

Hashtag Research

This article is mainly about the research and use of hashtags on Instagram. However, I dive a little deeper into the specifics of hashtags on other platforms at the end.

Let's start with the definition, just in case you're new here:

HASH·TAG

/ˈhɑːʃtɑːɡ/

noun

1. a word or phrase preceded by a hash sign (#), used on social media websites and applications, to identify messages or posts on a specific topic.

EX: "Spammers often broadcast tweets with popular hashtags even if the tweet has nothing to do with them"

Hashtag 101

It's probably important for me to go over some of the basics of hashtag use in general.

- 1) A hashtag must begin with #, formerly known as a number sign or a pound sign.
 - a) This creates a link within each social media platform. This link will take you to a category of content, where you can find posts, (text, photos, videos, etc) from users who have also used this hashtag.
- 2) Hashtags can be one word, a phrase, or even a sentence - without any spaces.
- 3) Hashtags can utilize letters and numbers.
- 4) Hashtags will break, *meaning they will not work*, if you use symbols or spaces in the middle.
 - a) Symbols you cannot use in hashtags include, but are not limited to: @ , ! \$ % ^ & * () { } [] | \ < > . / ? ` ~
- 5) Hashtags on Instagram also allow the use of emojis.

#DoltForTheGram

Hashtags are more than just writing down whatever is at the top of your mind. You might hashtag #DoltForTheGram because it's funny, but there are important research and methods behind choosing the perfect hashtags for your post.

1. Open your Instagram app.
2. Choose the "Search" tab.
3. Select the Search bar at the top of the screen and select the "Tags" tab.
4. Now begin searching terms that relate to your post.

Example Photo to post:



Undersaturated Hashtags vs Oversaturated Hashtags

For this image, hashtags you should search would begin with #Sunglasses as an obvious choice. Notice that this hashtag has 32+ million posts. This is an example of a hashtag that is oversaturated and I don't recommend using hashtags like this.

On the other hand search #GoldSunglasses -

This tag has less than 6,000 posts. This is an example of a hashtag that is under saturated and I don't recommend using hashtags like this either.

Our sweet spot for the perfect hashtags lie (usually) between 10,000 posts and 800,000 posts.

There are exceptions for this rule, which should always be approved before use:

- 1) An example of an oversaturated tag we might use despite these rules would be #WCW (Woman Crush Wednesday) or #TBT (Throwback Thursday). We use these oversaturated hashtags in our content because it makes sense with the picture we are posting and also makes the content more relevant.
- 2) Undersaturated hashtags are also useful, often times people utilize brand specific or event specific hashtags (like for weddings or festivals) in an effort to find or categorize all the content that is being posted about a specific brand or event. For this reason you may find that at the beginning of the hashtag's life it has a very few amount of posts.

There are other exceptions to under or over saturated rules, but the point is to use them wisely.

Begin your hashtag research

Begin the search for the right hashtags by looking for common terms or hashtags associated with your picture, don't forget to search for commonly misspelled words as well.

Referring back to the initial image example above, we can see a beautiful marble countertop and 5 pairs of pink designer sunglasses.

Let's search terms related to this post and pick some hashtags that reside within our sweet spot.

Several great tags for this post include:

#SunglassesOn #SunshineVillage #WhiteMarble #Aviators #StyleChallenge
#StyleInspo #AccessoriesLovers #DesignerBrand #NewSunglasses #NewShades
#SunglassesAtNight #FashionSunglasses #SunglassesLover #NewSunnies

There are other ways to find relevant hashtags other than the explicit search bar.

- 1) Check similar hashtags - select a popular hashtag from the initial search results and browse along the top of the Instagram app where it has other related hashtags. Select those one by one to see how many posts are in each, compare to other hashtags, check their 'sweet spot', and gather even more hashtags.
- 2) Look through some of the popular posts within a certain hashtag. Make sure to check the caption and even the comment section to see which hashtags that

account decided to use. This is a great comparison opportunity for your researched hashtags.

In the Caption vs Comment

There is some debate about placing your hashtags on Instagram in the caption of the post VS in a separate comment below. Here is my opinion on the matter, backed by my personal and professional experience.

While I do occasionally include anywhere from 0 to 3 hashtags within the post content (i.e. the caption), I prefer to add my hashtags in a separate comment below.

Here's why:

- 1) As people comment the hashtags will collapse and are not visible at first glance, but are still helping your post's performance in the search results.
 - a) This changes periodically with the fluctuation of the platform and newsfeed algorithm updates, but I still like this reason.
- 2) Adding hashtags in a separate comment allows you to go back and delete the set of hashtags later. There are several reasons for doing this:
 - a) If the hashtags are no longer needed because you have achieved the level of engagement you want on a certain post.
 - b) You are able to go back and delete the current set of hashtags at any time to replace them with the same or new hashtags. This will help your post reappear within the search results to gain even more post engagement.

The other debate about placing hashtags in the comments vs the caption is: Commenting the hashtags inspires others to comment. Placing the hashtags in the caption inspired more likes. The studies were done and as I recall the research was fairly inconclusive, the results were within a 1% margin of error of each other.

So at the end of the day, it's up to you and your preference.

Hashtags Across Platforms

There are so many great things about hashtags including the searchability, but there is much debate about hashtags and the things that make them content eyesores, annoying, or just cheesy.

Hashtags with more than 1 word should have the first letter of each word capitalized, this makes them easier to read when they are a part of your caption and post content.
Ex: #ThrowbackThursday #TreatYourself.

The capitalization matters much less when you are selecting multiple hashtags at a time to post in the comment below for search purposes.

With this in mind, there are some things to note about the use of hashtags across all the various social platforms:

Instagram only allows a total of 30 hashtags on your post. If you use one or two in the caption that means you have 29 or 28 in the comment below respectively.

Twitter uses hashtags and similar phrases to categorize trending topics and content, very similar to the way that Instagram does. However, these topics become message boards and provide an opportunity for more conversation vs just likes. It's also important to point out that Twitter is very fast paced and to be ready for those conversations at any time. But that is a topic for another day.

Facebook allows the categorization of hashtags within its platform, but it doesn't capitalize on the searchability quite as much as other platforms like Instagram, Twitter, or even LinkedIn do. This means that you can use hashtags, but you are also able to search any words that people use in their public posts without ever needing to use hashtags. The downside to using too many tags, which on Facebook can mean more than 2-3, can severely stunt your post reach - *especially if you are running a Page vs Personal Profile.*

Their recent algorithm updates have made it clear that they are trying to push out the use of click bait and other easy or "low quality" content grabs. I've noticed that hashtags tend to be among that thought matrix.