

Solidarity in Social Media: when users abandon their comfort zone



Back in January, I wrote a post showing the reaction in the Social Media to the Charlie Hebdo shootings in Paris: [C'est l'Europe qui pleure – The echo of a tragedy in Social Media](#). Seeing the potential of the gathered data and the reactions on this post, I decided to take it to the next level by literally *dissecting* the Social Media dialogue into specific behaviors and mapping these behaviors to the particular Charlie Hebdo's case.

The result has been published in the publicly accessible Icono 14 scientific journal... you can read it under this link: [Solidarity in Social Media: when users abandon their comfort zone - The Charlie Hebdo case](#)

For those in a rush and for those not reading scientific articles on principle -yes, I have a few friends *allergic* out of boredom to scientific papers, yet interested in discovering insights-, I'm bringing here the result of my analysis.

That's the way a "**Solidarity Outbreak**" manifests in the *Social Media*:

1) Breaking the communication pattern

- **Need for speaking up**

SM users follow some activity patterns. The need for speaking up, supporting the cause and joining the community makes users, that according to their patterns are not supposed to post anything during a given period of time since the last interaction, take action.

To analyse it we suggest working with two indicators: the average time between SM interactions and the timestamp of the latest interaction.

- **Change in posting style**

SM users usually exhibit their own posting style, for example, using abbreviations, writing very long or very short posts, referencing a lot to other users or hardly ever, richly using hashtags or by the absence of those, etc.

2) The emergence of flagging hashtags

- **Creation of event specific hashtags**

The communication of the event needs virality, which requires standardization in the flagging of posts. It motivates the creation of hashtags related to the event. At the beginning, several candidate hashtags circulate... following specific patterns, such as '*eventname*' with certain variations including misspellings, etc... unity messages such as 'ensemble', name of the human rights that have been attacked, such as #freedom or #freedomofexpression. etc The emerge of these hashtags translate into a set of flags for those tweets that are meant to refer to the event

- **Consolidation of event specific hashtags**

As time passes by, the community of SM users engage with certain tags more. Consequently, these tags gain

more visibility and spread, separating the ones that are the “most representative” event hashtags from the other candidates. This engagement based selection process works at a global scale and for the different localities

3) Searching for own identity in the global context

- **Adoption of foreign hashtags**

When such a tragic event occurs, it's not about differences... Rather, SM users seek for unity and sense of community. Users that usually don't post in any other language but theirs, adopt foreign languages hashtags related to the event in their communication. Typically the scope of the foreign languages usage stays at tag level, being the resting part of the message in the users' usual posting language (e.g.: “we are supporting you France! #liberté #solidarité” more typical than having the whole written in French)

- **Mirroring of hashtags in their own language**

Hashtags are mirrored by users in their own language to foster the spread in country specific communities and to add a touch of local identity to the global trend (e.g.: the originating one might be ‘#freedomofexpression’ and get mirrored into German as ‘#pressefreiheit’). Sometimes, the mirroring process triggers the adaption to more sounded local forms of global hashtags, especially if they can relate to existing tags that have traditionally been full of meaning in the local geography.

- **Searching for community identities**

People want to add an identity to the supporting message. The statement “I support you” is obvious by the author of the post, but it's too granular in terms of identity. “We support you” is more powerful, as “we” is bigger than “I”... Thus, SM users tend to use the most identity-rich “We” they can find, which usually is the name of the city the live in (e.g.: “#rome”, “#munich”, “#rennes”)

4) Answers seeking

- **The need to apply the global context to the local issues**

A tragic event often makes people take things very seriously –it could have happened to me--. As a consequence, a debate is usually initiated, especially if the circumstances under which the event took place are close to the local ones (e.g.: climate of religious segregation, radicalization, challenging integration of minorities, etc). It manifests in several local references in the SM interactions flagged with the event's hashtags. Addressing the root cause or the high-level pattern In the shock-state, people take a moment to understand how such a terrible event could have ever happened. Fundamental questions rise and the need for addressing these questions manifests in the SM dialogue (e.g.: ‘#islamophobie’ or ‘#integration’ might pop up after a terrorist attack)

- **The rise of the opposite voices**

Where we find a lot of people condemning the incident, other groups of SM users might speak in favor of what motivated such a horrifying incident to take place. Even after a while, condemning behaviors might crystalize into violent actions against those who were supposedly behind the incident, which usually leads to radicalization in the media dialogue.

Do I have proof points? Yes I do... Are you curious about these behavioral changes manifest in a real scenario? well, then there's no way around reading the [article](#) :)