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### **Overview**

The WATERisLIFE project began in 2007 with a vision to bring clean water to those in need, saving lives and transforming communities in the process (Waterislife, n.d.). Since then, they have conducted various campaigns aimed to raise awareness of water shortage, and to garner contributions from the public to fund their projects.

In 2011, WiL teamed up with an advertising agency, DDB New York, and launched the Hashtag Killer campaign. The campaign cleverly used the #FirstWorldProblems meme, a popular hashtag used within social networking sites such as Twitter. On top of spreading awareness of the world's water crisis, the campaign was also an attempt by DDB to eliminate the #FirstWorldProblems hashtag on twitter (Edwards, 2012).

The campaign's focus was a video posted on YouTube which starts out with an anthem commercial featuring Haitians reciting the popular, yet insensitive, #FirstWorldProblems tweets by real users. What made the video even more powerful was when the Haitians consoled the Twitter users with replies such as "I hope your day gets better!". The campaign was quickly picked up by celebrities, influencers, and major news outlets, and has gained over 2.4 million views as of today.

### **Was it effective?**

According to Hoffman and Fodor (2010), the effectiveness of a social media campaign is dependent on its objectives. They classify social media performance objectives into three categories, namely brand awareness, brand engagement, and word of mouth.

Before the hashtag killer campaign was launched, WiL uploaded 4 videos in 2010 to YouTube. Each of these videos received between 1000 and 6000 views as of today. Comparing the number of views alone, we can safely say that the 'First World Problems Anthem' video managed to garner overwhelming attention and created awareness among a large public. The popularity of the video was also driven by its emotional attachment, as well as the controversy created around humiliating people's insensitive use of the hashtag. These factors contributed greatly to raising awareness of the water crisis, and of course of WiL and DDB as the organizations behind the project. Furthermore, the campaign generated donations enough to provide over a million days of clean water to those in need.

Beyond the number of views, we must also consider how WiL engaged with the users throughout the campaign, and how effective the campaign was in creating conversations on social media. The video has generated more than 3000 comments, while the article on AdAge has been shared by readers over 800 times. Compared to the previous video posted by WiL which had only one single comment, the hashtag killer campaign created much more engagement and word-of-mouth among the viewers and readers. However, I think WiL could have and still can do a much better job by replying to #firstworldproblems tweets on a daily basis, to reach out to even more users and create a larger community and conversation around their mission.

In addition, WiL went one step further in the campaign to engage their viewers. After the first video was posted, WiL created 10 more videos, each mentioning the user and featuring

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his #firstworldproblems tweet. These follow up videos served to make the message more personalized, in an attempt to create a deeper connection with their viewers. Overall, this added to the potency of their campaign, although I personally feel that WiL failed to incorporate a sense of deeper connection with their users after the videos were posted. Instead of actively searching for new conversations to partake in and replying to existing conversations, WiL took a rather passive approach of retweeting posts and using Twitter as a broadcasting platform.

Lastly, when it comes to social media, it is crucial to consider that its effectiveness cannot be judged purely on its financial and quantitative performance, such as sales figures (or in this case, donations received), number of followers or views. Social networks serve as a platform for brands to reach out the potential customers, but many brands overlook the opportunity to maintain and strengthen the gained relationships. Since the campaign began, WiL has managed to gather 8260 likes on Facebook and 5352 followers on Twitter. However, compared to the number of views on the video, these numbers look meager. Perhaps they could have done a better job in directing users to their various social networks, so that they can continue market to these consumers who have seen and liked their content. In addition, I believe WiL could have further increased engagement and donations by replying comments on the YouTube videos, and creating and engaging in more conversations around the water crisis.

### **Conclusion**

The hashtag killer campaign managed to change the conversation through social media. Instead of complaining about first world problems, people started using the hashtag as a vehicle to spread WiL's message and to encourage donations. This new trend, sometimes referred to as "reverse-trending" and "meme-jacking", not only attempted to kill a hashtag, but it also managed to use social media to affect a real change in our world.

Overall, I feel that the hashtag killer campaign was successful in spreading WiL's mission to a large audience. The heartwarming and controversial theme of the video was effective in generating word-of-mouth through social media platforms. However, I feel that there is much room for improvement in terms of engaging with their users, and should further strengthen existing relationships with the goal of turning users into advocates.

### **Reflection**

Unfortunately, I could not find data on number of tweets with the hashtag #waterislife or any similar metric to measure the rate at which the campaign or the brand was shared by users. This would be useful to judge the virality and effectiveness of the campaign. Moreover, it would also be interesting to investigate whether the use of the hashtag #firstworldproblems has decreased since the campaign's launch, as a way of assessing the effectiveness of the campaign in reducing the hashtag's use. On the other hand, a brief content analysis showed that WiL's most recent campaign's hashtag, #5YearstoLive, has over 600 posts on Twitter since it launched on 1<sup>st</sup> August 2013. This shows a substantial generation of word-of-mouth by WiL's recent campaign, which can be partly attributed to the success and lessons learnt from the hashtag killer campaign.

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