

TACTIC HASHTAG CAMPAIGN

By choosing a strategic hashtag and curating the ensuing conversation, you can use Twitter and other social media platforms to shift the debate and expand your support.

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“THE HASHTAG IS A FRAMING DEVICE THAT HELPS SET THE TERMS OF THE DEBATE AND CLARIFY WHAT’S AT STAKE.”

With hundreds of millions of people around the world participating in social networks, activist storytelling strategies increasingly rely on hashtag campaigns to convene and drive conversations.

Wait, what is a hashtag? Twitter hashtags combine a “#” symbol and a keyword that connect posts from different authors (e.g., #BringBackOurGirls for discussion about the 200 Nigerian girls kidnapped by Boko Haram, or #Kony2012 to push for the arrest of indicted war criminal and International Criminal Court fugitive Joseph Kony, or #OWS for Occupy Wall Street). Posts that share a hashtag can be viewed together in a single place, facilitating an ongoing public conversation. And with no preset list of hashtags, Twitter is a democratic medium. You can create your own brand new hashtag at any time. #NowDoAHappyDanceToCelebrate.

Hashtag campaigning is all about using hashtags to strategically frame, convene, and drive key conversations. A well-chosen hashtag will positively define the values associated with your political position, and draw more people to your side of the debate.

Typically, the hashtag that organizes a conversation is a highly polarizing proper noun that inspires people to pick a position in a discussion about it. For instance, in 2011, UK Uncut organizers started staging protests at Vodafone stores, organizing under the hashtag #UKUncut, to reframe the discussion about austerity to focus on corporate tax dodgers rather than public spending. The role of the organizer practicing hashtag politics is to polarize a discussion effectively, and then curate the conversation to make

POTENTIAL RISKS

Hashtag campaigning has its limits. The hashtag #BringBackOurGirls received 2 million retweets, including one from Michelle Obama. But did Boko Haram release the kidnapped children? No. As a stand-alone action, a hashtag can’t change the world. It can only supplement or draw attention to other actions you want to take to create more awareness.

Also, your online security is only as good as the measures you put in place. If you are working in a high-risk political environment, you can create a Twitter account using a pseudonym and make sure you don’t put any of your personal information online. For more general online security tips, check out: Security in a box.

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your side more compelling.

Your hashtag could be any number of things. Using narrative power analysis as one guide, you could choose to polarize a discussion around a character in your story — either a sympathetic character (like the Nigerian girls seized by Boko Haram) or a villain (like Kony) — or perhaps a scene of conflict that locates the problem we must face (like Wall Street).

The hashtag is a framing device that helps set the terms of the debate and clarify what's at stake. A well-chosen hashtag will positively define the values associated with your political position, and draw more people to your side of the debate.

Adapted from "Hashtag politics," originally published in Beautiful Trouble.

LEARN MORE

Hashtag Politics Training Bit
Global Change Lab

<http://www.globalchangelab.org/en/trainingbit/hashtag-politics>

Hashtag Politics

Duncan Meisel, Beautiful Trouble, 2012

<http://beautifultrouble.org/theory/hashtag-politics/>

Safe Tweeting: The Basics

Twitter

<https://support.twitter.com/articles/76036>

Security in a Box

<https://securityinabox.org/en/guide/secure-communication>

Stories

- Bring Back Our Girls
- Dhawili (turn on the lights)
- Disrupting Obama's town hall in Myanmar
- Every Heartbeat Counts
- Fees Must Fall
- Flower Speech Campaign
- #GambiaHasDecided
- Kubatana's yellow poster campaign
- Manich Msamah
- Round Dance Revolution
- Stop Praver Plan
- #ThisFlag
- #YouStink

Tactics

- Distributed action
- Flash mob
- Guerrilla marketing
- Hashtag hijack
- Light Brigade
- Storytelling

Principles

- Brand or be branded
- Change a name to change the game
- Consider your audience
- Know your community
- Know your cultural terrain
- Practice digital self-defence
- Reframe the issue
- Seek safety in support networks
- Simple rules can have grand results
- Stay on message
- Think narratively
- Use humour to undermine authority
- Use organizing strategies that scale
- Use others' prejudices against them

Theories

- Al faza'a (a surge of solidarity)
- Floating signifier

- Framing
- Memes
- The propaganda model

Methodologies

- Battle of the story
- Hardship to grievance
- Ladder of engagement
- Spectrum of allies
- Story of self, us, and now

TAGS

Campaign strategy,
Communications, Community
building, Digital security,
Language, Movement building,
Social media