

Insights*

*Stick to your goal

Back to the video* →

Transcript of the
guideline's voiceover

*How to enjoy this
interactive text?*

Click on black words
and sentences to
deepen the topic
quoted in the video

“Everyday, the world changes, people protest in the streets as well as on social media, and hashtag hijacking has become one of their strongest weapons. But how can we make it even better? How can we hijack in the perfect moment?

After a hashtag is launched, the first hijacked posts usually appear between the first few hours and the next couple of days; the peak of interaction occurs the day after the hashtag is launched, but it decreases after a few days. So, if we wanna know how past hijacks managed to seize the day and protest effectively, we have to ask ourselves this very question: how did they know when to act?

Let's take a step back... After the fights with Occupy Wall Street protesters, on 22nd April 2014 @NYPDNews, the official Twitter account for the New York City Police Department invited the public to share photographs of officers with the hashtag #myNYPD to regain popularity. What started as a public relations campaign, however, in just one hour turned into an online protest.

Find out what's behind “Go with the flow”.

[Back to the video*](#) →

Thousands of citizens used the myNYPD hashtag to highlight instances of police brutality, abuse, and racial profiling. In total, over 100,000 #myNYPD posts were tweeted between 22nd and 24th April 2014. But the most remarkable aspect was speed of the hijack: the collective action in fact spread in less than an hour: its power relied on the amount of tweets created and the velocity with which they were posted. And even though the hijack lasted only a couple of days, the hashtag still used today to critique police brutality, showing how impactful and meaningful that original collective action was.

So, let's go back to our question. How can we hijack in the perfect moment? The key is seizing the day! Follow the conversation online and jump on opportunities when they present themselves. And to make sure you are up to the task, there are a few tips that may help you.

Remember, the **tips** are *our* suggestions to hijack, flawlessly.

[Back to the video](#) →

First of all, keep up with the new hashtags, and follow the topics you are most interested in.

Second, you can follow active accounts within a community, such as thought leaders or fan accounts, to learn about new collective actions as soon as they start.

And finally, seize every opportunity, challenge the hashtags as soon as they are launched, and get involved with your community to have a greater impact. And remember: the sooner the better!

We think you're ready! But remember, this is just one guideline: move the dot around to explore all the content in the page, or check out the rest of the website to find out more.

Go ahead to find out all the research
that helped us to design this video



What does hashtag hijacking mean?

From the clicked words “*hashtag hijacking*”

Back to the transcript →

Extract from

Austin Lucinda, Jin Yan,
“*Social Media and
Crisis Communication*”,
New York, Routledge, 2017
<https://tinyurl.com/y4vmntrs>

“An attention grabbing and dramatic moniker, which has quickly become a favorite of the news media, the term *hashtag hijacking* typically refers to a situation in which a hashtag (#), a tool widely used for designating and organizing online conversations on social media sites, becomes commandeered by others in the community and is then instead used to mock, satirize, or negatively critique the original hashtag sponsor. The popular social media platform Twitter is most closely associated with the use of hashtags, but most online communities today commonly use the content-organizing method.

[...] The first widely publicized example came in January of 2012, when the global fast-food giant McDonald's launched a promotional campaign on Twitter using the hashtag #McDStories, with the intent of inspiring costumers and fans of the brand to post cheerful anecdotes about personal experiences at the restaurant and positive memories associated with the food. In an effort to increase awareness of the campaign, McDonald's paid Twitter to boost visibility of the hashtag through its “promoted trends” offering, in which the social network gives visual prominence on users' screens to a limited number of corporate-sponsored hashtags.

Within a matter of hours of launching the promotion, McDonald's “pulled” formal sponsorship of the Twitter campaign due to the prevalence of overtly negative, sarcastic, and inappropriate responses tweeted by the platform's users incorporating the hashtag. Despite, or perhaps because of, the company's quick

decision to cancel the campaign, major news organizations capitalized on the opportunity to cover the embarrassing event for one of the world's most well-known and iconic brands, with many articles including examples of particularly harsh or humorous individual tweets (*"One time I walked into McDonalds and I could smell Type 2 diabetes floating in the air and I threw up. #McDStories"*).

[...] The coordinated hashtag hijack has become a viable and effective strategic tool used by individuals and activist groups to publicly shame companies, to pressure organizations to action, and to help get their own messages amplified and heard by the general public."

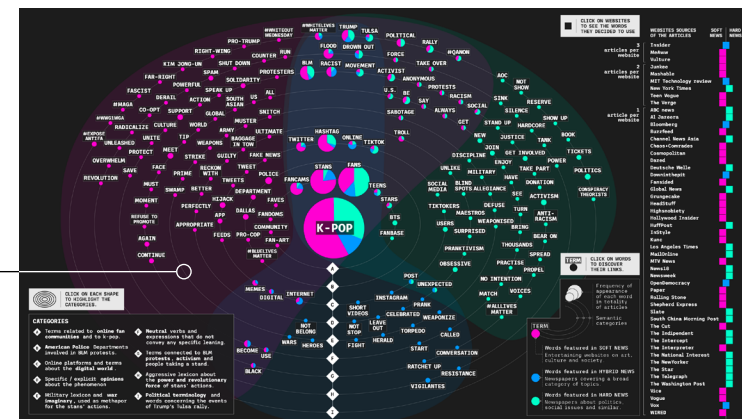
Why did we define this tool a "weapon"?

From the clicked word "weapons"

[Back to the transcript](#) →

The phenomenon of digital activism through hashtag hijacking did not go unnoticed: the main online news websites covered their actions with critique pieces, describing these groups as a force of social and political action and acknowledging their power given by internet used as a weapon. This particular term, with others related to a militar language, have been used to describe these collective actions in online media. Hard news generally prefer more neutral and broad terms, as opposed to soft news, which instead use a more powerful and aggressive lexicon.

Our website "*Stan wars: the rise of a new army*" investigates the various facets of language used by the media to describe the communities' behaviour.

[illegible]

<https://dd16-group2.github.io/stan-wars/>

Why is interaction important?

From the clicked words “*peak of interactions*”

Back to the transcript →

For further information

Mike Eckstein,
*Social Media Engagement: Why it
Matters and How to Do it Well*
Buffer, 2021

<https://tinyurl.com/y6cospod>

Nowadays, the level of interaction is one of the most important elements in social media: **it is highly considered by the algorithms, and helps spreading collective actions even more. With interaction, we intend the engagement that users have with online content**: this could take the form of likes, comments, direct messages, shares, mentions and saves, and they all influence the popularity of an account or even a singular post. In fact, in the last few years, organic reach (namely, not sponsored content) has dropped on almost every social media platform. However, accounts with higher social media engagement are the least affected, because **“meaningful engagement” is considered an important signal that a post should be prioritized in users’ feeds.**

Therefore, promoting audience participation is fundamental, because users can help a hashtag hijacking to spread even without posting directly new content. **By engaging with hijacked posts, they can help the collective action grow**: the more buzz is created around it, the more quickly and more efficiently it will spread.

What is Occupy Wall Street?

From the clicked words “Occupy Wall Street protesters”

Back to the transcript →

Extract from

Jaime Lalinde, Rebecca Sacks,
Amark Guiducci, Elizabeth Nicholas,
Max Chafins
“*Revolution number 99*”,
Vanity Fair, 2012

<https://tinyurl.com/y6bejbha>

“On September 17th, several hundred people marched to an empty square in Lower Manhattan—a place so dull that the bankers and construction workers in the neighborhood barely knew it was there—and camped out on the bare concrete. They would be joined, over the next two months, by thousands of supporters, who erected tents, built makeshift institutions—a field hospital, a library, a department of sanitation, a free-cigarette dispensary—and did a fair amount of drumming.

It was easy to infer from the signs protesters carried what the grievances that gave rise to Occupy Wall Street were: an ever widening gap between rich and poor; a perceived failure by President Obama to hold the financial industry accountable for the crisis of 2008; and a sense that money had taken over politics.

The amazing thing about the Occupy Wall Street movement is not that it started—America was full of fed-up people at the end of 2011—but that it worked. With a vague agenda, a nonexistent leadership structure (many of the protesters were anarchists and didn’t believe in leaders at all), and a minuscule budget (as of December, they’d raised roughly \$650,000—one-eighth of Tim Pawlenty’s presidential campaign haul), the occupiers in Zuccotti Park nevertheless inspired similar protests in hundreds of cities around the country and the world.”

<http://occupywallst.org>

How did #MyNYPD go from PR campaign to hashtag hijacking?

From the clicked word “#MyNYPD”

Back to the transcript →

For further information

Mark Tran,
*#myNYPD Twitter callout backfires
for New York police department*
The Guardian, 2014
<https://tinyurl.com/yy8em6c5>

Inae Oh
*This NYPD Idea Backfired
Horribly On Twitter*
Huffington Post, 2014
<https://tinyurl.com/y5sxtt45>

On April 22nd 2014, the New York City Police Department tweeted a post asking its followers to publish pictures of themselves posing happily next to the city's officers, using the hashtag #myNYPD. It was originally **a social media campaign, whose aim was to improve the public image of the department and to feel closer to the public.**

The request for photos, on the @NYPDNews Twitter page, reported: “Do you have a photo w/ a member of the NYPD? Tweet us & tag it #myNYPD,” the message read. “It may be featured on our Facebook.” And even though **the first post presented a photo with a smiling citizens, next two officers,** the type of content posted by New Yorkers was quite different.

By midnight on the same day, over 70,000 people had tweeted **pictures of police brutality, in which police officers wrestled with demonstrators and used weapons on civilians. The hashtag became an outlet to both ridicule the NYPD for their social media disaster, but also to expose the reality of the city** and recall the names of people shot dead by police.

Police officials refused to engage with the comments, which were being posted at a rate of 10,000 an hour, but they released a short statement. “The NYPD is creating new ways to communicate effectively with the community. Twitter provides an open forum for an uncensored exchange and this is an open dialogue good for our city.”

How did Twitter help #MyNYPD spread so quickly?

From the clicked words "*speed of the hijack*"

Back to the transcript →

Extract from

Jaime Lalinde, Rebecca Sacks,
Amark Guiducci, Elizabeth Nicholas,
Max Chafins
Revolution number 99
Vanity Fair, 2012

<https://tinyurl.com/y6bejbha>

“Despite the decentralized nature of sending individual tweets, we suggest that the collective hijacking and trending of #myNYPD reveal an intentional and nearly spontaneous strategic effort; an effort that exemplifies how counterpublic strategies meant to infiltrate mainstream narratives have adapted to the technological architecture of Twitter. These efforts can be successful, in large part because **Twitter’s architecture allows conceptually related but otherwise disconnected messages to be stitched together in a networked narrative that becomes newsworthy, even by mainstream standards.** No single tweet introduced alternative narratives of policing, but **a collection of tweets created and spread by a networked counterpublic allowed these narratives to temporarily gain traction** in the public sphere.

It is clear from our findings that Twitter functions as a useful tool for counterpublics to share in-group knowledge and experience about police brutality and that through the strategic use of Twitter these counterpublics have the power to motivate the mainstream public sphere to take note and respond. Our findings further illustrate that **networked counterpublics are more diverse and inclusive than the mainstream public sphere—many of our online crowdsourced elites were women and people of color with no elite status elsewhere [...].**

Although these findings and their implications are significant, we must not overly idealize Twitter’s potential for highlighting a diverse set of voices in a meaningful way.

Twitter is not a revolutionized, or even generally counternormative, space for information creation and dispersal. As Poell (2014) points out, the economic and technological architecture of Twitter is certainly founded in dominant values that prioritize the needs of advertisers and elites over others. Furthermore, the structure of the platform still allows the segmentation of publics and the sheer quantity of information at any given moment means it is easy to miss particular narratives as they come and go with a speed unique to the medium. And of course, **the mere presence of counterpublic narratives on Twitter, even as trending topics, does not guarantee a sustained or substantive engagement with these narratives by the state or members of mainstream institutions, or even of the majority of members of the counterpublics themselves.**

What is the legacy of the #MyNYPD hijack?

From the clicked words “*still used today*”

[Back to the transcript](#) →

The hijack of the #MyNYPD hashtag occurred in 2014, but by taking a look at the feed on Twitter, we can see how it is still used today. During 2020 in particular, police brutality has returned to be an important topic of conversation, due to the Black Lives Matter Movement and George Floyd's assassination. Therefore, #MyNYPD resurfaced, even more popular than in the previous year, and has been **used to tag instances of police brutality, racial profiling and improper behaviours carried out by police officials.**

These posts were all posted in 2020: some describe the protests in Minneapolis, other portray misconduct by American police officers (so not only from NYPD).



What is a *thought leader*?

From the clicked words "*thought leaders*"

Back to the transcript →

Extract from

Denise Brosseau
What is a thought leader?
Thoughtleadershiplab, 2017
<https://tinyurl.com/yyybvk4x>

“Thought leaders are the **informed opinion leaders and the go-to people in their field of expertise. They are trusted sources who move and inspire people with innovative ideas;** turn ideas into reality, and know and show how to replicate their success. Over time, they create a dedicated group of friends, fans and followers to help them replicate and scale their ideas into sustainable change not just in one company but in an industry, niche or across an entire ecosystem. [...]

They are changing the world in meaningful ways and engage others to join their efforts. They create evolutionary and even revolutionary advancements in their fields not just by urging others to be open to new ways of thinking, but **when they create a blueprint for people to follow – they provide a method, process, guidelines or a set of best practices.** Thought leaders who codify the steps necessary to follow in their footsteps build a platform and assure that others will align with and build on their success. This guarantees that they are not confined to making small tweaks around the edges, but instead **create a foundation for others to build on or a movement for others to join.**

Thought leaders do come in every shape and size, they do come from any background or community and they can be any age, gender or ethnicity. That said, not just anyone can be a thought leader. Thought leadership takes time (sometimes years); knowledge and expertise in a particular niche; a certain level of commitment and a willingness to buck the status quo or the way things have always been done.”

Did you find what you were looking for?*

*If you didn't, you can go back
to the website to find out more.

Back to the website →