



Insights*

*Peek behind
the curtains

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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 on 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 choose the proper social media to achieve our goals?

In the last few years, many social networks rose in popularity, also thanks to the different algorithms that regulate their feeds. These formulas determine the platforms' main characteristics, that we should try to exploit in our hijacks. Therefore, when looking for examples to follow, we should not focus on which platforms activists used, but on... How were social media exploited in the latest protests?

Let's take a step back. After people flooded the streets with the Black Lives Matter protests, a particular counterpart group started to rise: they are called "Proud Boys", a far-right, neo-fascist, men-only organization that promotes political violence. However, around October 5th, their hashtag was hijacked.

It all started from the actor George Takei, who asked the Twitter community to turn this hashtag from a message of violence into a message of love. The LGBTQ+ community promptly responded and users around the world started posting images

Find out what's behind “Peek behind the curtain”.

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of happy and proud gay couples. Soon enough, the hijacking started spreading across Instagram and TikTok, with different tactics and posts but sharing the same goal.

Let's take a look at the three different social media involved in the event.

Let's start from the platform where hashtags were born: Twitter. Here, even though users can post pictures and videos, the main focus is on the textual message, while hashtags help to gather similar discussions. By allowing people to retweet posts and to comment on other users' tweets, this social media favors conversation and exchange of opinions.

Then we have TikTok, where hashtags are mostly used to create communities and define the content of the videos, but the real deal here is music. TikTok's trends are in fact often identified by a common musical soundtrack, and this is why here it's important to choose the right music for your hashtag hijacking, in order to obtain a better resonance in the community you want to reach.

And finally, we have Instagram, a visual social network, where images and videos are the protagonists. However, the way they are presented to the user depends not only on the hashtags, but also on the level of engagement, the description and the metatags connected to the pictures. Therefore, in order to be efficient, hashtags should reflect the content in your posts, and address the specific communities you want to involve.



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

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So, let's go back to our issue. How to choose the proper social media for our hijacking? The key is peeking behind the curtains. Follow the logics that regulate each platform and make the most of them!

And to make sure you are up to the task, there are a few tips that may help you.

First of all, if you want to use Twitter, keep in mind that your hashtags should be consistent to your image and especially to its description. Hashtags are the core of an engaging post, so make sure it is well "put on display".

On the other hand, if you want to use TikTok, remember to associate the hashtag that you'd like to see trending, with a specific song: music is very powerful on this platform and it can become the trademark for your hijack.

And lastly, on Instagram, you should use the most searched hashtags by your community to accompany the one you intend to hijack. But always remember to pay attention to your visual content, because it is still the most important feature.

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*”

Extract from

Austin Lucinda, Jin Yan,
*Social Media and
Crisis Communication*,
New York, Routledge, 2017
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*"

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For further information

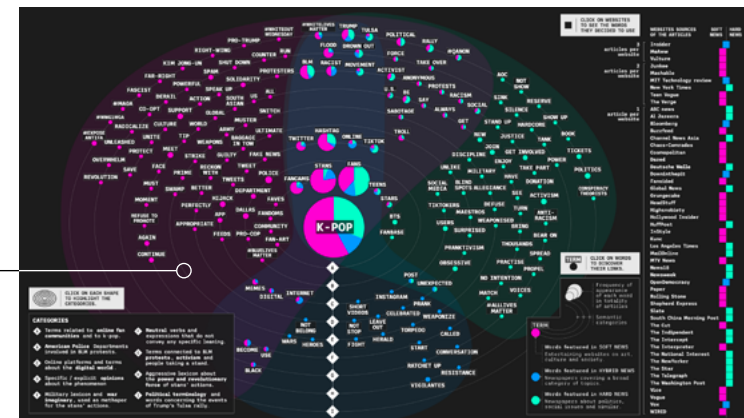
Dataset that gathers articles' titles talking about the phenomenon

tinyurl.com/5ywk8wy8

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 military 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.



<https://dd16-group2.github.io/the-hijackers-guide/>

Are social media arising in popularity?

From the clicked words “hashtag hijacking”

Extract from

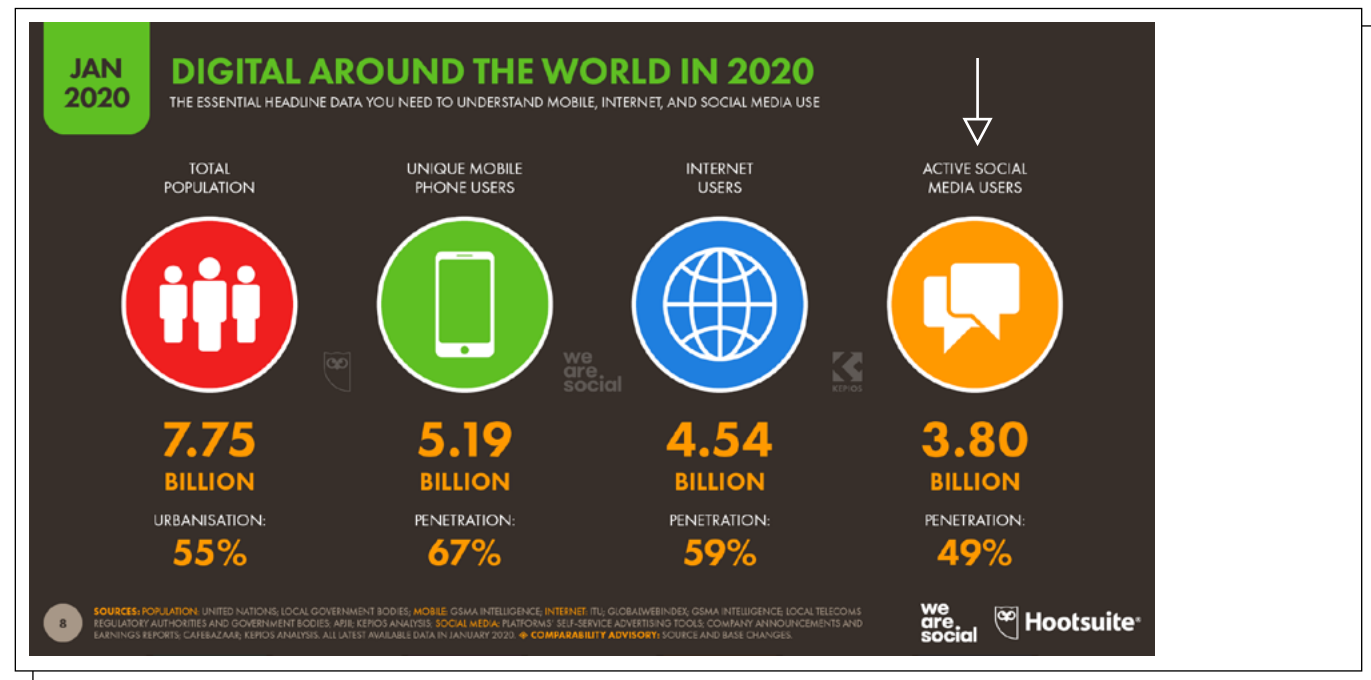
Kemp Simon,
*Digital 2020: 3.8 billion
people use social media*,
WeAreSocial, Jan 2020

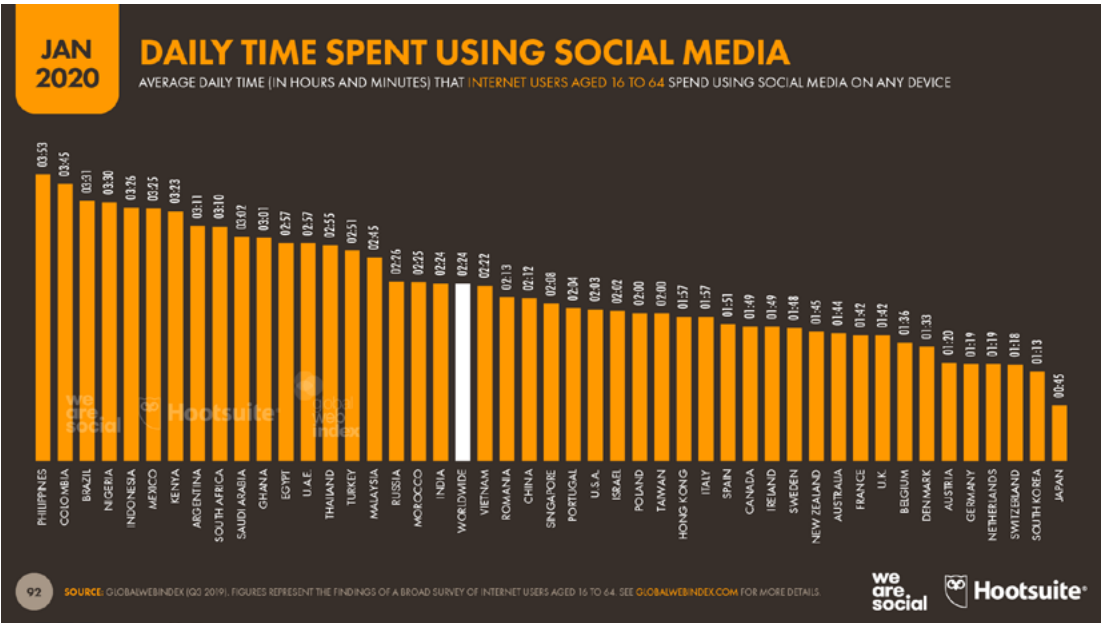
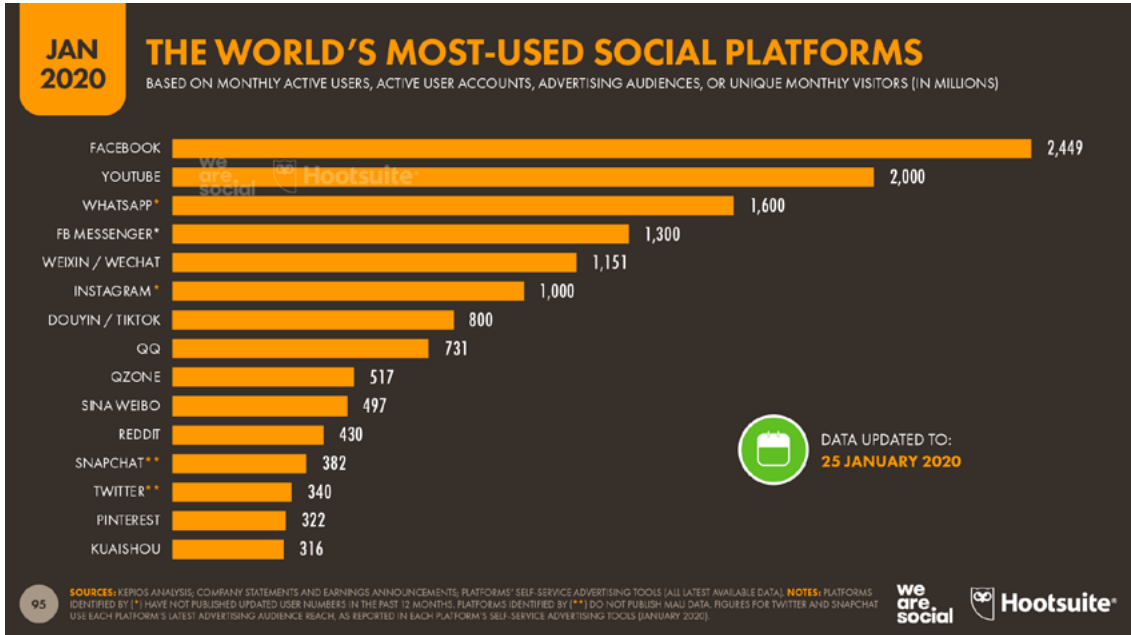
tinyurl.com/y6nfty3n

For further information

Digital in 2020,
WeAreSocial, Jan 2020
wearesocial.com/digital-2020

“Digital’s role in our lives has reached new heights, with more people spending more time doing more things online than ever before: worldwide, there are **3.80 billion social media users** in January 2020, with this number increasing by **more than 9 percent** (321 million new users) **since this time last year.**”





What is BLM movement? How is social media shaping civil rights movements?

From the clicked words "*Black Lives Matter*"

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Extract from

About Black Lives Matter
Official Site BLM, 2013
blacklivesmatter.com/

Black Lives Matter
Wikipedia, 2020
tinyurl.com/2vwqjg3q

Lavietes Matt,
How Social Media Is Shaping
Civil Rights Movements,
Resource, Jun 2017
tinyurl.com/4gkdjp7o

"#BlackLivesMatter was founded in 2013 in response to the acquittal of Trayvon Martin's murderer. Black Lives Matter Global Network Foundation, Inc. is a global organization in the US, UK, and Canada, whose mission is to eradicate white supremacy and build local power to intervene in violence inflicted on Black communities by the state and vigilantes. By combating and countering acts of violence, creating space for Black imagination and innovation, and centering Black joy, we are winning immediate improvements in our lives."

"The movement returned to national headlines and gained further international attention during the global George Floyd protests in 2020 following the killing of George Floyd by Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin. An estimated 15 million to 26 million people participated in the 2020 Black Lives Matter protests in the United States, making it one of the largest movements in the country's history.

The movement comprises many views and a broad array of demands but they center on criminal justice reform."

"On a greater scheme, social media has been used as a weapon to spread causes for social struggles of freedom, justice, and equality. Civil rights movements have capitalized social media's influence, making cause's values and ideas unavoidable to everyday users. In recent years, movements including the Women's March, Black Lives Matter, and the Human Rights Campaign have all been leaders in multiplying supporters through social networking."



Granillo Gabriel,
*The Role of Social Media
in Social Movements*,
Monthly Portland, Oct 2020
tinyurl.com/7l65r34f

“There are a few ways to think about the impact of social media with regard to social movements. The “slacktivism” is one, where users circulate information and resources through likes, shares, and retweets. Though it’s been disregarded as noncommittal, feel-good politics, there is some evidence that suggests this form of activism can actually help.

[...] A study by the University of Pennsylvania Annenberg School for Communication pointed to two significant groups in social protests: a core group and a periphery group. The core group are the users on the street, actively protesting and spreading their message, and the periphery are low-commitment participants, echoing and sharing that message through various social media.

[...] For Kelsy Kretschmer, an associate professor of sociology at Oregon State University, [...] information is most mobilizing when it’s coming from acquaintances or a stranger with a common communal background as opposed to a friend, family member, or loved one. “If you see a lot of people online on your social media feed showing up for a protest, you are also more likely to show up for a protest because you feel like this is what your network is doing, and that can be really valuable,” Kretschmer says.

“George Floyd’s death matters to more people because there was footage of it happening. And it’s much different than reading an account in a newspaper,” she says. “[...] That changes how many people are willing to participate.”

Who is the Proud Boys organization?

From the clicked words “Proud Boys”

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For further information

Wendling Mike,
US Election 2020: Who are the Proud Boys - and who are antifa?
BBC News, Sep 2020
[tinyurl.com/y629ydpq](https://www.bbc.com/news/health-56944444)

The organization was founded in 2016 by Canadian-British right-wing activist Gavin McInnes, and now it is labelled as a far-right, anti-immigrant, all-male group with a history of street violence against its left-wing opponents.

The group's name is a reference to a song from the musical version of the Disney film Aladdin. Members often wear black and yellow Fred Perry polo shirts along with red “Make America Great Again” hats.

The group shows in its platform the mottos for which they “fight”: Trumpian ideas (“glorify the entrepreneur”, “close the border”), libertarianism (“give everyone a gun”, “end welfare”) and traditional gender roles (“venerate the housewife”).

The groups has been banned from many social platforms like Facebook, Instagram and Twitter; its members have been largely shunted towards less-popular networks.



What was the reaction of the Proud Boys to the overturning of meaning?

From the clicked words “*from a message of violence to a message of love*”

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Extract from

Brown Abram,
The Proud Boys Are Furious That Gay Men Have Taken Over #ProudBoys On Twitter, Forbes, Oct 2020

tinyurl.com/y5f9odyy

“The Proud Boys have no official presence on Twitter since the social media site banned them in 2018, so they have spent the last few days in gleeful celebration over their newfound, Trump-fueled fame on Parler, a two-year-old social media app popular among conservatives. And it’s their **absence on Twitter** that allowed the gay activists to seize control of #proudboys on Sunday.

The Proud Boys took none too kindly to this, **filling up Parler with the type of hateful messages** that got them kicked off Twitter in the first place. Much of the action was carried out by the Proud Boys’ official account on the app, which has 60,000 followers.”

Extract from

Elassar Alaa,
Gay men have taken over the Proud Boys Twitter hashtag, CNN, Oct 2020

tinyurl.com/y5f9odyy

“Enrique Tarrio, the leader of the Proud Boys, said he doesn’t see what the men are trying to accomplish.

«I think it’s **hysterical**,” Tarrio told CNN. “This isn’t something that’s offensive to us. It’s not an insult. **We aren’t homophobic**. We don’t care who people sleep with. People think it’s going to bother us. It doesn’t.»

He added, “One of the messages they want to send with this is that they’re trying to drown out our supporters, they’re trying to silence us. ... **When you’re trying to drown out other people’s thoughts, I don’t think there’s anything progressive about that**. Why don’t these people just engage?”

How do social media algorithms work? What can you do?

From the clicked words “three different social media”

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Extract from

Nemeth Cole,
How the Twitter algorithm works in 2020,
SproutSocial, Feb 2020
tinyurl.com/y2kl99mh

Twitter

“The biggest recent change to the **algorithm** happened in 2017 with the introduction of the relevance model, and replacing “While You Were Away” with “**In Case You Missed It**”. [...] When you’re following hundreds, or even thousands, of Twitter accounts, it becomes impossible to catch up on all the posts you might have missed after being offline for a period of time.

A Twitter blog post from 2017 helps highlight a few other **things to keep in mind when planning your content** for Twitter:

- **Recency**: how recently a Tweet was published;
- **Engagement**: has to do with how many retweets, clicks, favorites and impressions a Tweet has received;
- **Rich Media**: the type of media you include in your Tweet, such as images, videos and GIFs;
- **Activity**: refers to how active a user is. For example, how long its been since the user was last on the site, how many followers they have and how much they use the platform.”

“**10 Tips** to increase the organic reach of your Tweets:

- **Maintain an active Twitter presence**: the more often people engage, the more

Sehl Katie,
How the Twitter Algorithm Works in 2020 and How to Make it Work for You.
Hootsuite, May 2020
tinyurl.com/4ef7g79z



likely Twitter's algorithm is to share your tweets with them in the future;

- **Tweet at the right time**: the 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. EST window tends to be best.
- **Add tags purposefully**: keep an eye on trending hashtags. Or even better, plan ahead with top hashtag and keyword forecasts on the Twitter blog. But don't overdo it. Twitter recommends using no more than two hashtags per tweet.
- **Use photos, videos, GIFs**: a boost in engagement can boost your tweet's ranking with the Twitter algorithm. And it's well known that tweets with photos, videos, and GIFs tend to get more attention.
- **Encourage followers to engage**: when it comes to soliciting engagement on Twitter, it's simple. Ask and you shall receive. Ask a question. Ask for feedback.
- **Try a Twitter Poll**: another thing you can ask for: votes. Polls are a quick and easy way to ask for input on something.
- **Consider a Twitter thread**: threads are simply fun to unravel. The format offers [...] several opportunities for followers to engage.
- **Join relevant trends and topics**: be a part of the conversation on Twitter. Look for trends and topics that your brand can contribute to—or better yet, lead.
- **Repackage top content**: don't simply Retweet or copy your top performing content. Find creative ways to repackage and re-share what works. Leave enough time and contrast from the original so as not to appear spammy.
- **Apply insights from Twitter Analytics**: when it comes to algorithms, there are no one-size-fits-all solutions. Use Twitter Analytics to track what works and what doesn't."

TikTok

"It's important to highlight a few **things to keep in mind when planning your content** for TikTok:

Memon Masooma,
*How the TikTok Algorithm Works
 in 2020 (and How to Work With It)*,
 Hootsuite, Jul 2020
tinyurl.com/yyysats3



- **User interaction**: the TikTok algorithm serves users posts they engage with; The strongest ranking indicator in this category, however, is the video completion rate. This means if users watch a video in full, it's more likely to be pushed for further distribution to other feeds
- **Video information**: if users often search for a particular hashtag or enjoy content with a specific sound bite, they're more likely to see videos with the same hashtag and sound.
- **Account or device settings**: users' location, language preference, and device type also play a role as these optimize the watching experience. However, they don't have as much weight as other ranking signals.

11 tips for working with the TikTok algorithm:

- **Create short, 15-second long videos.**
- **Create video content that engages viewers from the start**: introduce a hook into your video within three seconds so viewers don't yawn and scroll past it.
- **Add an engaging caption**: TikTok beats tweets to writing short captions; question-based captions help as well.
- **Pay attention to each video you create**: TikTok shows all videos, irrespective of the creator's follower count, to a set of potentially interested users. So, you don't have to build an audience first (as is the norm these days) and get video views second. Put another way, so long as your content is good, it'll pick up steam in the algorithm.
- **Create high-quality videos that are well-edited.**
- **Post when your audience is active and most engaged.**
- **Engage with other TikTokers.**

- **Use the correct hashtags**: this includes #fyp, #foryou, and #foryoupage; if you create truly awesome videos for trending hashtags, you're likely to attract a sizeable part of the crowd to your content.
- **Join hashtag challenges**: participating in a hashtag challenge is an excellent way to grow your video views and gain favor with the algorithm. Find the prevailing hashtag challenges from the Discover tab.
- **Use trending sounds and music in your videos**: sounds also ride the popularity wave on TikTok. This means creating videos to these trending sounds can help you tap into the algorithm further. You'll need to open your video editor and click Sounds on the top. Scroll down to find trending sounds. You can also gather trending sounds from your TikTok Pro Account. Spot what your followers have been listening to in the last seven days under the Follower tabs.
- **Make sure people can interact with your content**: enabling your download option lets people share your content on other social channels.

Instagram

"The Instagram algorithm relies on three primary ranking signals:

- **Relationship**: the algorithm bumps up posts from accounts that a user already interacts with. For brands and creators, this means that focusing on community engagement is key. Exchanging DMs, tagging each other in posts, and frequently leaving comments are all actions that indicate a close relationship between accounts.
- **Interest**: if users have enjoyed certain types of posts in the past, the algorithm is more likely to show that type of post to them in the future.
- **Timeliness**: Posts that are more recent are more likely to be pushed to the top of people's feeds. This means that posting when your audience is online is crucial.

Cooper Paige,
*How the Instagram Algorithm Works
in 2020 (And How to Work With It)*,
Hootsuite, Apr 2020
tinyurl.com/zk3zvkg9

8 tips for working with the Instagram algorithm:

- **Post consistently**: in order to get traction with the Instagram algorithm, you need to first build relationships with your audience.
- **Keep a close eye on your analytics**: looking at your Instagram analytics is, not surprisingly, one of the best ways to get insight into not just how your audience feels, but how the algorithm sees you.
- **Remix, reuse and repost your top-performing content**: upcycling and remixing your best tried-and-true content has two benefits: you already know the algorithm likes it, and it saves time.
- **Reward your audience for spreading the word with user generated content**: there are plenty of ways to reward enthusiastic fans: in many cases just reposting their content to your followers (a.k.a. regramming) will win hearts and minds. Not to mention plump up your content calendar.
- **Collaborate with like minds**: finding a relevant collaborator with a complementary audience is one of the best ways to organically expand your reach to new eyes.
- **Build quality relationships the old-fashioned way.**
- **Use hashtags properly**: hashtags are an integral tool for getting your content in front of the right eyes; misusing or abusing your hashtags is one of the easiest ways to get on the wrong side of the Instagram algorithm.
- **Post in a timely manner**: the Instagram algorithm favours recent posts, so post when your audience is online.”

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

