

From Flowers to Fascism: The Cottagecore to Tradwife Pipeline on Tumblr

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1 Introduction and Related Work

Social media sites can offer a breadth of perspectives and information, as well as a place for users to share their views with others. However, this can lead to the internet being used as a tool to foster extremism and radicalization. The internet environment may contribute to solidarity and radical action [4]. In their paper *Queer Fragmentation and Trans Urban Aesthetics: From Cyberpunk to Cottagecore*, Barbeau et al. theorize about a potential pipeline for online extremism called the “Cottagecore to Tradwife” pipeline [1]. In this work we show the existence of this pipeline and provide users with the ability to explore other topics and potential pipelines to Tradwife views on Tumblr.

1.1 What is Cottagecore?

Cottagecore is “an internet based aesthetic that revolves around a romanticized rural lifestyle, which is shared through social media postings”[5]. Some typical Cottagecore imagery can be seen in figure 1, including rural scenery, feminine dress, lush gardens, and more. This aesthetic embodies a desire to get away from the harsh realities of modern life, and it contains themes of queer escapism [5]. These idealized rural aesthetics become a setting for a queer lifestyle free from homophobia and the strict stereotypes enforced by society, reminiscent of lesbian separatism [1]. This aesthetic is also associated with anti-capitalism, revaluing hobbies that have histori-

cally been considered feminine like homemaking, baking, gardening, and sewing. Instead of focusing on making money, Cottagecore emphasizes doing these hobbies for enjoyment and as a way to be more sustainable, and sharing these hobbies with others [5, 1].

1.2 What is Traditional Feminism?

Traditional Feminists (also known as Tradwives, Tradfems, etc.) are a sect of conservative women who subscribe to conservative values, traditional gender roles, and often white supremacy [3]. Traditional Feminism is a set of values and philosophies designed to “win over” women and get them to join alt-right communities [3]. They value the same feminine hobbies seen in Cottagecore, like homemaking, but Tradwives emphasize the role of the husband in these activities and perform them to serve a partner or be a good wife [5]. Some tradwives also “extol the virtues of staying at home, submitting to male leadership and bearing lots of children,” which has ties to eugenics and the goal of furthering the white race[3]. Annie Kelly, a Ph.D. student at the University of East Anglia researching the impact of digital cultures on anti-feminism and the far-right, says “the seemingly anachronistic way they (traditional feminists) dress is no accident. The deliberately hyper-feminine aesthetics are constructed precisely to mask the authoritarianism of their ideology,”[3].

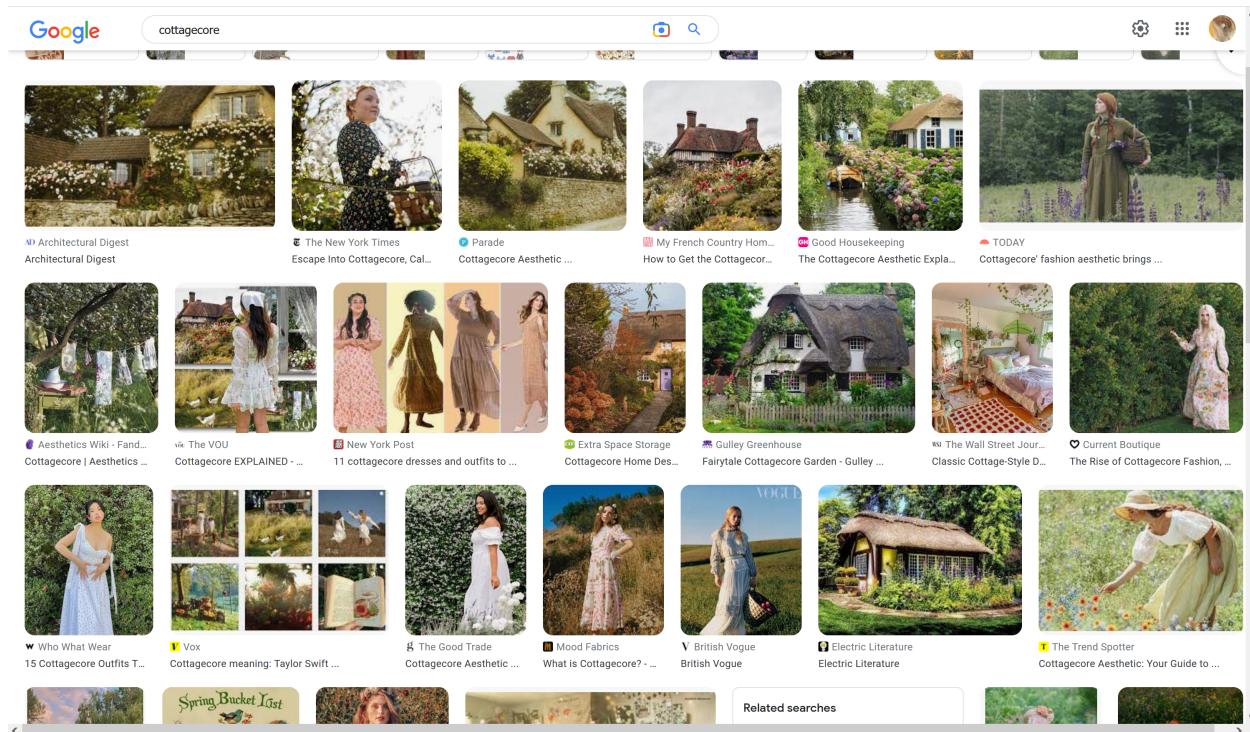


Figure 1: Results of a Google image search for “Cottagecore” from November 30, 2022.

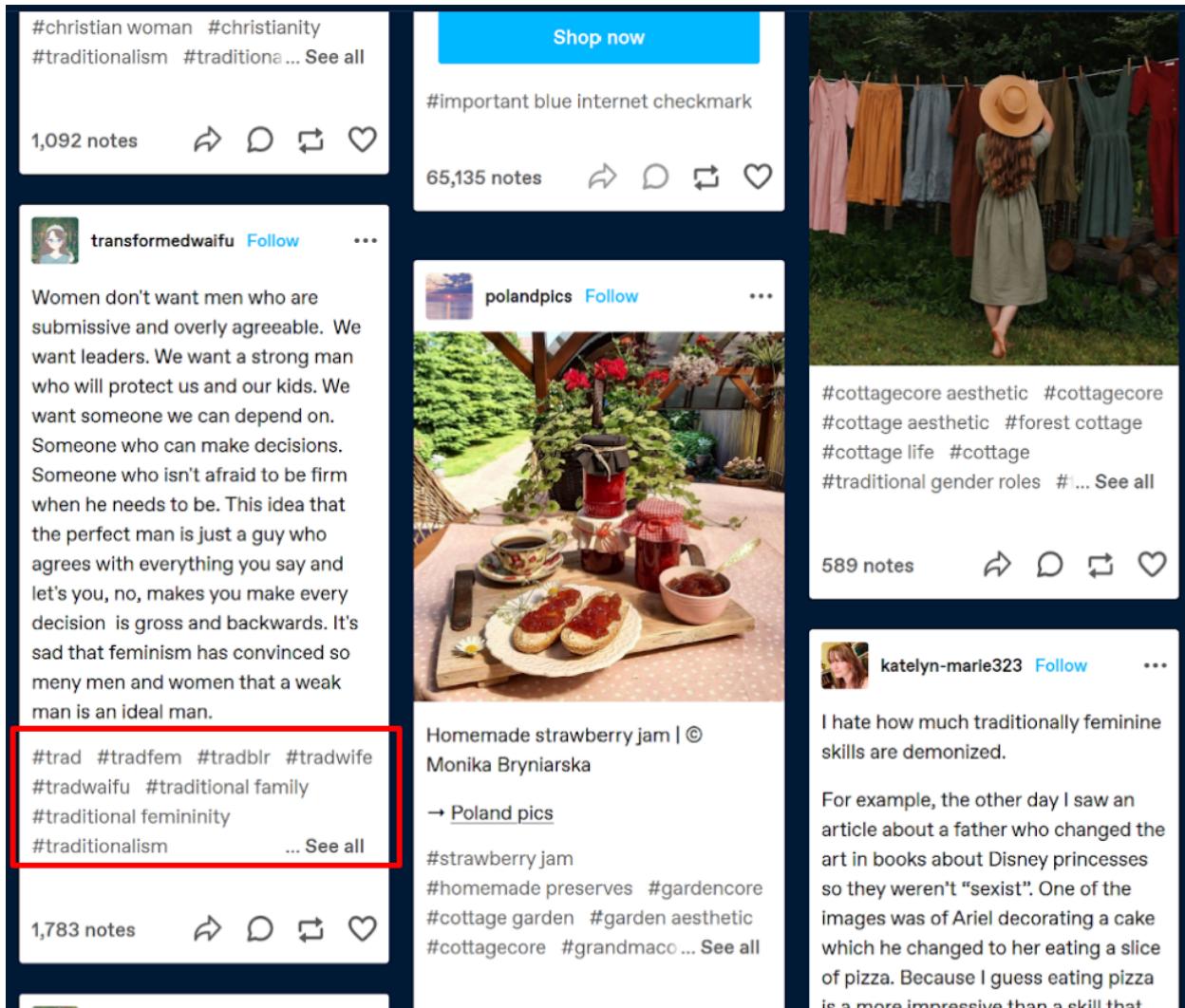


Figure 2: Results of a Tumblr tag search for “tradwife” from November 16, 2022. Notable Tradwife tags are highlighted in red.

1.3 What is the Cottagecore to Tradwife Pipeline?

According to Barbeau et al. “The consumption of content related to Cottagecore can lead to accidentally stumbling into conservative spaces — which is often called the “Tradwife pipeline” — where conservative women discuss their hobbies of canning, sewing, gardening as well as their political views, while sharing pretty images and DIY tips,”[1]. As seen in figure 2, the imagery and hobbies adopted by both groups can lead to an overlap of posts containing things like canning, gardening, and traditional feminism. Presumably this overlap of imagery might cause some users to be exposed to alt-right ideas, potentially leading to accidental amplification of alt-right views and content or in a more extreme case offline incidents of hate [2]. The far-left nature of Cottagecore users may also make them more vulnerable to alt-right content, as disaffected individuals who are already interested in divesting from cultural norms may be more easily introduced to right-leaning extremism.

2 Methods

2.1 Data

In order to investigate the existence of such a pipeline on Tumblr we used a subset of over 180,000 posts collected with the Tumblr API ¹. The posts were collected using the hashtags “#tradmfem”, “#tradwife”, and “#tradblr”. These posts were made by over 38,000 users and span 2016-2022. We chose to use posts from 2019 forward since Tradwife content was posted most between 2019 and 2022.

2.2 Visualization Techniques

To show the existence of this pipeline we included two types of visualization. First, we used a line graph to show the appearance of a certain tag over time in Tradwife posts on Tumblr. This allows the user to see how a tag has been used over time by Tradwives

on Tumblr and potentially identify pipelines. The line graph adds an element of temporal data so the user can see the way that these pipelines change and mutate over time.

The chart allows for the user to compare several tags at once, and to select these tags the user clicks on a network of tags. The network was a tag-tag co-occurrence network where the nodes were tags and two tags were connected if they were posted in the same post. The size of the node indicated how many times it was posted with the more popular tags being largest. The result was a visualization of the tags posted by Tradwife blogs clustered by topic, which lets the user easily parse and explore potential pipeline tags.

2.3 Narrative Strategies

This work used the “Martini Glass” structure to both give the user context about the topic and allow the user to explore the data themselves. The page started with an in-depth review of the context surrounding the “Cottagecore-Tradwife Pipeline” to introduce the viewer to the topic. Then the user scrolls down to see the visualization and they are directed by a modal on how to use the chart. The chart starts with only “cottagecore” selected to demonstrate how the chart works and how the data connects to the previous context, and then the user is directed to explore other tags.

2.4 Encodings

There are several visual encodings present in this work that help to make the data more digestible to the viewer. First, the size of the nodes indicates the popularity of the tags, which shows the user which tags are more common or important. The position of the nodes also indicates general topics, so the user can explore tags that are closely related.

The line graph encodes the fraction of the posts that contain a certain tag among all Tradwife posts over time. Originally it presented just frequency but this resulted in a graph that showed the general trend of all Tradwife posts no matter which tag was selected. Colors differentiate between different tags

¹<https://www.tumblr.com/docs/en/api/v2>

when more than one tag is selected.

2.5 UI Interface

The interface of this visualization has a few features to increase ease-of-use. First, the context section includes links to various sources in case the viewer wants more information about the topics or references.

Next, the network allows the user to hover over and zoom into specific clusters. Because the nodes were sized by the times they appeared in posts some of the nodes were very small which made it hard to view them without a zoom. The zoom also allows the user to clearly see where their mouse is, which was difficult without the zoom due to the busyness of the visualization.

Finally, the modal must be dismissed by the user before fully viewing the chart. This prompts the viewer to read the directions before testing out the features and ensures they have adequate context to understand the visualization. There is also a “help” button in case the viewer is confused which brings the modal back up into view.

2.6 Algorithms

The only algorithm used in this work was a backbone extraction method to reduce the size of the tag network. The original network contained thousands of tags, so it had to be reduced in size to fit effectively on the page. We used the multi-scale backbone method² to extract only the most important tags from the full network.

3 Discussion and Future Work

This work accomplishes a few goals. First, the work communicates ample context and background information about the “Cottagecore to Tradwife” pipeline and why it is an important topic to discuss. The visualization also connects this context to the line graph and network by showing the “cottagecore” tag and giving direction to the user on how to use it. Finally,

the visualization allows the user to explore other potential pipelines and make their own observations.

In order to improve this visualization there are a few things that could be added. A comments section where users could share their observations could allow for community discussion, which could help further develop the discoveries that users make. Additionally, links to actual Tumblr content could help users gain further context for the visualization. Finally, the posts in this pipeline are often visual in nature and include images and aesthetics. It could be helpful to incorporate images into this visualization to show the aesthetic similarities between Tradwife posts and Cottagecore posts, or posts with other related tags.

References

- [1] Erin Barbeau et al. “QUEER FRAGMENTATION AND TRANS URBAN AESTHETICS: FROM CYBERPUNK TO COTTAGECORE”. In: *GLOCALISM: JOURNAL OF CULTURE, POLITICS AND INNOVATION* (2022). DOI: 10.12893/gjcpi.2022.1.4.
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²<https://gist.github.com/bagrow/11181518>

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