

Corey Greenwood

Dr. Swarts

Persuasion

Kony 2012: A Social Movement

For my application paper topic, I chose to research and write about the Kony 2012 social movement. This communication event was a big deal last year. It used primarily social media as an outlet to gain advocates and support. This event sparked a revolution in America, and across the world. I personally watched this video last year, and it did spark a small flame inside me that I'm sure it did for all advocates, that grew to a full flame to pledge and help the Invisible Children Incorporation. It was posted to create awareness, but its goal was much bigger. Invisible Children Inc. wanted it to be an extremely persuasive message that would create a revolution that would entice viewers to spread the word and donate or become part of the movement. I watched the video again to get a feel for what it was about again, but more in depth, and to get a feel for how it persuades, and in what ways. While I was watching it again, I got a strong sense of a few chapter topics that were listed on our handout. The first, and maybe most prominent, was fear. Second was how the video used powerful language. The third topic I believe the video used was visual communication functions. The next two didn't seem as prominent as the first three, but still had a hand in how the video was made and edited. Fourth was nonverbal communication, and fifth was cultural trends. I chose multiple topics because while I was watching this video, these all, especially the first three, all stuck with me. I wouldn't be able to write this research paper if I was only to focus on one topic. Through this paper there will be an in-depth analysis and breakdown of how the Kony 2012 video used persuasion, and I can't explain it in detail without

using all of the topics listed above. The reason I chose this topic is because I remember watching this video and I saw the clips and everything, and I realized that this was going to be a pretty big movement, and it was incorporating social media, which the study and use of interests me.

Detail Description of Kony 2012 Video:

The Kony 2012 social movement was based on a video. This video was released on March 5, 2012 (Wikipedia.org). This short film was created by the Invisible Children Incorporation, which is a non-governmental organization. This campaign was implemented to advertise Invisible Children's "Stop Kony" movement. Joseph Kony, normally referred to as just "Kony", is an African military and cult leader, primarily known for his leadership with his rebel militia group, the Lord's Resistance Army, or LRA. The video's purpose was to have Kony captured or arrested by the end of 2012, when this campaign ended. This video is just short of 30 minutes in length, and yet, it captured college-aged students to watch it. Most of the time, our generation is based on immediate satisfaction, so we won't watch something that is too long, or takes up "too much of our time". But despite its length, the Kony 2012 was dubbed the most viral video of all time. It reached 100 million views through Youtube and Vimeo (Shepherd, *Remember Kony 2012? Well it's 2013. What happened?*). It was also considered one of the top international events in 2012 by PBS. It did officially result in a movement in the United States Senate to send troops to help capture and arrest Joseph Kony. Jason Russel narrates the entire video. The video begins talking about how more people are on Facebook today than there were in the world 200 years ago (Ristić, *How Kony2012 Persuaded You [Part 1]*). Jason talks next about social media today, technological advances, and how these effect governments today. He then introduces his son, Gavin, who eventually co-stars in this video because since he is young, only a few years old, his innocence shapes his answers to how Joseph Kony is an evil man, and that he must be stopped

(Ristić, *How Kony2012 Persuaded You [Part 1]*). Next, Jacob is introduced, who was a child in Uganda when Jason first started this movement. Jacob is also a co-star in this video, and a little further in the video, he explains the situation in Uganda and Africa, how Kony takes children and uses them as either prostitutes or soldiers. Jacob also talks about his brother, and how the rebels of the LRA cut his neck and killed him. Also, Jacob states that he would rather die than stay on Earth, due to his originally dim outlook on his future. Jason developed a relationship with Jacob, and this is how the "Stop Kony" movement started.

The next part of the video shows how the "Stop Kony" movement has progress, and has resulted in this video. Jason explains that this video "expires on December 31, 2012", and then he explains the Kony situation to his son Gavin. Jason goes on to explain how Joseph Kony abducts children, forces them to kill their parents, and become sex slaves and soldiers. Jason says this happens to not just a few children, but over 30,000. In the video, Jason says that Kony does all of this for the sole purpose to just maintain his power.

The video then transitions into showing how Jason turned this information into a movement in the United States. A Facebook page was created for the Invisible Children, schools were created, jobs were created, and education was offered for these Ugandan children. This was all funded and accomplished by "young people", or my demographic, since they could not wait for government interference. It then fades to an upbeat Mumford & Son's song, with a montage of inspiring videos and pictures of how these young people were volunteering to fix these communities and help these children. Next, it shows Jason reading a letter from President Barack Obama saying he will deploy a small amount of troops to help the cause. Following this good news, the video transitions saying that Kony knows about the United States' efforts of removing him from his power, and that he is still out there, becoming more elusive than ever. The video

then shows Jason talking to his son Gavin, and it once again shows the innocence, and that people don't know about Joseph Kony, and Gavin says he knows who he is because he has a picture of Kony right in front of him. That is a segue to say that Kony needs to become famous; not to praise him, but to make the public aware of his image and wrong-doing. Jason goes into detail how they are going to target policymakers and culture-makers, such as celebrities, to help spread this awareness. Then Jason talks about how the young people will gather and make Kony famous, and how you can become part of the movement by purchasing an "Action Kit" that includes a t-shirt, posters, stickers, a pin, and a bracelet that has a unique identification number that allows you to connect with this movement online. The posters and stickers are mainly so that on April 20, 2012, they were going to "cover the night", which meant that everyone who purchased an "Action Kit" or anyone who believes in the cause should go out on the night of April 20 and put hundreds of thousands of posters around the United States so that when everyone else wakes up tomorrow, they will see these posters and will see the demand for justice. This all results in a motivational montage of how the people of the world are shaping history, especially through this movement. The video ends by showing some inspirational text, and three things you can do help. First is to sign the pledge to show support. Second is to get the "Action Kit." Finally, Invisible Children asks you to sign up for TRI and donate a few dollars a month. Lastly, it says to share this movie as much as possible, because it's free.

Theories/Concepts Used:

While I was watching this video, a few concepts made themselves very noticeable to me. The first one I will explain is how this video used fear to persuade viewers of the video. In our textbook, *Persuasion, Social Influence, and Compliance Gaining*, chapter 13 points out motivational appeals. One of these is the use of fear to instill some persuasion. In the book, it

states that fear is based on a few concepts. First is perceived vulnerability. This means that "the more susceptible the audience feels, the better". Next is the specificity of the recommendations, which suggests that the more specific, the better. Lastly, the positioning of the recommendations plays a role in the retention. The book says that placing the recommendations "after the fear appeal is best". The way that fear plays most relevantly in this social movement is incorporating it in the fear-then-relief procedure. The book also goes into slight detail about this tactic, but in chapter 10. In the book, it uses the "good cop, bad cop" example, suggesting that someone who is presented with a significant amount of fear, and then there is a transition period where the fear is relieved, and then they are relieved to be presented with something much more pleasant and understanding. There was also an experiment conducted, in which I found the paper on while researching, by a few universities in Poland, where they addressed the fear-then-relief tactic. In the research paper, it goes on to say that the fear then relief tactic "introduces people into a state of mindlessness, which in turn increases compliance" (Dolinski, Ciszek, Godlewski, and Zawadzki 437).

The second tactic I chose to explain was powerful language. In *Persuasion, Social Influence, and Compliance Gaining*, the authors say that powerful language and language intensity together can bring about a solid point. If used in the correct context, an audience may be fall susceptible to the message that is portrayed. Language intensity is defined as "the quality of language which indicates the degree to which the speaker's attitudes deviates from neutrality" (Gass, Seiter 153). Gass and Seiter go on to say that intense language can be "emotional, metaphorical, opinionated, specific, forceful and evaluative" (153).

Next is visual persuasion. Visual persuasion is a more recent concept in the span of communication research and studies. Particularly for this paper and campaign, I could only really

focus on as a subset of visual persuasion was indexicality. Indexicality says that the images seen are documented and have happened. It is defined by Gass and Seiter as "the ability of images, in particular photos and video, to document that an event happened or that something took place" (294). These images, however, are left up to the reader and audience for their own interpretation most of the time. It is up to them how they will cognitively understand these images.

The next two topics were a little less prominent, but I felt they should be briefly addressed. First is nonverbal communication. Nonverbal communication is defined as the process of communication through sending and receiving wordless (mostly visual) cues between people (Wikipedia.org). For example, messages can be sent and received just through your eyes, mouth, facial expressions, proximity, and through bodily functions. The last tactic is cultural trends. I believe this plays into Gass' and Seiter's chapter on conformity and influence in groups. Regarding conformity, I believe this study suggests the group locomotion hypothesis. Gass and Seiter define this as "members of a group are motivated to achieve the group's goals. When a member of the group believes that going along with the group will help achieve these goals, he or she is motivated to conform" (126).

Analysis:

The first tactic I will analyze with this social movement is the fear appeal, and more specifically the fear-then-relief procedure. Only four minutes into the video, Jacob is introduced, and it goes into detail, and even shows how either Ugandan enforcement or the LRA was intervening with a simple interview between Jason and Jacob. Next it shows multiple videos and images of Ugandan children that were stockpiled in huts and buildings because they were all running and hiding to save their lives. Next was an interview about how Jacob would rather die than stay on Earth and live because he sees no positive future. All of these images and video clips

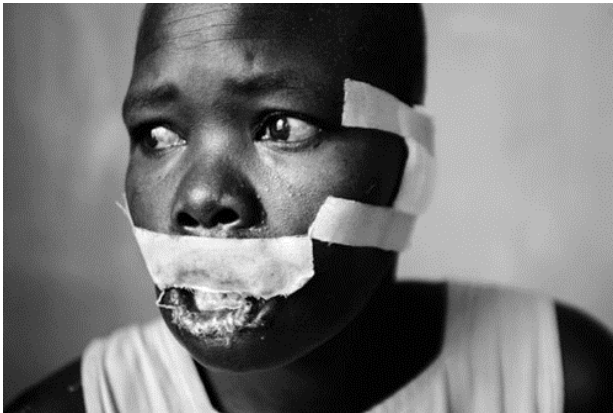
instill a type of fear and sympathy in the viewers and audience. Then, immediately after these morbid clips, Jason narrates and shows how he has fought to make it his sole mission to stop Joseph Kony, and save not only Jacob, but everyone that has been affected by Kony and the LRA. It then jumps to a modern, upbeat song and shows positive clips that are foreshadowing the movement in action. Next, the video instills sympathy by showing Gavin and his innocence and how he is incapable of understanding why someone would do something so evil.

The next part of the video is even more focused on displaying fear. Jason talks about how Kony kidnaps children just like Gavin. For over 20 years, Kony has been kidnapping children for his rebel group, the LRA. Jason goes on to say that he makes the girls sex slaves, and the boys soldiers, mutilates their faces, and that this is true for over 30,000 children. The images and words that are portrayed here infuse the audience with sympathy, but even more prominently, fear. Next, credibility is introduced by having representatives from the International Criminal Court (ICC) speak, and it shows how serious of a problem Kony and the LRA are. The remainder of the video, for the most part, uses the relief tactic to show how this video and Invisible Children Inc. can create awareness about Kony, and that the viewers can pledge to help, and that this can result in the capturing of Joseph Kony, and that "the better world we want is coming, it's just waiting for us to stop at nothing" (Waldorf, 471).

The next tactic that this video uses to persuade is powerful language. This is used briefly throughout the video. Some of it is scripted, some of it is not. For example, when Jason is narrating, he is explaining what Kony has been doing with children. While he is explaining, he uses "devil terms" such as abduct, rape, sex slaves, kill, mutilate, kidnap, rebel, murder, and slavery. Words like these catch viewers' ears because they are automatically associated with anything bad that must be stopped due to cultural beliefs. Not only does the Kony 2012 video use

"devil terms", but they also use "god terms." Throughout the video, words like justice, lifesaving, power, and peace are thrown out when a positive mission is being portrayed.

Visual communication was also used, but it is hard to explain through words. I've included some pictures that were shown in the video below. Like stated in an article on bleep.deepgroup.com, "Russel then shows us the evidence of Kony's work, sparing none of the harsh realities or images that are too violent for little ones to witness."



Next is nonverbal communication. Nonverbal communication was briefly used throughout this video. One of the more memorable scenes from the video that displays nonverbal communication was when Jason was talking to Jacob, and how



Jacob would rather be killed than be alive, and how he misses his brother, and how he will meet into heaven. In mid-sentence, Jacob bursts into tears, and this will tug at the heartstrings of any viewer.

Lastly, is the cultural trend. Throughout the video, there are many montages of college-aged adults running around, putting up posters, as a "static homogenous group collectively giving the peace sign", and showing how they will all gather and rise up together to stop Kony (Kouveld, 17). This shows viewers that this is a culture-based uprising that must gain more followers.

While I was researching online, there was a study done that pointed out something that I hadn't originally caught or thought of. This study was conducted by Igor Ristić on his blog. In this study, Ristić more or less examines the Kony 2012 campaign in depth with regard to Monroe's Motivated Sequence. This wasn't originally a topic that I chose to analyze this social movement with. The author says that the steps of Monroe's Motivated Sequence play out in the video by using these steps; "to gain audience attention, establish a need, provide satisfaction, show a visualization of that satisfaction, and finally, to provide a call to action" (Ristić, *How Kony2012 Persuaded You [Part 1]*).

A final subject I will touch on that wasn't a research topic was just how the use of social media was really the keystone of how this social movement was so persuasive. This video targeted my demographic; college-aged adults. We are engulfed in a society that is based on social media. Our society today does not simply function without it. This video itself is using a social media platform, Youtube, to spread its awareness. The video went viral, and that started this success. Next, Twitter blew up with people tweeting with the hashtag #kony2012. "On March 7th, the hashtags #makekonyfamous, #kony2012 and #stopkony became globally trending terms on Twitter, some of which ranked higher than New iPad, according to the Associated

Press." (Brad, *Kony 2012*). Facebook is mentioned numerous times throughout the video, and even going as far as saying we live in a "Facebook world." The video strives for the viewers to "share it with their personal networks on social media platforms so that "Kony's name is everywhere.'" (Goodman, Preston *How the Kony Video Went Viral*).

Strengths/Weaknesses:

The strengths of this video were its tactics or persuasion that I have stated above. Any viewer of this video would have a hard time not wanting to buy an "Action Kit", or at least signing the pledge to help. I thought this social movement was a very successful persuasive campaign. Now, the campaign itself did have some flaws, and the "Cover the Night" event was actually a pretty big bust, but those were due to circumstances outside of the communication realm that had little to do with these applied concepts. Major outcomes of this analysis from my point-of-view was something that has been touched on in class more than several times, but when it is applied to a real-life social movement, you see its strength, and that is just how powerful persuasion can be. This video and social movement used a few persuasive techniques and it started what seemed like a revolution. The social media world blew up with this video and its meaning, and it has created a global awareness of Joseph Kony, who only a few years ago was almost invisible.

Kony 2012 was a very interesting topic to research. I like to research topics that are relevant to me, and have something to do with social media. I believe social media is such a great and fantastic tool to use in the communication world. Social media combined with persuasion, and you could literally start a revolution. I believe Kony 2012 was and could have been something historic, with the use of persuasion tactics such as fear, powerful language, and visual communication.

Works Cited

Wikipedia (April 13, 2013). *Kony 2012*. Retrieved from
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kony_2012

Waldorf, L. (2012). *White noise: Hearing the disaster*. Informally published manuscript,
Retrieved from <http://jhrp.oxfordjournals.org/content/4/3/469.full.pdf.html>

Goodman, J., & Preston, J. (2012, March 9). How the kony video went viral. *New York Times*. Retrieved from
http://www.iftpartners.com/downloads/How_Kony_Video_Went_Viral.pdf

Shepherd, T. (2013, January 11). *Remember kony 2012? well, it's 2013. what happened?*. Retrieved from
<http://www.news.com.au/world-news/remember-kony-2012-well-its-2013-what-happened/story-fndir2ev-1226550575923>

Kouveld, T. (2012). *Violence and victimhood: The language and image of kony 2012*. (Master's thesis) Retrieved from
http://igitur-archive.library.uu.nl/student-theses/2012-0806-200544/Thomas_Kouveld_BA_paper_final.pdf

Page, A. (2012, December). *Kony 2012*. Retrieved from
<http://knowyourmeme.com/memes/events/kony-2012>

DEEPGROUP. (2012, April 4). [Web log message]. Retrieved from <http://bleep.deepgroup.com/2012/04/04/kony-2012-a-persuasive-advertising-case-study-part-1/>

Ristić, I. (2012, March 13). [Web log message]. Retrieved from <http://igoristic.com/2012/03/13/how-kony2012-persuaded-you-part-i/>

Dolinski, D., Ciszek, M., Godlewski, K., & Zawadzki, M. (n.d.). Fear-then-relief, mindlessness, and cognitive deficits. (2002). *European Journal of Social Psychology*, *32*, 437-447. Retrieved from http://content.ebscohost.com/pdf25_26/pdf/2002/58Q/01Jul02/11830314.pdf?T=P&P=AN&K=11830314&S=R&D=a9h&EbscoContent=dGJyMMv17ESep7M4v+bwOLCmr0uep7ZSr6a4S7eWxWXS&ContentCustomer=dGJyMPGpt0mzr7VOuePfgeyx44Dt6fIA

Wikipedia (April 10, 2013). *Nonverbal Communication*. Retrieved from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nonverbal_communication