

KITTENPOWER



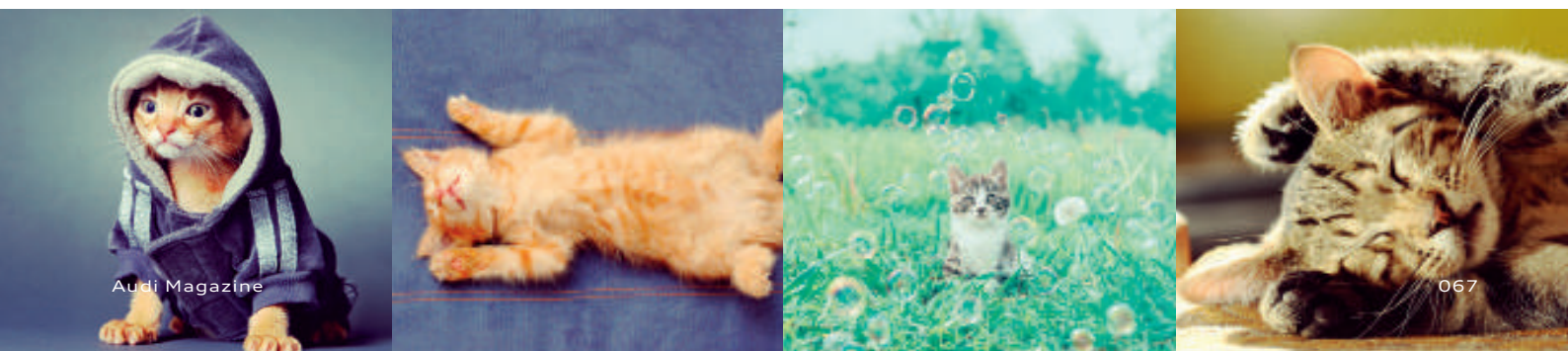


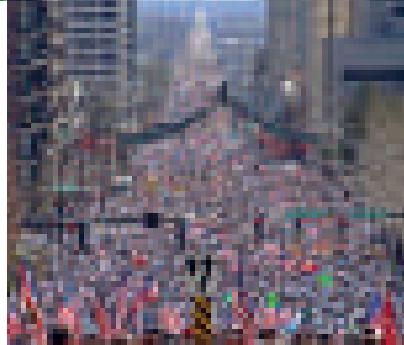
@helenedancer What kind of power do cats have via social media? They seem to already own the internet... So what about fighting terrorism on Twitter? With these faces?

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The terrorist attacks in Paris last November rocked the world. Shockwaves reverberated far and wide, not least in neighbouring Brussels, where the authorities instigated a lockdown to try and seek out the perpetrators. It was a deeply troubling time, which is why the barrage of cute pictures of cats on social networks under the hashtag #BrusselsLockdown may have come as a surprise.

The internet has always been partial to cats but this campaign wasn't just about sharing lol pics of anthropomorphised felines. It began when the Brussels authorities requested that the public refrain from disclosing details about police activity on social media to make it harder for suspects to discover information about anti-terror measures. Some members of the public had tweeted details of a particular police operation that allegedly could have alerted suspects.

In response, people began posting pictures on Twitter of cats posing as Belgium's National Security Council, along with others aiming guns out of windows, hiding in suitcases and getting facials (caption: #relax mes amis).

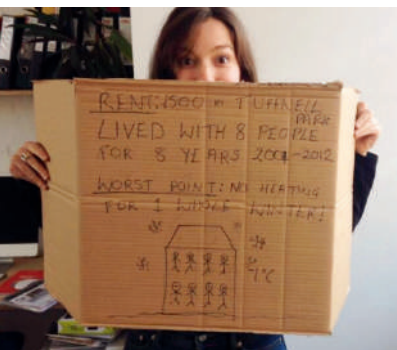
According to authorities, the swerve campaign was a success – a perfect example of the power of a social media storm, which is an unstoppable force when enough people get behind a cause. Unstoppable because of the almost limitless freedom associated with broadcasting on social networks. 'People understand that they have a voice that they haven't had before,' says Adam Gray, social media

speaker, author and consultant. 'The infinite reach for conversations now means real power.'

In the case of #BrusselsLockdown, people used their power to support the authorities, and it worked. But this power can be used for nefarious means too. Islamic State (IS), who claimed responsibility for the Paris attacks, relies heavily on social media to promulgate its own extremist message. It has a fully formed online division that launches campaigns, such as jumping on trending hashtags as unrelated as #NationalBurgerDay to barge into existing conversations and spread their own message to unwitting participants.

'Social media is interesting for politics. It gives everyone a voice and can be used as a tool for political change. If you have smart people to mobilise around you, then you can make an impact,' says Gray, who spends much of his time advising clients on just how to make this happen.

'The danger [with social media] is that obnoxious and militant views can spread more widely,' Gray continues. 'But because they're disseminated in a first-person way, comments can always be traced back to someone so there is some



Jay Morton

@Jaymorton8

My renting experience #ventyourrent
#londonrenting @genrentuk



'People have a voice that they haven't had before. The infinite reach for conversations now means real power'

accountability. However, there's so much data that you'll be forgotten in no time.'

A staggering number of conversations take place on social networks every minute. According to Facebook, more than one billion people are active on the platform and more than 400 million people use Instagram every month. Twitter averaged 310 million monthly active users in the first quarter of 2016.

With so many conversations happening at the same time, it takes something special – or dripping in celebrity – to galvanise public interest. Perhaps it's the latest travails of the Kardashians, or a corporate, political or activist organisation launching a well-orchestrated campaign. It's in this instance, reckons Gray, where power is harnessed to achieve a clear objective.

UK-based activist group Generation Rent this year launched an online campaign called Vent Your Rent (#VentYourRent), to raise awareness of the sky-rocketing prices people pay to live in London – and for not very salubrious properties. People are encouraged to post photographs on the campaign's Tumblr page of themselves holding cardboard placards stating how much they pay each month and what kind of hellhole they're paying for. The hashtag began trending on Twitter and the national media has subsequently picked up the story.

Advancements in technology and lower barriers to entry have helped put the power, literally, in people's hands. In the US, the #BlackLivesMatter movement has been largely shaped by the technology available to its supporters. In the past, the movements of civil rights activists were severely curtailed, limited to secret meetings and complicated telephone exchanges. Today, it's about choosing the optimal social networking platform on which to broadcast views. #BlackLivesMatter has executed its online campaign with aplomb – using GroupMe for private chat, WhatsApp to mobilise specific groups of people, Periscope to broadcast protests live, and Twitter to communicate with the world.

People have also become adept at using the power of social media to challenge corporate entities, previously held at a remove. Rather than lodging complaints through traditional channels, it's now possible to tweet the company in question, publicly advertising your displeasure. It means holding these companies to account more adeptly, and getting some impetus behind a complaint from similarly disaffected customers.

It also gives the company the platform to broadcast their own responses, and for Gray, the Twitter storm surrounding an O2 outage in 2012 is a great example of a brand fighting back – and winning customer support at the same time.

Customers tweeted angrily at O2 after a 24-hour blackout left them unable to call, text or access data. O2's response was to shelve the standard corporate responses and reply with very human, often tongue-in-cheek responses to some of the most polemic tweets. The result was that some customers even came out in O2's defence, one saying, 'As much as I really don't like @O2 you really have to give whoever handles their Twitter massive credit lol.' O2's response was: 'Thank you for the massive credit! We'll hang it on our massive credit wall.'

The power of the social networks is certainly a force to be reckoned with. Perhaps it is the ultimate meritocracy. Perhaps it's the utopia we've always dreamed of. But the mercurial nature of power means that however we play it, it needs to be handled with care. ☺☺☺



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BREAKING NEWS: Belgium Police using the new 200mph Hovercat during terrorist operations #BrusselsLockdown

