

TACTIC FLASH MOB

A spontaneous, contagious, and often celebratory protest that often uses social media or word of mouth to gather people on short notice in a particular place at a particular time.

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"FLASH MOBS HAVE RECENTLY BECOME A POWERFUL TACTIC FOR POLITICAL PROTEST, PARTICULARLY UNDER REPRESSIVE CONDITIONS."

A flash mob is an unrehearsed, spontaneous, contagious, and dispersed mass action. Flash mobs first emerged in 2003 as a form of participatory performance art, with groups of people using email, blogs, text messages, and Twitter to arrange to meet and perform some kind of playful activity in a public location. More recently, activists have begun to harness the political potential of flash mobs for organizing spontaneous mass actions on short notice. (The term "flash mob" has also been erroneously used to describe highly-choreographed street dance routines, often used as a tool of corporate guerrilla marketing but do not be fooled).

Flash mobs have become a powerful tactic for political protest, particularly under repressive conditions. In the midst of a harsh crackdown on protests in Belarus in 2011, for instance, dissidents calling themselves "Revolution through the Social Network" began organizing impromptu demonstrations where protesters would simply gather in public spaces and clap their hands in unison. The result was the bewildering sight of secret police brutally arresting people for the simple act of clapping their hands — a powerful challenge to the legitimacy of an increasingly irrational regime.

In 2013, there was another spike in defiant flash mobs in Belarus: on one occasion, 100 people, responding to internet postings, gathered outside the KGB building to read from the Belarusian constitution; on another 200 people gathered in a central square and simultaneously opened copies of an independent newspaper, which they silently read as they walked forward.

The overthrow of President Hosni Mubarak in Egypt also involved flash-mob-like tactics, with organizers calling for protesters to gather initially in alleys and other protected spaces for safety

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- Street Graduation
- Who Would Accept?
- Yomango
- "You'll never have a home in your f***ing life!"

Tactics

- App flooding
- Cacerolazo (noise-making protest)
- Carnival protest
- Creative disruption

before moving into the streets in larger and larger numbers. Blogger Patrick Meier explains the thinking behind this approach:

“Starting small and away from the main protests is a safe way to pool protesters together. It’s also about creating an iterative approach to a ‘strength in numbers’ dynamic. As more people crowd the smaller streets, this gives a sense of momentum and confidence. Starting in alleyways localizes the initiative. People are likely neighbors and join because they see their friend or sister out in the street.”

Another example of effective use of the flash mob tactic is UK Uncut. In October 2010, one week after the British government announced massive cuts to public services, seventy people occupied a Vodaphone store in London to draw attention to the company’s record of unpaid taxes. The idea quickly went viral: Within three days, over thirty Vodaphone stores had been shut down around the country by flash mobs organizing over Twitter using the hashtag #ukuncut (see: TACTIC: Hashtag campaign).

The revolutionary potential for dispersed, coordinated action using flash mob tactics has only begun to be realized. As Micah White wrote in Adbusters:

“Fun, easy to organize, and resistant to both infiltration and preemption because of their friend-to-friend network topology, flash mobs are positioned to be the next popular tactic with revolutionary potential With flash mobs, activists have the potential to swarm capitalism globally.”

Originally published in Beautiful Trouble.

LEARN MORE

Flash Mob

Know Your Meme

<http://knowyourmeme.com/memes/flash-mob>

Tool: Flash Mob

Global Change Lab, 2014

<http://www.globalchangelab.org/en/trainingbit/smartmob-the-new-flashmob>

Dance Flash Mob Step-by-Step How-To Kit

Backbone Campaign

<https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/backbonecampaign/pages/81/attachments/original/1509496659/FlashmobHowto2.pdf?1509496659>

BDS Song and/or Dance Flash Mob Step-by-Step How-To Kit
End the Occupation

- Critical mass
- Distributed action
- Flotilla
- Hashtag campaign
- Human banner
- Invisible theatre
- Light Brigade
- Mass street action
- Visibility action

Principles

- Balance art and message
- Create many points of entry
- Do the media’s work for them
- Don’t expect a concrete outcome from a symbolic action
- Enable, don’t command
- Focus on basic needs
- If protest is made illegal, make daily life a protest
- Joy is a revolutionary force
- No one wants to watch a drum circle
- Simple rules can have grand results
- Use others’ prejudices against them
- Use the Jedi mind trick

Theories

- Ethical spectacle
- Memes
- Temporary autonomous zone
- The social cure
- The tactics of everyday life

Methodologies

- Art of Hosting

TAGS

Action design, Dictatorship, Humour, Pranks, Social media, State violence, Street protest

https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/backbonecampaign/pages/81/attachments/original/1509496658/FlashMobHow-To_FirstDraftcopy.pdf?1509496658

Mondo Award Winner, First Runner-Up: Rae Abileah and Colleen Kelly for Flash Mob
Mondoweiss, 2011

<http://mondoweiss.net/2011/03/mondo-award-winner-first-runner-up-rae-abileah-and-colleen-kelly-for-flashmob/>