

Mass Violence Incidents and Social Media: A Guide to Hashtags

- Hashtags are typically created to provide support to survivors and communities affected by MVIs, grouping all social media posts using the tag in one location.
- Following an MVI, hashtags can also be used to spread unreliable and unverified rumors.
- Caution should be taken in viewing social media hashtags as reliable sources of information about the MVI.
- Hashtags can often be extremely helpful in guiding MVI victims and survivors to support and assistance.
- There is no standardized process for creating and spreading social media hashtags.
 - For example, after the bombing at the Boston Marathon in April 2013, a number of hashtags quickly emerged to share information, to offer collective support to the city of Boston and MVI survivors, and to link people to longer-term support and services:
 - #BostonStrong
 - #PrayForBoston
 - #BostonHelp
 - #BostonResilience
- It's helpful for MVI crisis responders to immediately create social media hashtags that can “trend” across multiple online platforms and provide timely and reliable information.
 - For example, as the Route 91 Harvest Festival mass shooting occurred, the Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department immediately published news and updates on social media:
 - #LVMPDnews
 - @Sheriff_LVMPD
 - These social media hashtags and handles then provided timely and accurate information about the MVI, warned people to stay away from the MVI site, and then provided information about victim/survivor assistance resources available at the Response Center and, later, the Family Assistance Center.