

# All Things

## Social

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### Here's Why Facebook Wants to Edge In on Twitter's Hashtags

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Although not the inventor of the tool, Twitter has dominated conversations centered around the hashtag (#) for quite some time. As we saw last week, however, Facebook wants in on the action, [introducing hashtags to its users](#), so that they can follow individual topics throughout the network.

Why are some of your stiffest competition, ultimately validating their little language of pound symbols?

Here's why: It's all about the second-screen audience.

Data from [Nielsen's latest research shows](#) that nearly half of smartphone owners and tablet owners (46 percent and 43 percent, respectively) said they use their devices as second screens while watching TV every day. And nearly half of that activity on tablets is directly related to the shows they're watching (one-third for smartphone users).

Think on this: It's been Twitter's major pitch to advertisers to tack little hashtag addendums and catchphrases onto the end of their commercials. From there, a viewer can do a quick search for the hashtag to track conversation about the ad and connect with other folks. Same with TV marketers: Identify a hashtag



with your show and viewers can talk about the action in real time.

That demographic is *ripe* with potential for seeding ads. Twitter, for instance, lets advertisers stick promoted tweets for their products in with those specific hashtag searches. So, if you're a viewer watching an NFL game on the couch and search the hashtag #MondayNightFootball, for instance, that's prime real estate for companies such as Frito-Lay or Budweiser to slot a promoted tweet right in there.

And that's a lot of potential ad dollars being lost by Facebook over to Twitter. Facebook even said that on any given night during prime-time television hours, there are between 88 million and 100 million people active on Facebook. Give those folks a way to use hashtags and follow content more easily on the social network, and you're giving Facebook's ad guys an easier way to sell against said hashtags.

Granted, Facebook's hashtags are a) only rolled out to a small percentage of users for the time being and b) not on mobile yet, only the Web. But this is merely a temporary stopgap.

Facebook's larger problem is whether or not viewers will associate hashtags with Facebook, just as they already do with Twitter. It seems like it's working on Instagram, so perhaps that will translate to Facebook's mobile apps.

And perhaps even more problematic: Part of why it's so tough for Twitter to court and retain mainstream, average non-techie users is because of the opacity that the language of hashtags and @symbols creates. If you're someone in, say, the Tide detergent demographic, you may not be as able to figure out just what a hashtag actually *is*. Try selling *that* to an advertiser.

Personally, I anticipate Facebook's adoption will only make the language *more* accessible to the mainstream; stick the hashtag in everyone's faces, and you'll be forced to learn what it means. That, paired with the fact that it's floating over to other platforms like Vine, Path and [most recently Google+](#), and I'd guess it reaches a tipping point.

The heat is on to see where the ad dollars go from here.

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