



Hashtags on Social: What You Need To Know

A NewsWhip Social Publishing Insights Report

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To hashtag or not to hashtag?

Goodbye pound symbol, hello hashtag – the tool used across social media platforms to help group, or “tag” posts by adding a ‘#’ symbol before a word or phrase.

But, what are hashtags good for?

Well, it turns out that it depends – on platform, on publisher, and on purpose.

On Instagram, influencers use multiple hashtags tacked onto the bottom of their captions, or in separate comments, to drive views and gain followers. Hashtags are able to gain traction on Instagram as users are able to “follow” a specific hashtag. However, publishers, brands, and individuals on Instagram who already have dedicated large fan bases including National Geographic and Kim Kardashian, limit most posts to 1-3 hashtags.



In contrast, on Twitter and Facebook, hashtags are most often successful when they tap into an event and begin to “trend”. As a result, most successful posts don’t include more than one or two hashtags. Furthermore, using multiple hashtags in text-based media can reduce readability and viewer engagement.

Playing the platform is thus essential when making hashtag decisions. In this report, we dive into how different hashtag strategies can help generate engagement on across social.

How to use hashtags to drive engagement on Twitter

Understanding hashtag traction on Twitter around events

Tapping into current events with a hashtag can give a post traction on Twitter. From holidays to sporting events, a hashtag can help consolidate tweets about a topic that many are already posting about. By including current-event hashtags in posts, brands and publishers can increase the relevancy of their content.

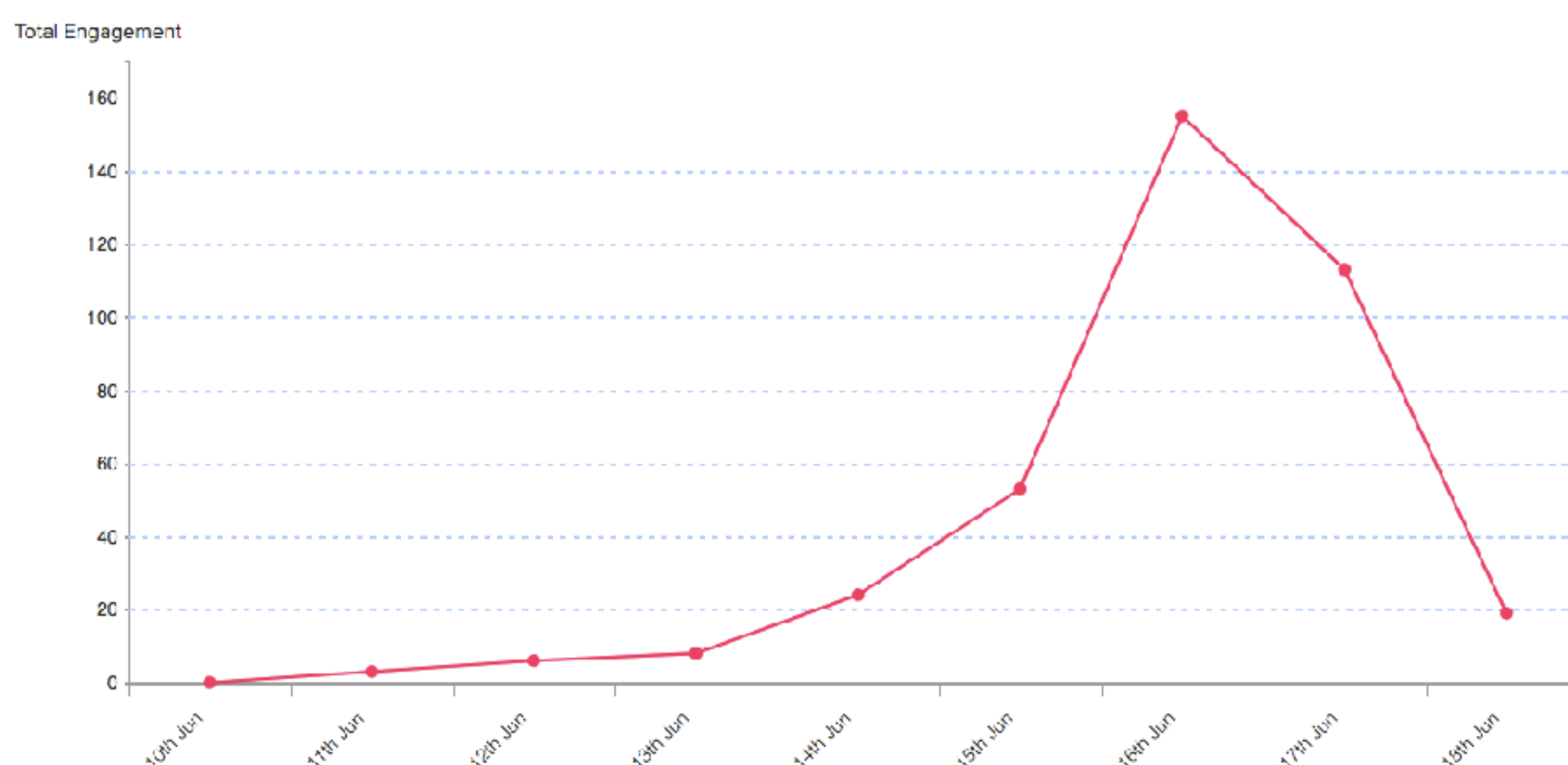
As a result, understanding how to time event-oriented hashtag use on Twitter is essential to driving velocity in posts.

We examined Tweets that included #USOpen during the event's 6-day period to analyze when the hashtag was used the most. After buildup that began in the days leading up to the event, the hashtag #USOpen peaked on the final day of the tournament.

This doesn't mean that event-oriented hashtags should only be used during the pinnacle of an event. Rather, these insights show that by building use of a hashtag throughout a certain period, content creators can simultaneously build engagement and connect with a growing number of Twitter users who are already tracking the event.

#USOpen on Twitter

Number of Twitter influencer shares on #USOpen content for June 11-17, 2018

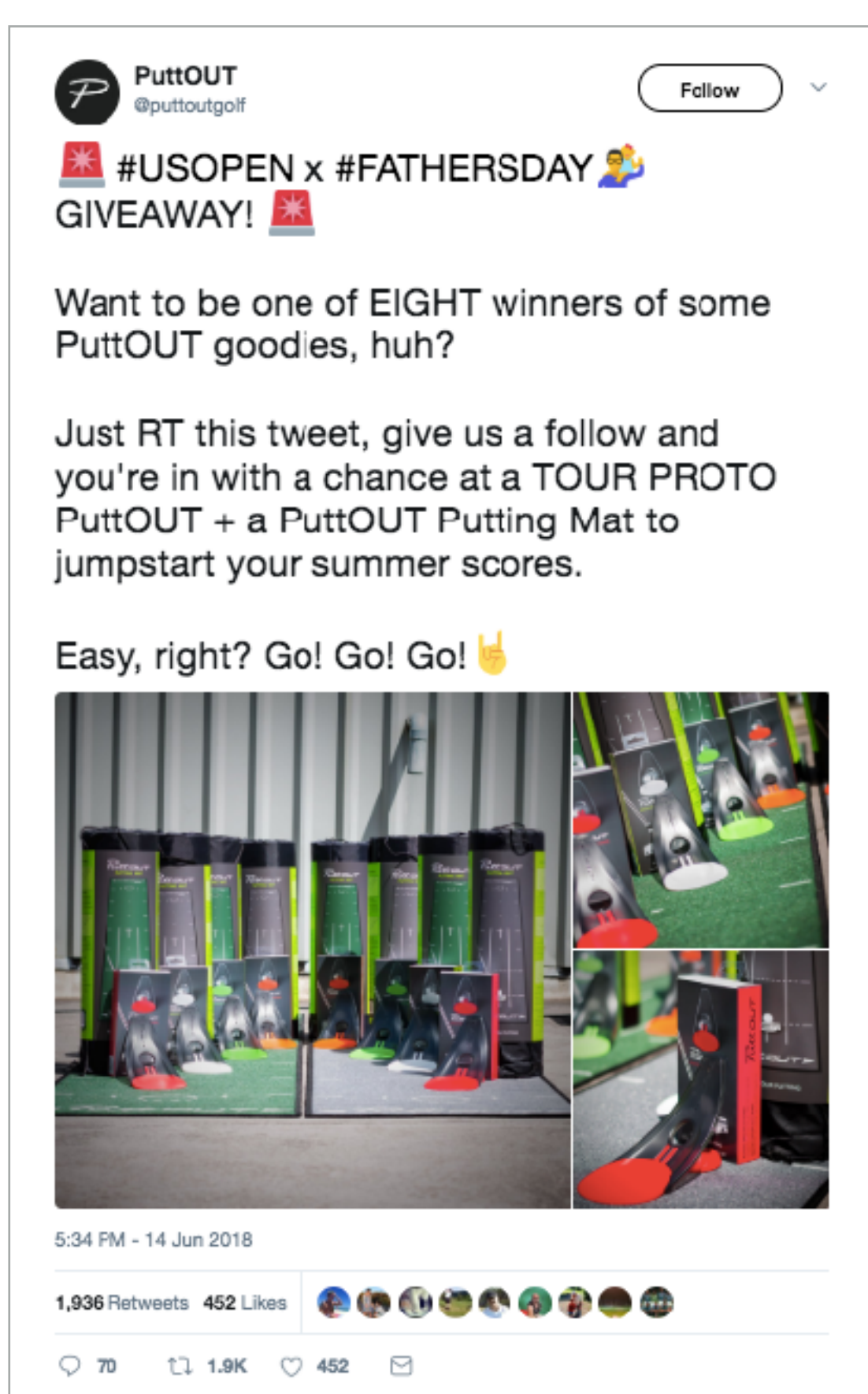


Use hashtags to connect with your audience

Hashtags are especially helpful when it comes to amplifying content that your audience already engages with. The top tweets that included #USOpen were from accounts that already marketed to golf and sports enthusiasts.

By adding hashtags to tweets that are already popular with their audience, publishers and brands can make content trend and go viral. Once a topic is trending, more Twitter users are likely to see and engage with the content,

The three tweets in our database that gained the most traction about the #USOpen were about sweepstakes contests that those who retweeted the post would be entered in. This increased the velocity of the post's shares and tuned into an interest that the audiences were already excited about.



**Use hashtags to
understand your
niche**

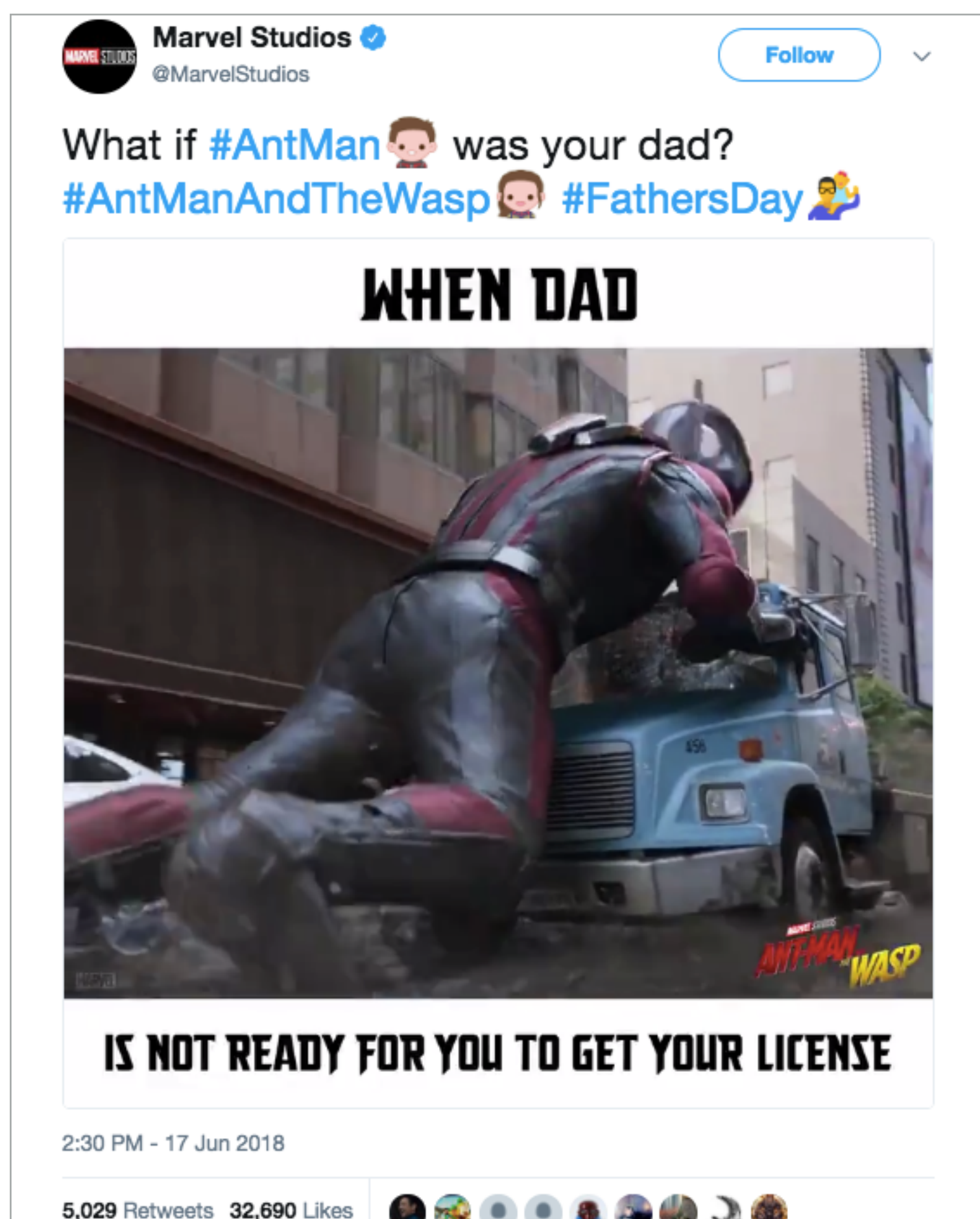
Keep track of event coverage & your competitors by watching hashtags

Mid-June saw brands tapping into the #FathersDay hashtag across social media platforms. So what worked best?

On Twitter, both Marvel and the NBA created emotional content that related to its brand, its audience, and the holiday, generating top engagement for both.

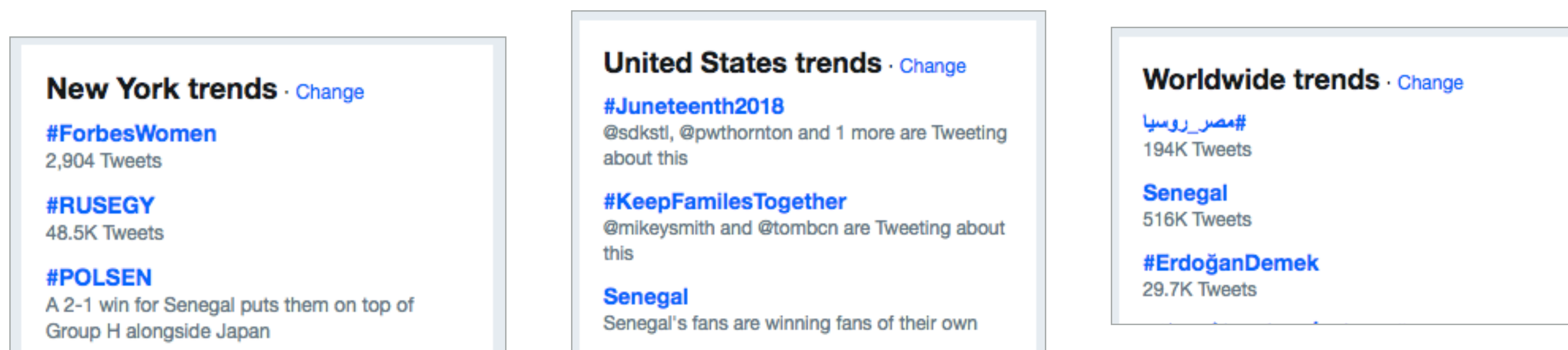
The NBA's Father's Day post included mention of its brand-specific hashtag, #ThisIsWhyWePlay, and included a video of NBA players with their children.

Similarly, Marvel used humor to personalize the #FathersDay hashtag for its audience. Referencing their new film *Ant Man and the Wasp*, Marvel made the post relevant to why its audience already follows the brand.



Finding user-generated content with hashtags

By following hashtags, marketers can tap into current events and trends that their customers are engaged with. Twitter’s “trending” feature allows users to browse through topics that are being shared widely on their platform by city, country, or worldwide.

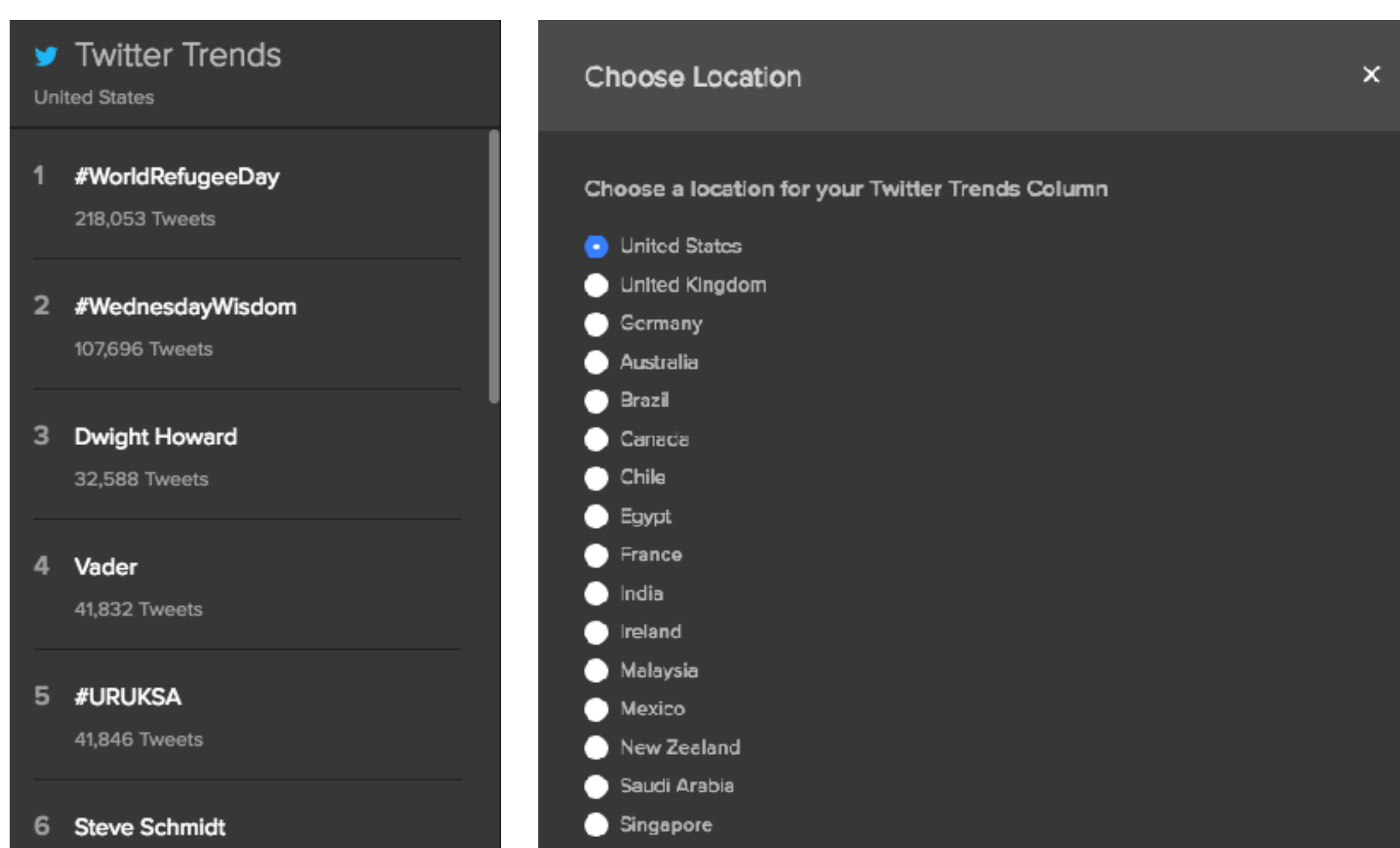


Twitter trends from June 19, 2018.

User-generated content spreads quickly through Twitter and often can provide insight into what audiences are finding relevant and relatable. From memes to current events, tracking user-generated content and trending topics on Twitter can help drive engagement for your own content.

Twitter also releases a calendar of keywords for each month outlining major events that are likely to trend on the platform. Access their 2018 marketing calendar [here](#).

Twitter trends are also available to [NewsWhip Spike](#) users, in the dashboard view. Users can choose across a multitude of location-specific trends.



Choosing which hashtags to use

Choosing the right hashtag to gain traction on your posts

What gains more traction – #TBT or #ThrowbackThursday? What about #WomanCrushWednesday and #WCW? Or #ManCrushMonday and #MCM?

Looking at historical Instagram data from April 2017-April 2018, it looks like the acronym wins these ones. #TBT alone got more than 7x times more engagements for the year than #ThrowbackThursday. As long as the acronym hashtag is well known, its a safe bet that more users are likely to use it than its long-form version.

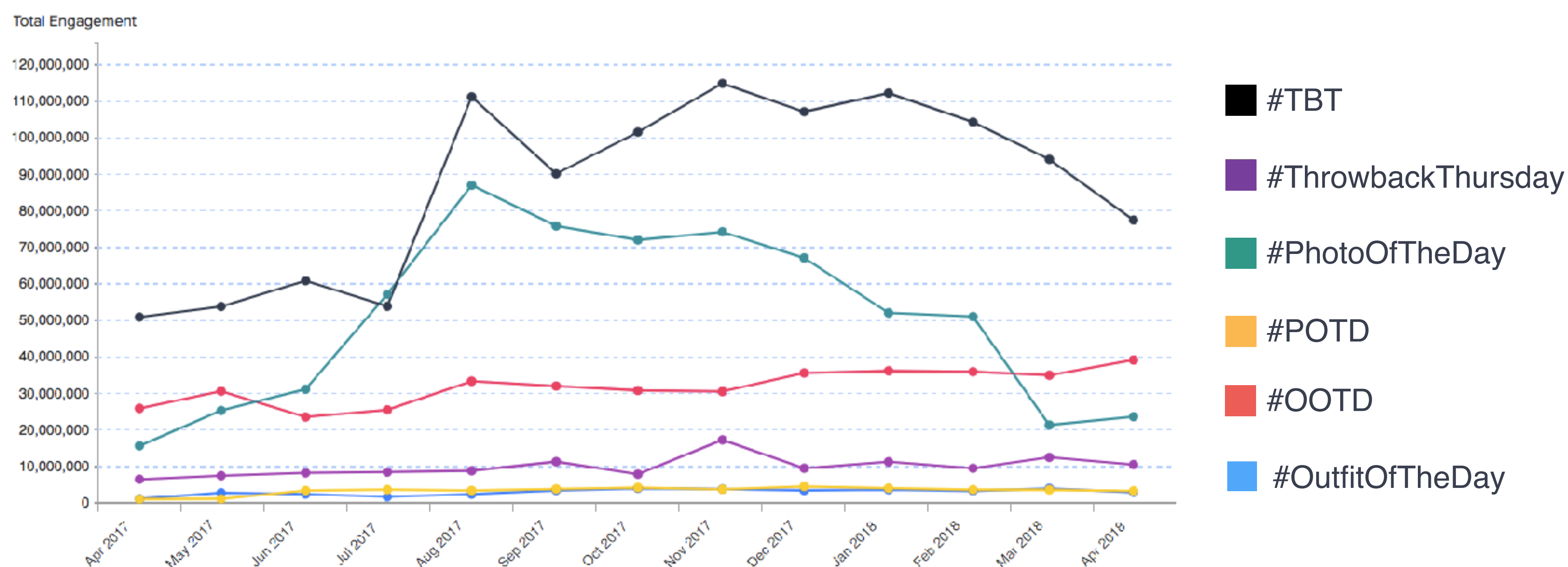
However, things get tricky when looking at more niche hashtags with similar long-form and short-form versions. Take the popular hashtag #dogsofinstagram, which has a short-form #dogsofig. Over the year, #dogsofinstagram had more than 6x as many engagements as #dogsofig.

Knowing which hashtag to use becomes even more confusing when comparing #PhotoOfTheDay and #POTD and #OutfitOfTheDay and #OOTD. Though these hashtags are in very similar forms, #PhotoOfTheDay outperforms #POTD while #OOTD far outperforms #OutfitOfTheDay.

How do you find a method in the madness of different hashtag forms? Analyzing historical and current data about use and engagement is the surest best for determining which hashtags will gain the most traction.

Comparing Similar Hashtag Use

Use of common hashtags across Instagram over 12 months



*Based on Instagram hashtag use from April 1 2017 to April 1 2018. Source: NewsWhip Analytics.

Combining evergreen and event-oriented hashtags

Following certain hashtags can provide insight into how event-focused hashtags gain traction throughout the year.

For holidays like Christmas, New Years Eve, and Halloween, use of hashtags that relate to the holidays swells quickly in the weeks preceding it and then quickly drops off. The same is true for sporting and arts events, such as the Super Bowl and the Academy Awards.

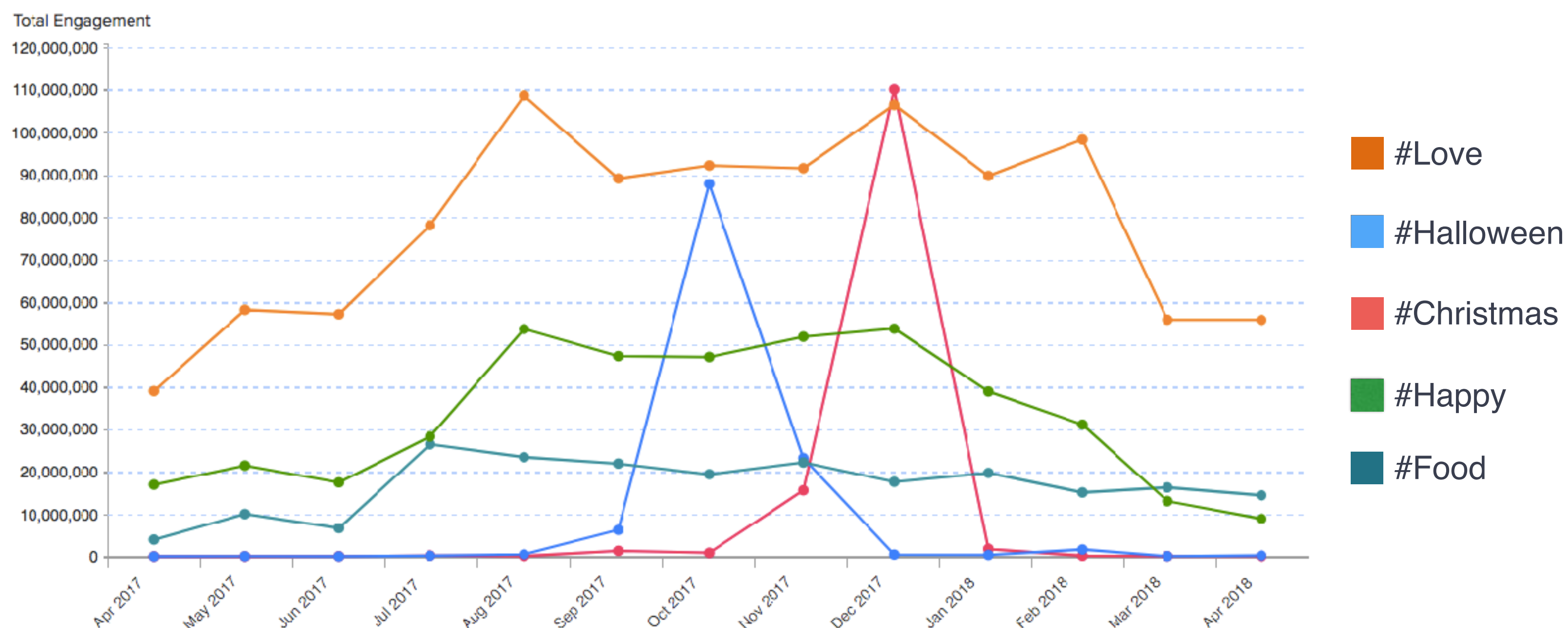
The most used hashtags are evergreen – they don't require a time of year or even day of the week to be relevant. These are hashtags like #happy, #picoftheday, #love, and #food.

On Instagram, these hashtags that cover universal themes are often mass-added to the bottom of influencer posts. This means that they're rich with content, but posts become buried very quickly.

Strategically mixing evergreen hashtags with event-specific ones can help make Instagram posts stand out from the hashtag feed.

Popular Hashtags Throughout the Year

Comparing event-based and evergreen hashtags on Instagram



Thank you!

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Content Intelligence predicting what stories will engage audiences across social

Our content intelligence database contains the world's most complete set of stories and publishers tracked against every major media network.

NewsWhip is the world's most content strategy platform, empowering the world's leading publishers and brands to predict and understand the stories that will engage their audiences.

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MasterCard Case Study



NewsWhip client MasterCard has a Digital Center of Excellence for Worldwide Communications. The professionals in this Center manage MasterCard's social monitoring, brand publishing and comms, on a global basis.

To keep ahead of the competition and find content aligned with their brand themes, members of the Center of Excellence are constantly on the look out for game-changing technologies. Driven by these motivations, MasterCard's VP of Corporate Communications, Bernhard Mors and his team trialled NewsWhip Spike.

With such a major monitoring and communications challenge to manage and after impressive results, MasterCard quickly integrated NewsWhip into workflows around its newsroom.

NewsWhip is helping MasterCard do its media monitoring and content performance analytics more effectively by giving insight into which publishers and stories are gaining traction right now.

"On a regular ad-hoc basis we look to Spike to better understand the velocity and relevance of certain news stories to answer questions such as: who's driving them? Should we get in or stay out of a conversation?"

On a weekly basis, we use Spike to identify the top owned and earned stories for our brand and for some of our key competitors.

It's about getting insights that help us better understand what's going on and enable us to be better storytellers. Spike is invaluable in helping us do this.

Data and audience insights are the foundation to drive relevant engagement. We are recommending Spike to all our visitors, and our Global Marketing team now also has it integrated into their big screen."

-Bernhard Mors, VP Corporate Comms
MasterCard



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