

TREND: Hashtag social activism

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Social activism is a massive social media trend and doesn't just pertain to global events as we saw in early January 2015, but can also target brands. And the influence and reach of social media and those who know how to use it correctly, will only increase, particularly as another 2015 trend grows: that of mobile social media marketing as more people access social media from mobile devices.

According to [Statista](#), there are already about 1.79 billion users in social media in 2014. And it is projected to reach about 2.44 billion by 2018. Social media is becoming the most effective platform to get your message out, across the globe.

The question of whether social media is being used and measured correctly in order to derive maximum benefit from it, is another question. There is no doubt that social activism is on the rise because of the popularity and global reach of social media.

So-called "Hashtag Activism" has gained popularity worldwide. 2014 will be remembered for the #BringBackOurGirls campaign, among others, and 2015 is already trending with #JeSuisCharlie, referring to protests over the Paris attacks on a satirical newspaper.



hxdbzxy via [123RF](#)

Social media is an opportunity to spread the word about various causes at a faster rate, to a bigger number of people, than through traditional methods, reports the [Huffington Post](#), which describes social media as one of the most powerful forms of activism.

The reasons are simple: social media allows more people to be reached, and around the world. There are no boundaries, no borders, no perceived freedom of speech issues, no overt censorship, no bias. Everyone gets a say, good or bad. And when an issue moves people - like any other great content that engages them emotionally - they share it. Again. And again. Until it trends around the world.

"Social media gives people the power to call out injustices, inaccuracies and misrepresentations and brings about better understanding of other cultures and people. Mediums like Twitter give people the platform to amplify their concerns, demand authentic storytelling and create dialogue that may eventually dispel stereotypes," reports the *Huffington Post*.

Social investment

For brands and services, it takes investment in specialists and software to ensure their brand message gets across in the manner they want it to, to achieve a return on investment (ROI).

Socialmediatoday.com's top trends for 2015 are:

- Social media will be designed more for mobile devices.
- Images will be used in a more extensive manner.
- Short videos will be more in use.
- Companies will go for viral marketing.
- Real-time marketing will rise significantly.
- Instagram and LinkedIn will be the most popular platforms.
- Creativity will be the need of the hour - content needs to be visual and creative.

Visual content will in particular have a major impact for marketers and video marketing in 2015 will be big. "The use of visual content on social media is not going to be limited to images only. Companies are likely to create short but informative videos on their products and services. And this is going to be one of the best ways to connect with the target audience within the shortest possible time. Interactive videos are also expected to rule the roost in 2015. Sites like Instagram, which offer excellent video marketing opportunities, are likely to become more and more popular during the year," reports SocialMediatoday.com.

Innovation

Social media growth is also being fuelled by innovation:

- **Mobile payments:** Facebook has built a hidden (for now) payment feature inside its Messenger app, which will allow people to send money to each other using debit card info, free of charge, reports Time magazine. Mobile payments are a huge global trend.
- **Social shopping:** Both Twitter and Facebook began testing 'buy' buttons to allow users to purchase from brands online. (*Time*)
- **Investment:** More money will flow into social networks as social media companies become more than just networks, to fully fledged digital platforms, reports Techrepublic.com.
- **Smart social:** The explosion of smart devices collecting data and pushing it wirelessly to various apps, including social networks. The smart marketing of that data and harnessing it is another chapter yet to unfold. (*Time*)
- **Converged media:** Social media will integrate into live events, including television. Tweeting while watching shows, television, live events, etc., can push them to the top of ratings (Techrepublic).
- **Content marketing:** "In 2015, marketers will finally realise that there are two core pillars of a content marketing strategy: publication and distribution. Marketers will learn that social media is the most effective method of expanding the reach and visibility of their content, and because of this, will come to view social media as more of an 'amplifier' for their published content rather than as the content itself," reports Forbes magazine.

What is always very interesting is that internationally, much of the research done into social media comes from public relations companies - quite the opposite in South Africa, where the PR companies are largely being sidelined by the digital agencies as regards championing social media, both in research, solutions and implementation.

Measurement is a huge trend this year. [Heidi Myers](#), Meltwater's head of marketing and communications across Central Europe, Africa and the Middle East, poses this question: "If a tweet falls in a forest and no one is around to share it, does it make a sound? The short answer is: nope. If your content isn't shared socially, it simply isn't social marketing. It's long-format advertising. As social media marketers, driving word of mouth (going viral) is our primary goal.

"We want people clicking on our content to share it. Once they share it, that's viral word of mouth - and that's what we're after. Top tip: don't be the guy with the megaphone. We as marketers decided on a static target message, and we broadcast it to a target audience. This is fine for traditional advertising and some PR initiatives: basically, if you want to control the message and that's more important than having it shared, this broadcast model works," Myers says.

However, the traditional monologue marketing model doesn't work for social media, she says. "You can't just broadcast a message at an audience and hope it resonates, because we're trying to start a conversation. Social media is a dialogue marketing model."

**Trends curated by [Louise Marsland](#), specialist editor of Biz Trends 2015.*

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