

December's #illridewithyou: One of the year's biggest Twitter events

By [Walter Pike](#)

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An allegedly mentally deranged man walked into a Lindt store in downtown Sydney on Monday 15 December, and took the patrons hostage. The man happened to be Muslim, and although his motives were uncertain, his siege sparked off such a large islamophobic response that the ultra-right wing Australian Defence League threatened confrontation at the Muslim majority suburb of Lakemba.

Then, something remarkable happened - a Brisbane woman named [@Rachael Jacobs](#) decided to protect a Muslim lady who had removed her headscarf on the train by offering to walk with her to her destination as a gesture of support.

#illridewithyou

“ This, this is what good people do. [#sydneyseige](#) [#MartinPlace](#) [pic.twitter.com/zxbHLWzxEp](#)- Michael James (@MichaelJames_TV) [December 15, 2014](#) ”

She updated her private Facebook status with the story and her feelings. This was shared by a friend Michael James and picked up by [Tessa Kum](#) on Twitter, who had 540 followers at the time. She in turn offered to accompany anyone else travelling on her bus.

“ If you reg take the #373 bus b/w Coogee/MartinPl, wear religious attire, & don't feel safe alone: I'll ride with you. @ me for schedule.- Sir Tessa (@sirtessa) [December 15, 2014](#) ”

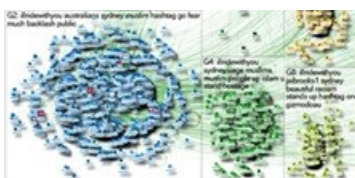
“ Maybe start a hashtag? What's in [#illridewithyou](#)?- Sir Tessa (@sirtessa) [December 15, 2014](#) ”

“ Anyway. #373 bus between Coogee & Martin Place. [#illridewithyou](#) @ me if you just want to wear your headdress & not be bothered.- Sir Tessa (@sirtessa) [December 15, 2014](#) ”

The impact of taking an offline action online with a hashtag

The idea to start a hashtag followed and the one of the [biggest twitter events of the year](#) followed.

This is a dramatic example of how an idea can spread as the hashtag made its way across the world. It's also a study of influence and how individual players can circulate a thought.



[click to enlarge](#)

When you come down to it, #illridewithyou is an idea. And marketing is all about spreading ideas - it's always instructional to look at how successful ideas spread. With this in mind, I had three [NodeXL](#) maps run around an hour apart. I wanted to understand who the influential people in that discussion were - I will only include one here.

The graph shows that the hashtag idea was taken up by many people spontaneously, and although they haven't become a real community, they could do so.

Analysing the true marketing impact and Twitter influencers

Over the three periods we captured, the most influential person in the conversation was identified as [@Julian Burnside](#), who was able to use a substantial following of 61,210 on Twitter to consistently dominate the discussion. He did this with a dozen tweets. He could thus be crowned the mayor of this hashtag.



Sumi Hasan's Twitter profile

[@SirTessa](#), the lady who started it all, owned the hashtag for a short while, but without people like Burnside picking up on it, I doubt it would have gone nearly as far.

Other key players in the dissemination of this idea that many Moslems had a crucial part to play included [Sumi Hasan](#), who has 23,824 followers and was a major contributor to the spread of the idea.



Julian Burnside's profile

But a real surprise in the analysis is the role of [Mahrukh Bashir](#), who played an extremely prominent part in the discussion by transmitting the idea to her Twitter followers in volume. She has only 53 of them, but by constantly retweeting and sharing the hashtag, she was able to help spread the idea as a bridge.



In this topic, she had very high relevance and was very influential.

Every conversation on social media can be analysed as I did this one.

The benefit of analysing Twitter conversations...

In the analysis, we can find every person who found this topic important, and more importantly, we can gauge the viewpoint and commitment of the people involved.

The data lets us discover the community around a topic, tells us what the community thinks, highlights the roles individuals play in that community, gives us the information we need to gather all the people that care into groups and allows us to understand real influence and activate that community.

Ultimately, it allows us to facilitate the conversation in that community and start a movement.

Isn't that what every marketer dreams of doing, as well as every politician and every social activist?

As a result of her spontaneous Twitter activity, [Tessa Kum](#) has faced a pile of hate tweets, mainly along the lines that it's patronising behaviour and simply part of her "white saviour" complex, even though she is bi-racial. I think she just did something kind because it was the right thing to do.

[Click here](#) to view her thoughts on her blog after the rocket launched.

ABOUT WALTER PIKE

Walter has decades long experience in advertising, PR, digital marketing and social media both as a practitioner and as an academic. As a public speaker; Speaks on the future of advertising in the post - broadcast era. As an activist; works in an intersection of feminism & racism. He has devised an intervention in unpacking whiteness for white people. As an educator; upskilling programs in marketing comms, advertising & social in South, West and East Africa. Social crisis management consultant & educator. Ideagogy founder

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