

# **THE LANGUAGE OF NON-SUICIDAL SELF-INJURY HASHTAGS ON TUMBLR: A MIXED ETHNOGRAPHY AND NETWORK ANALYSIS APPROACH**

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**Background:** This paper forms part of an interdisciplinary project on non-suicidal self-injury (NSSI) and communities of practice (defined through shared behaviour rather than member characteristics) on social media. NSSI is the act of deliberately injuring one's own body tissue for non-suicidal purposes. Colloquially known as "self-harm", NSSI is highly stigmatized. Consequently, many people engaged in NSSI find community through anonymous participation on social media.

**Objectives:** We aim to visualize NSSI hashtag networks on Tumblr in a way that reflects how Tumblr users create and use hashtags. Hashtags allow users to connect with others interested in NSSI while avoiding content moderation.

**Methods:** Research on Tumblr was carried out in Summer 2021. Using online ethnographic methods, we approached the data as a new Tumblr user who is seeking NSSI content and learning the language and practices of the community. We kept observation logs and manually compiled a list of 182 relevant hashtags. We then used data mining methods to automate data collection from Tumblr leveraging its application programming interface (API). For each of the initial 182 hashtags, we collected 1000 posts, and created a social network map of how these hashtags are connected. Network analysis was also used to study hashtags of interest more in-depth.

**Results:** Our findings suggest that NSSI hashtags form semantic clusters that indicate formation, norms and changes in NSSI community practices and language.

**Implications:** There is evidence of semantic shifts in NSSI hashtags on Tumblr that indicate changes in in-group language and practices, covert tactics to avoid content moderation as well as content overlap with other Tumblr communities. Methodologically, data mining can enhance online ethnographic research by automating and visualizing the data collection process.

Subsequent network analysis in conjunction with ethnographic research can provide valuable insight into the formation of communities of practice.

## **Learning Objectives**

At the conclusion of this presentation, participants will be able to:

1. Recognize the role in-group language plays in the creation and maintenance of hashtags used by people who self-injure and share their experiences on Tumblr.
2. Identify the benefits of a mixed ethnography and network analysis approach to studying hashtag usage in content-monitored communities of practice on social media.