

The importance of hashtagging

 By [Craig Hannabus](#)

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Amber vs. Depp is illustrating the extent of our collective social clout



Source: © business2community [business2community](#) Your hashtagged post matters more than you know

Up until a few weeks ago, I was making a very concerted effort to avoid any exposure to the Johnny Depp vs. Amber Heard trial.

I wanted to maintain the delusion that I was above all the drama and voyeurism that comes with people laying bare the sordid details of their lives. But TikTok being what it is (and I'm addicted), I was served an overwhelming amount of Amber's 'dog stepping on a bee' tragedy. I was hooked.

Social Media Forensics

Of particular interest to me was the testimony of Ron Schnell, a social media forensic expert. I had never heard of that job title before.

Schnell generated a report detailing when people were using certain hashtags and how they correlated with certain details of the case. I found his testimony fascinating.

The lawyers tore him apart, which is either indicative of Schnell's poor skills as a social media forensics expert, the newness of the field (and possibly made-up nature of it), or Schnell's lack of experience on the stand.

Schnell is an educated man. He knows over 40 computer programming languages and has served as an expert on a multitude of court cases across all sorts of technical issues.

Judging by the proliferation of articles detailing the tools and methodologies that make up social media forensics, it is fast becoming a real field - and the fact that a so-called expert is being called upon in court cases - a very important one.

I have a lot of questions about how you would go about putting together a course in social media forensics so that it does become more formalised, but I'll save those questions (and hopefully answers) for another day.

War of the hashtags

Let's talk about those millions of tweets and how they became a discussion point in this trial. This really does boil down to a war of hashtags.

On the one hand, you have #justicefordepp (and a bunch of other more derogatory hashtags), and on the other, #believeamherheard. This case is more of a landmark case than we know.

Firstly, it's a case being decided by social media. Sure, we're in the courtrooms now, but the fates of Heard and Depp have already been decided by the public. Depp has just received his first acting job in years, Heard has been kicked off of the sequel to Aquaman. The people have spoken. The court case is just a formality.

Secondly, if Depp wins, the #believeallwomen movement takes a hit. Publications (like *Vogue*) who have supported Heard and associated the case with that hashtag may lose some credibility. There's probably a lot more that could happen, but those sorts of predictions are above my pay grade.

Conversely, if Heard wins, we'll see #believeallwomen validated even more than it has been through the #metoo movement. There is likely to be some kind of public outcry though, considering all the millions of negative tweets Schnell uncovered.

Use hashtags properly

I'm not here to take sides or to predict outcomes (accurately), but what I am here to say is that you need to use hashtags properly.

I'm sorry, were you expecting something more profound? We're accustomed to hashtagging our content to increase organic reach and engagement.

What the Depp vs. Heard trial is demonstrating is that hashtags can do so much more.

For good or bad, you can decide the outcome of court cases and who gets to keep their jobs and gets fired.

We've had an idea of what was possible with our tweets for years, but Amber vs. Depp shows that it goes beyond giving the real-life version of Sonic the Hedgehog a new set of teeth.

Whether for good or ill, your hashtagged post matters more than you know and depending on who you are that may make the cost of your privacy worth it.

Side note: I never found out what happened to Amber's dog or the bee.

ABOUT CRAIG HANNABUS

Craig is the strategy director at Rogerwilco. His most recent career history, which spans more than 15 years, is dominated by digital - before that he worked in logistics.

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