

## Hashtag activism analysis

What is hashtag activism? Let's begin by breaking down the phrase:

- A **hashtag** is “a largely user-generated mechanism for tagging and collating [digital messages] related to a specific topic. Senders include hashtags in their messages to mark them as addressing particular themes” (Bruns and Burgess 15).
- **Activism** is the use of action to bring about change.

Hashtag activism is, put simply the purposeful use of hashtags to bring about change. As Victoria Carty notes, “activists have always utilized the latest communication device to recruit, distribute information, and mobilize support, whether it be the pen, printing press, telegraph, radio, television, Internet, or high-speed digital technologies” (7). From this perspective, we can see the hashtag as one of the more recent communication strategies employed by activists.

In order to more fully understand hashtag activism, you will conduct a hashtag activism analysis. First, select a hashtag that is/has been involved in an activist campaign. A list of potential hashtags is provided below.

- #BringBackOurGirls
- #MyNYPD
- #BlackLivesMatter
- #ICantBreathe
- #WeAreHere
- #UmbrellaRevolution
- #Ferguson
- #YesAllWomen
- #StopGamerGate
- #NotYourAsianSideKick
- #AmINext
- #MarriageEquality
- #IStandWithAhmed
- #FIFAWWC
- #StandwithPP
- #JusticeForTrayvon

After selecting the hashtag, familiarize yourself with the life of this hashtag. The following questions are designed to help you gather information.

- Does the hashtag appear on multiple social media sites? If so, which ones? Does one site seem to be more popular with the hashtag than others?
- When did the hashtag start? What reason(s)/event(s) prompted the birth of this hashtag?
- Is the hashtag still active?
  - If so, to what current event/situation is the hashtag responding?
  - If not, when was the last time the hashtag was active? Did something particular happen that caused the hashtag to fade or lose momentum?
- What are the main messages of the posts that include this hashtag? For example, are users calling for action? Communicating a complaint? Offering encouragement? Sharing stories? Drawing attention to an event/experience? Something else?

- What seems to be the end goal(s) of this activist campaign? What do/did those using the hashtag hope to accomplish?
- Do the users of the hashtag seem to share any demographics? (Demographic markers include age, race, income level, education level, gender, marital status, and occupation.)
- Who/What is the intended audience of this activist campaign? In other words, is there a specific person/group to whom the posts are directed?
- Is there interaction between the users of the hashtag? If so, what form do these interactions take and how would you characterize the tone of these interactions?
- Has mainstream media picked up on this hashtag? If so, what are these media outlets saying about the hashtag and/or the activity surrounding the hashtag?

Finally, after analyzing your specific hashtag, you will share your analysis with the class. Together, we will then discuss what our analyses suggest about hashtag activism. Specifically, we will consider questions such as,

- What are the specific influences of the hashtag within activist campaigns? In other words, what might have been different about these activist campaigns without the digital hashtag?
- What are the benefits of developing an activist campaign around a hashtag? The drawbacks/risks?
- In what specific ways does the hashtag impact the messages communicated, those who can/do participate in the campaign, the recipients of the message, and the intended/actual outcomes of the campaign?
- What makes instances of hashtag activism successful or effective?
- What happens to a hashtag when it moves across social media sites? In what ways does the specific site impact the expression and use of the hashtag?
- What is the role of different modes (alphabetic text, still images, moving images) within instances of hashtag activism?
- In what ways does hashtag activism interact with marginalized populations and minorities? Are the issues/perspectives of marginalized groups helped, hindered, and/or complicated by instances of hashtag activism?
- How do hashtags work to build community across time and space?
- Is hashtag activism an effective way of drawing supporters to a cause, or does it only appeal to those who are already supporters?
- What is the relationship between hashtag activism and mainstream media?

#### Works Cited

- Bruns, Axel and Jean Burgess. "Twitter Hashtags from Ad Hoc to Calculated Publics." *Hashtag Publics: The Power and Politics of Discursive Networks*. Ed. Nathan Rambukkana. New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2015. 13-27. Print.
- Carty, Victoria. *Social Movements and New Technology*. Colorado: Westview Press, 2015. Print.