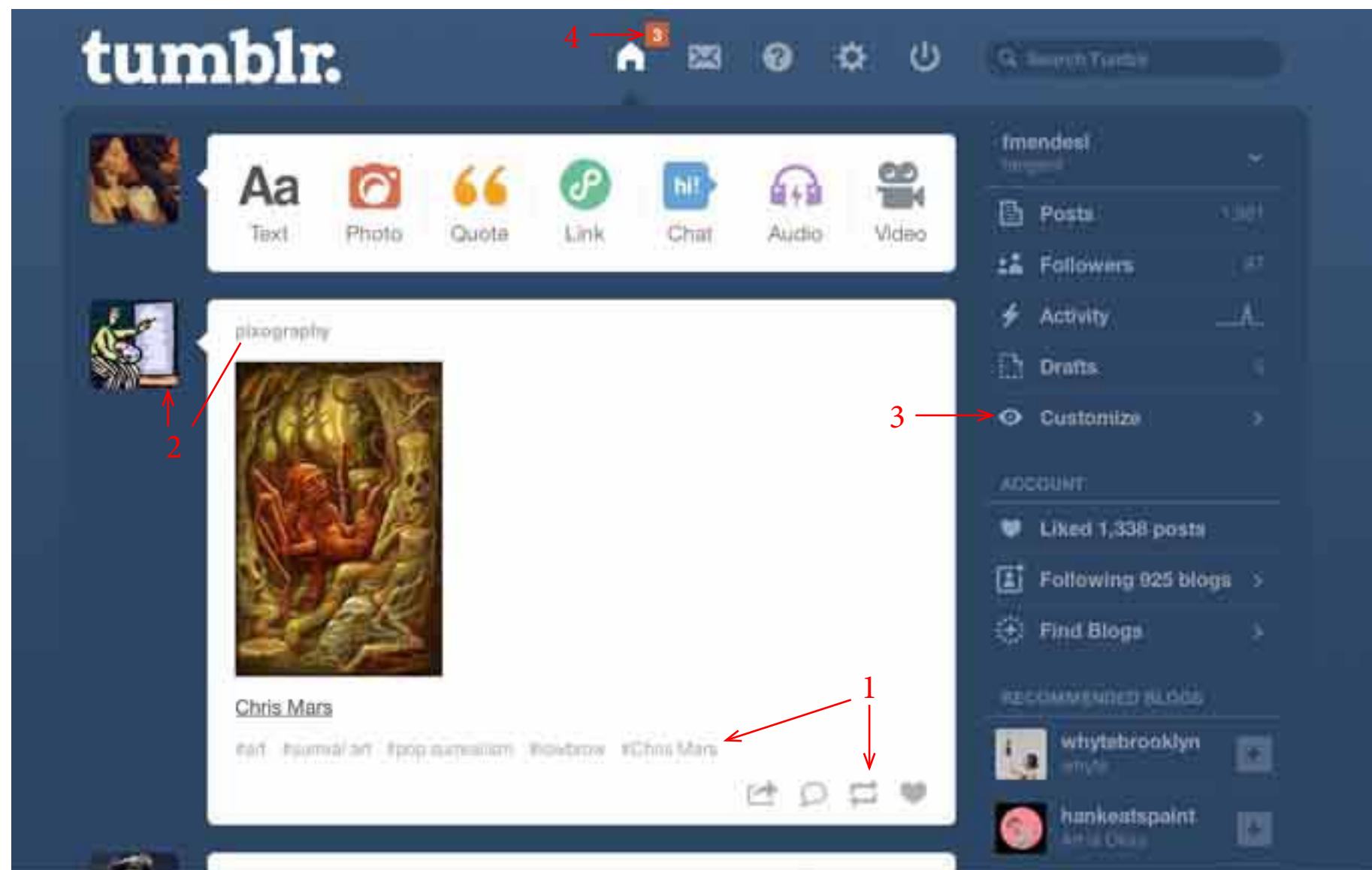
How to easily follow who other users you follow

Method

I first broke the site down into its component parts: The dashboard feed and other users' tumblrs. I took multiple passes through the interface to carry out common tasks in both of the site's component parts to evaluate the interface's compliance with Nielsen's usability principles.

Usability problems from most to least severe:

1. Reblog Hashtag Functionality
2. Dashboard Feed Post Link Functionality
3. Theme Changing Recovery
4. Dashboard Feed Generation and Update Functionality



Usability Problem Components

1. Reblog Hashtag Functionality

A. Problem: When a user initiates reblogging a post, the pop-up dialog box where a user has the ability to type in hashtags doesn't display the hashtags of the previous user.

The Pop-up dialog box covers up the hashtags displayed with the following user's post (displayed in the dashboard feed post).

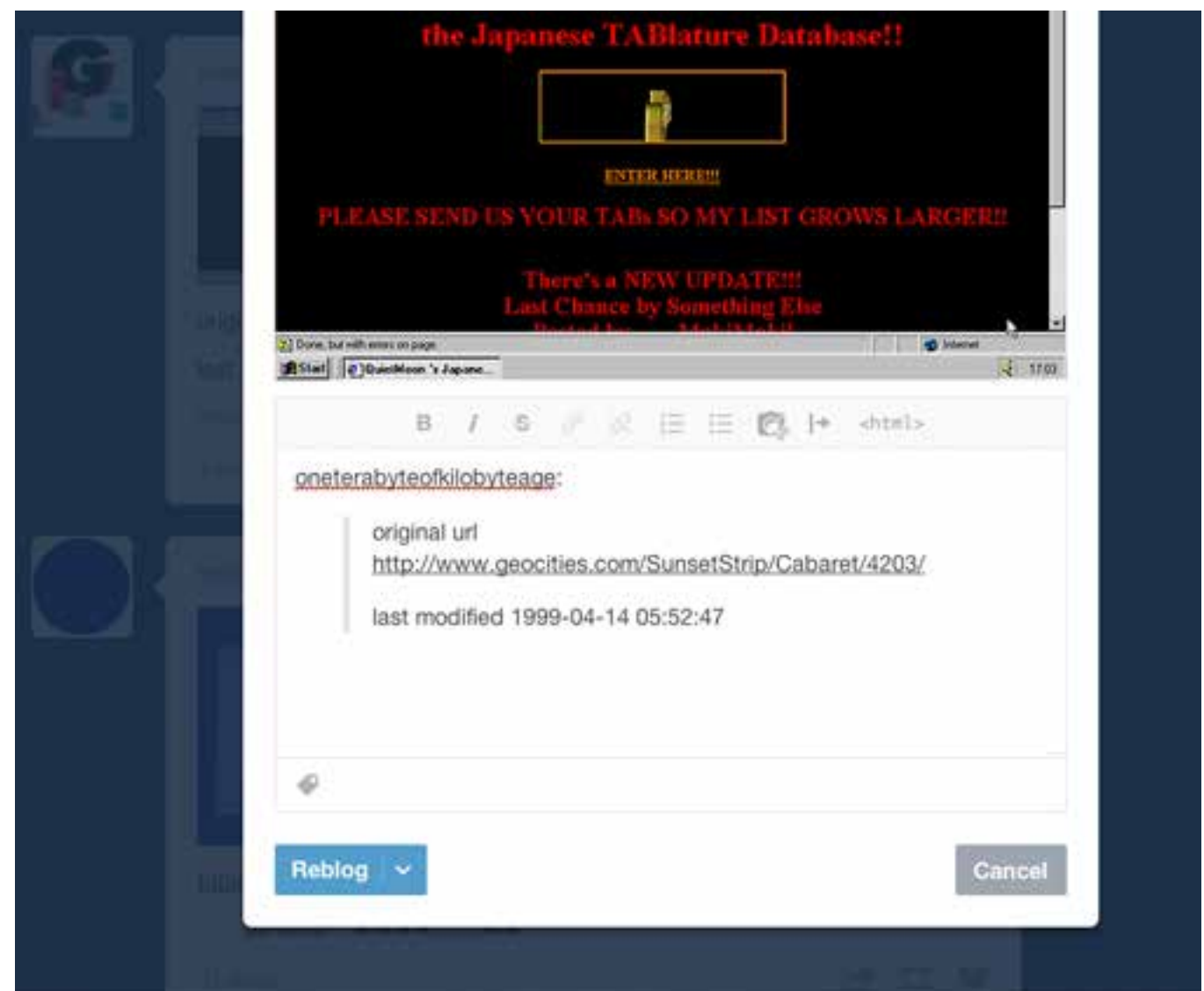
B. Heuristic violation: A user must recall hashtags used by previous users when reblogging content rather than recognize if the user wants to tag content as such.

C. Priority: While hashtags are not a necessary part of the tumblr experience for users, and this feature certainly doesn't hinder users from using the site, making hashtagging easy for users would make the content on the site more meaningful and therefore enhance the user experience. Requiring users to recall rather than recognize, increases the margin of error in spelling and reduces meaningful relationships between content since each user must construct a tagging system independently.

D. Potential Solutions: A quick and easy short-term improvement could involve making the tumblr feed move downwards when the pop-up reblogging dialog box comes up. This would allow users to see the hashtags written for the post underneath the dialog box and offer users the option of typing these tags in. Another solution could involve placing the highest ranked hashtags used by previous reblogs at the bottom of the dialog box. Users could quickly hashtag things by clicking on tags to add them and additional tags could be typed



Example reblog post



Example reblog pop-up dialog box

Summary

Tumblr's dashboard feed integrates the experiences of processing and curating content. By placing reblog, like, and forward functionality under every post in the dashboard feed a user can seamlessly process, like, reblog, and tag content without ever leaving the user's dashboard. While my highest priority heuristic violation was an aspect of the hashtag feature, I believe it is also one of tumblr's best features. Even though a user can not see the hashtags used by previous typed and other popular tags on Tumblr. Offering suggestions as a user types is extremely helpful in facilitating ease of use, reduced errors, and encourages meaningful hashtagging between users. While the usability problems noted in this report don't prevent users from operating Tumblr, improving the functionality of the dashboard feed links and the dashboard feed's updating methods would greatly improve the user experience.

Note

This report has been abridged. The specific sections evaluating dashboard feed post link functionality, theme changing recovery, and dashboard feed generation and update functionality are available upon request.

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Appendix

While this heuristic evaluation focused mainly on maximizing the dashboard feed's functionality to provide users with intuitive paths of navigation and improve the searchability of tumblr's content database by improving the relationships between hashtags, there is much to be improved in navigating other tumblrs. When trying to reblog content from another user's page, users are sometimes redirected to the dashboard after posting the content. This can disrupt the browsing process and cause users to lose various tumblrs discovered in the process of navigating through a series of link of reposts. While navigational confusion is a severe issue, maintaining the ability to customize themes is a crucial aspect to tumblr's identity. Fixing this issue might entail developing a new feature rather than placing parameters upon tumblr users. For example, tumblr might need to make their code more usable for less code literate users.