

What's in a hashtag?

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Like every year since South Africa's liberation, youth month has come and gone as quickly as it came. As a generation living in the shadow and following in the footsteps of those who left a great legacy, would we say we're deserving of their sacrifice?

Can we honestly say without doubt that our generation has earned and maintained the dignity that came with the freedoms handed to us? Are commemorations like Youth Day even relevant to a generation to whom liberation is a birth right? I get that we are a hashtag generation that has birthed cross cultural and trans-continental social media movements throughout the globe, but are we honestly doing enough to make an impact and leave the world better than we found it? Is it enough to just view, like, share and heart posts that demand us to take action?

It's become the principle to #prayforvictims of terrorism or some other humanitarian crisis. The hashtags are now trivial, they don't really get us thinking about what it is that we are trying to achieve when we share them with our friends and followers. They have become the subconscious act we perform because it seems like the 'right thing to do', they demonstrate to others that you are aware/in tune with an event that occurred elsewhere, and as a result, an empathetic response is expected from you. You become part of the cool kids club by adding your two cents to the noise.



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It's become the norm to mobilise cyber users who share our anger and resentment against some other alleged racist who forgot to censor themselves. It's expected that getting just enough people speaking about an issue would get a person fired or it would make it 'trend' on twitter- until something else happens and we move on.

We are such a reactive pupil who thrives on novelty, we have no sense of loyalty to issues we claim to believe in. We don't seem to be 'results driven' because we like quick fixes. Issues are deemed unworthy of our energy the moment their life cycle ends on social media. It's only interesting when it shows up in our timelines only to be replaced once again by something more tragic. It's obviously really hard to retain our attention with all the noise going on the world because the competition is tough at the top of our thought hierarchy.

Whatever happened to #bringbackourgirls, remember that novel idea. We chant for the kinds of movements that don't expect too much from us, ones that don't inconvenience our lives. We thrive on pet projects that can be forgotten the moment the court of public opinion deems them irrelevant-we have proudly adopted a psyche that propels us to be so connected and yet so detached. When was the last time any of us saw something through, remember how heated and passionate we felt about #rhodesmustfall, #feesmustfall or #zumamustfall? We seem to have the right intention and our collective mind is in the right place, but we don't have the drive to inconvenience and push ourselves to do things that make us uncomfortable.

We are a generation born of great revolutionaries, so clearly we have it in our blood line to do more than just tweet about our anger. The media has deemed our generation of youth movers, shakers, challengers of the status quo. But we need to start expecting more of ourselves, believing in our own potential for greatness, begin to be less self-centred and stop worrying so much about our own shortcomings. I think we honestly spend way too much time dwelling on the insecurities brought on by the delusions social media feeds us.

The youth of 16 June picked a struggle and then went to fight for it. Doing for the greater good and aiming to make a bigger impact that lives outside our own ambitions would certainly give us perspective. Social media makes it easy to identify causes we believe in but the focus should be channelled offline. Maybe we have become our own worst enemies because we have nothing to fight for? We are not in a gorilla war so burning down and damaging public property doesn't count, we need new strategies to channel our energy.

What would the answer be if we were individually asked - 'do you have anything that you believe in strongly enough to die for?'

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