
SOCIAL NETWORKING AND OTHER TECHNOLOGIES: CAPTURING THE ATTENTION AND MAINTAINING THE SOCIAL SIGNIFICANCE OF AN ISSUE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

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INTRODUCTION

THIS ARTICLE IS ABOUT WAYS IN WHICH DIGITAL NATIVES CONVERSE DAY-TO-day and explains the value in knowing how they converse. “Digital native” is a term that is used to describe young people in First World countries who were born into an era during which the Internet truly became popular: the digital era. The focus of this article is to explain ways in which to keep the attention of the digital native. This has proven to be difficult in the past as there are many things that are thrown into their visual range that serve to distract them.

Many of the observations in this article are drawn from my own experiences and perceptions. I will be bringing in some of my evaluations of the *Kony 2012* campaign, which seemed only to last a few days in the minds of youth, and will talk about how and why the campaign went viral. I will discuss the methods used to capture the attention of youth specifically, such as short clips and slogans, and in particular the fact that the campaign was not limited to one social networking site. The campaign itself invited youth to become more involved in their communities (e.g., putting up posters all over downtown Toronto), to become more knowledgeable about world issues, and to donate to the cause. Interest in the campaign’s videos, and the campaign generally, only seemed to last a few days, and there were not many people who actually did post the posters downtown. In light of these observations, I wanted to write about ways in which one could actually get a large youth population to congregate downtown and put up posters for a cause they believe in and understand.

ENGAGING YOUNG DIGITAL NATIVES

Digital natives are constantly bombarded with different advertisements and messages. However, unlike many preceding generations, the digital native generally finds it difficult to take in the great amounts of information thrown their way.

The thought process of the digital native is different as compared to that of their predecessors, i.e., their parents. These different thought processes can be divided into two main categories, being the former generation (those who are in their early thirties +) on the one hand and digital natives on the other. The former generation had, in their formative years, a significantly less amount of information thrown at them. They did not have

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to worry about technology such as the World Wide Web presenting a new issue every time a new Web page loaded.

It follows that the former generation was presumably able to take more time to engage with the information offered to them and to try to understand if they wished. However, digital natives must pick and choose which information to invest their time in and these choices are often determined by how useful the information could potentially be in their future. Digital natives are intensely targeted by companies and organizations. Many of those in the former generation don't understand that digital natives must deal with this issue on a greater scale than the average older adult, especially those organizations desiring money, such as the *Invisible Children* organization. The organization ran the *Kony 2012* campaign, a social media campaign that aimed to make people aware of the transgressions of Ugandan guerrilla group leader Joseph Kony, requesting money to help those who were alleged to be in dire need.

This campaign's accomplishments were amazing. The organization used social media sites to target youth and younger adults. In targeting youth, they were able to get the information out to both digital natives and to adults. The information flowed to adults in large part because youth discuss important world issues with their family when they do not quite comprehend all of the relevant terminology. The former generation, however, is likely to retain the information and the youth generation will struggle to keep it in their interest, as a new topic is bound to emerge soon. A question for many is: "How can I capture the attention of these individuals?"

The key is to be meaningful, true, and efficient. This Taylor-ist, capitalist world demands efficiency in those who are young; so adults must step up to the plate and match the demand in efficiency. In the *Kony 2012* campaign, this was achieved through the use of various social media sites, one of which was twitter.

With its use of short messages of under 140 characters, tweets about the *Kony 2012* campaign caught the attention of many and reached the top trending topics. Messages easily go viral since twitter messages are very short, potentially catchy/memorable (to the point), as well as noticed easily by youth, specifically because of slogans. With twitter, *Invisible Children* made their slogans known by tweeting them away to the world. It must be remembered that these tweets were a meaningful manipulation of their audience. How did they do manipulate them? Emotion. The organization made both short and long videos, which were linked in their tweets. The short videos worked extremely well in evoking emotion in the viewers. In a short time, the videos created the feeling of pity and made the viewer generally feel like they needed to help. However, the organization did something quite great here again. The organization did not pressure the audience into donating to the cause monetarily. They simply asked that viewers "spread the word" by recommending something quite simple: reposting and spreading the information. With a click of a button, or by word of mouth, *Invisible Children* evoked feelings within those who were informed of their campaign. They allowed their viewers to believe that they were truly helping individuals far away with their simple efforts – and it is true. They did spread the information about the cause and help raise awareness about the situation to many around the world.

There were also long videos. For those who wanted to get more information, these long videos, one of which was about half an hour long, were created. If the individual reading these tweets didn't have much time to get all the facts, they looked at the short videos. The longer videos were targeted to the former generation, as it would seem that these individuals are not often easily convinced about what they see on the Internet unless they have some facts or strongly believable information.

In the few hours that passed after it was posted, the *Kony 2012* went viral. It was as if a scandal had broken. If you didn't know about the topic, the impression was that you weren't social whatsoever. The following day, debates struck up between those who were wary of the truth and devoted believers of the campaign's message. However, the campaign made a crucial mistake.

They asked for more effort from the present generation. It wasn't that much of an effort, but it was more than a click of a button. The campaign asked that everyone in their own cities (including Toronto) go downtown and put up posters, in the hopes of increasing the number of people informed about the topic. As many know, this request essentially ended in failure.

The *Kony 2012* campaign ended with many people calling it a scam and refusing to support it. *Invisible Children* used what many perceived as bad slogans, such as "Make Kony Famous" (Kony, 2012). The problem: the slogan sounded as if they were trying to give Kony, an unethical character, glory, presenting Kony in high regard.

Frustration was evident as the campaign continued downhill. The present generation is strongly against being lied to and played for a fool; when information is found to be false, the former generation opts to forget and discredit the information as soon as possible. The campaign had lost trust, which is pretty difficult to re-obtain. Irritation caused by the false information was the campaign's ultimate downfall, as the principle of truth is important in twenty-first century society. Fabricated perceptions of truth can create a trend but falsity ultimately leads to failure. The lessons: social networking is a start but cannot be the heart of information; slogans, manipulation, and persuasion make a difference; and truth and trust create the ultimate route to success.

REFERENCE

Kony 2012. (2012). URL: <http://invisiblechildren.com/kony> [March 2, 2013].