

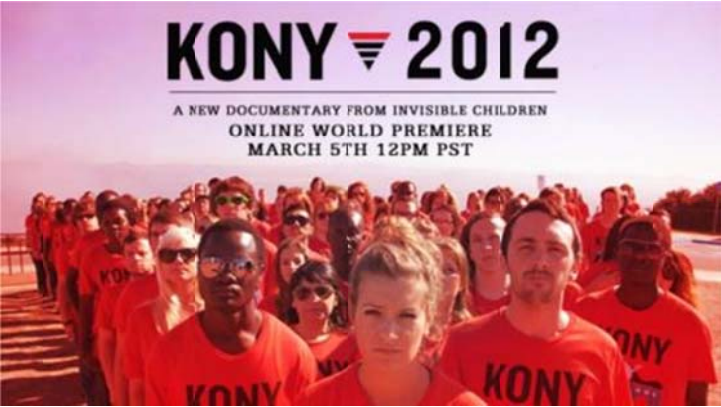


## KONY 2012: Did Social Media Drive Slacktivism or Social Action?

By [Nancy Pekala](#)

Unless you were unplugged from every social channel over the last week, you are aware of the 30-minute documentary [KONY 2012](#) that went viral almost the instant it hit the Web. Directed by Jason Russell, founder of the [Invisible Children](#) charity, the film aims to create public awareness of Joseph Kony, the leader of Uganda’s Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA), known for his crimes against humanity, including the kidnapping and abduction of children and forcing them to serve as child soldiers and sex slaves.

The video went massively viral, garnering as of this writing more than 71 million YouTube views, nearly 1.3 million likes, more than 72,000 dislikes and nearly 600,000 YouTube comments. KONY 2012 also trended high on Twitter and Facebook feeds were inundated with reposts of the video.



The Stop Kony mission also prompted big name celebrities to shed light on the plight of the invisible children through their own social media campaigns. Kim Kardashian, Nicole Richie, Rihanna and others retweeted the hashtags #StopKony and #Kony 2012 to spread the word. Rap artist Soulja Boy took some hits for recording a song addressing the movement entitled “Stop Kony” in which he raps “Stop Kony” lyrics over audio from the Invisible Children video. Critics blamed Soulja Boy for using the mission to further his self-promotional goals.

The incredibly successful KONY 2012 social media campaign has not come without criticism. Many have accused the video of being inaccurate (i.e., Kony is not believed to be residing in Uganda as the video suggests), oversimplifying the issues and turning Kony into a celebrity.

Critics also point to a potential misuse of charitable funding (32% of funds collected are targeted for aid), militaristic goals and a movement that encourages “slacktivism”, an expression of support for a cause through an action that doesn’t directly impact the organization or cause. Facebook posters, tweeters and sharers can indeed be defined as slacktivists.

According to the Council on Foreign Relations, organizations like Invisible Children “manipulate facts for strategic purposes, exaggerate the scale of LRA abductions and murders and emphasize the LRA’s use of innocent children as soldiers, and portraying Kony—a brutal man, to be sure—as uniquely awful, a Kurtz-like embodiment of evil. “

Regardless of whether you support the KONY 2012 mission or the Invisible Children charity’s methods, the success of the social media campaign cannot be disputed. Hundreds of thousands of people are now aware of a man and a cause they never knew about before. Viewers have jumped at the chance to donate to and

Kony 2012 Viral Stats	
YouTube Views	71.5M
YouTube Likes	1.2M
YouTube Dislikes	73K
Vimeo Plays	16.3M
Vimeo Likes	20.5K
Vimeo Comments	1,206
Twitter mentions (#StopKony, #Kony)	• 10M
Facebook shares	• 2B
<i>*Statistics as of 3/11/2011</i>	

fundraise for the cause. The campaign, in fact, offers marketers, especially those working in the nonprofit sector, many lessons in social engagement.

- **Get Personal.** The KONY 2012 documentary touches viewers on a personal level, not just pass along information about Kony or the Invisible Children cause. In the video, Jason Russell introduces his son, Gavin and makes viewers aware of the identity behind the voiceover.
- **Create a Quality Product.** The production values of the KONY 12 video are high. The documentary, website, merchandise and all elements of the campaign were well designed and developed. Take the time to plan and execute each element of the campaign.
- **Tap into the Power of Thought Leaders.** Reaching out publically to celebrities and politicians who are active on social networks is crucial. In analyzing the progress of the viral campaign, the video really picked up speed when celebrities and thought leaders turned to their Twitter and Facebook accounts to spread the mission. In fact, the Invisible Children charity identified 20 “culture makers” and 12 “policy makers” to help get the word out for its 2012 campaign. Everyone from Oprah, Lady Gaga, Angelina Jolie, George Clooney, Rihanna, Mark Zuckerberg, Ellen DeGeneres, Tim Tebow and Bono were targeted as culture makers. Policy makers included Bill Clinton, Mitt Romney, George W. Bush, John Kerry, Harry Reid and Condoleeza Rice. Reach out to thought leaders and encourage them to share your video on their social media platforms.
- **Include a Clear Call to Action.** The Invisible Children charity closes its video with a specific call to action: "Above all, share this movie online. It’s free.” Make the call to action clear and simple. Sign up now. Visit our website and donate today. Share this video.
- **Identify a Singular Focus.** The primary focus of the KONY 2012 video was to create awareness of Joseph Kony. It is this focus that drives the progression of the entire video. Identify the primary focus of your video and social campaign and make sure all elements of the campaign demonstrate a singular focus.

- **Be Positive.** The KONY 2012 documentary addresses a very serious issue yet the tone of the video is still positive. It's peppered with images of people interacting and connecting, the birth of a baby and the joys of parenthood. It is only later in the video that images of Joseph Kony appear.
- **Provide Context.** The KONY 2012 video communicated the power of the mission by communicating to viewers the scope of the issue (i.e., the camera zooms from a close-up of a few Ugandan children to a crowd of thousands). Clearly communicating the scale of your mission, where it's appropriate, can be powerful.
- **Tug at the Heartstrings.** Without question, one of the reasons the KONY 2012 viral campaign has been so successful is that the video tugs at the heartstrings. Director Russell uses his son and Jacob, a young Ugandan to play on viewers emotions. Jacob's picture is featured on the Invisible Children's Facebook timeline. In the documentary, he breaks down in tears when discussing his life and his brother's murder. Obvious? Perhaps. But it works.
- **Create a Sense of Urgency.** The KONY 2012 video includes the announcement "Expires December 31, 2012." The viewer never really understands what that refers to but creating a sense of urgency by making a time-sensitive announcement can spur a call to action.
- **Design and Integrate Multiple Campaign Elements.** While all the KONY 2012 buzz has centered on the 30-minute documentary, the campaign has also been helped immensely by coordinating elements such as the campaign's website, Facebook page, graphic design, Twitter hashtags, etc.

[Nancy Pekala](#) is the AMA's Senior Director of Online Content and Editor of Marketing Thought Leaders. Continue the conversation on the KONY 2012 viral campaign and social media in the Interactive Marketing group of [AMAConnect](#), the AMA's online community exclusively for marketers. Follow us on Twitter @[marketing\\_power](#).