

# **Kony 2012**

## Moving from an Online Movement To Reality

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The internet has been around for some decades, bringing forth new ways of life such as social media sites and communities. We are able to put out anything we want for the world to see with the click of our mouse. Sometimes little to no audience is all one can reach while others can become viral in an instant. Invisible Children, Inc. released a video on the popular site YouTube and has become the most viral video of all time. Their campaign message is focused on capturing the tyrant Joseph Kony for the sufferings he has caused the Uganda people, especially to the children he kidnapped for his own sadistic plans. As it becomes so well known to the public, there is a cry among the internet realm to bring real change to the suffering Ugandans. There is so much debate as to what is really the agenda of those in the corporation and if this is even a relevant topic. What can be said about the Kony 2012 movement is a testament of what if internet embolization alone can elicit a live reaction from its online participants in real life.

The history of Joseph Kony, the man depicted in the video, didn't always start out as evil. His actual birth year is debated to be around the years of 1961, 1962, or 1963. He was born into a small town known as Trading Center of Odek, where the Acholi people of Uganda lived. His father, Luigi Abol aka Cilio Obol, was a teacher and a very active member in the Catholic Church. Nora Anek Oting was his mother was 86 years old when she died and hoped for her son to make peace with his country and people. His family wasn't rich due to the poor salary given to teachers. Kony attended Odek Primary School and was known not for being the brightest but as one of the best Larakaraka dancers, a traditional Acholi Dance. He was also known as a funny person who was pleasant, polite, and soccer player. As a child he was an altar boy for the church his father preached in the Catholic Church. After graduating from school he joined his older

brother Ginoni Okello to operate a traditional shrine outside of his birth town. There he became a witch doctor.

Uganda was going through changes in which those who were ruling were challenged by different groups of people. The early and mid 1980's gave rise the ruling of President Museveni, who still in office till this day. His government party, which resided in Kampala, was constantly attacked by soldiers mostly made up of the Acholi or Langi people. By 1985, there was a short lived ruling of the President Okello from Acholi. The Acholi people were proud of having someone of their own ruling. Yuweri Museveni, the former president, led troops into the Kampala to take it back. He was victorious in his conquest and the army of Okello had to flee into north and south Sudan. The Acholis people now feared the government who is now in power since they had fought against them. The scattered Acholi troops regrouped and formed the Uganda People's Army. At this time of defeat for the Acholi people, Alice Lakwena came in the picture. Known as the cousin of Joseph Kony and "Joan of Arc", she inspired thousands of Acholi men into battle with sticks and stones with the promise that the bullets of the enemy would not penetrate them. She and her troops were initially successful, but they were attacked by more sophisticated weapons when they attempted to cross the Nile near Jinja. After defeat, she fled to Kenya to live in the refugee camps. The National Resistance came to power but they were challenged by another rebel army who had declared war on Kampala. It was led by Alice Lakwena's cousin, Joseph Kony.

Kony and his army intentions were set on over throwing the government due to the 10 commandment in the bible. He wasn't using children in his army at that time. He had many successful victories against the government's military. The government formed a strategy to defeat Kony. They first made Acan Bigombe (an Acholi native) the Minister of State in the

Office of the Prime Minister to show support of the Acholi people. Next the government created a blockade of northern Acholi. The people were victims of crime and were given weapons to fight against Kony since he is the reason for their sorrow. Instead of being defeated, Kony turned his anger towards his people since he felt betrayed by them. He sent a treat to the elders of Acholi, which resulted in 250 murdered. In 1992, he started abducting children. He first abducted 44 secondary school girls. Kony wanted to produce a new type of Acholi people by using children who were blank slates in which he can fill with his views. His thinking is similar to that of Adolf Hitler wanting loyal and pure people. Funding his new army was done by stealing and raiding villages. For weapons, he teamed up with Khartoum (enemies of the President Museveni) from south. When the president started talking of peaceful negotiations around 1994, Kony used this time to abduct more children to fuel his army. Boys were used as killer machines and girls were used as wives aka sex slaves. His new army murdered thousands and displaced whole villages. He continued his wrath up until the mid 2000's. In 2005, the International Criminal Court in Netherlands issues a warrant for his arrest. Many Ugandans believed he should be handled by the Uganda people and government instead of staying in a prison in the Netherlands with TV, scheduled feedings, and other luxuries. Around 2006, there was a peaceful agreement between the government and LRA to stop hostile actions. Since then the people have slowly been rebuilding. Also this was the last time Kony was seen in Uganda.

The Invisible Children, Inc. is a nonprofit organization founded in 2004. It is trying to bring awareness of the brutal actions of Lord Resistance Army (LRA) in Central Africa and its leader Joseph Kony. Specifically, the group seeks to put an end to the practices of the LRA which include abductions and abuse of children, and forcing them to serve as soldiers. To this end, Invisible Children urges the United States government to take military action in the central

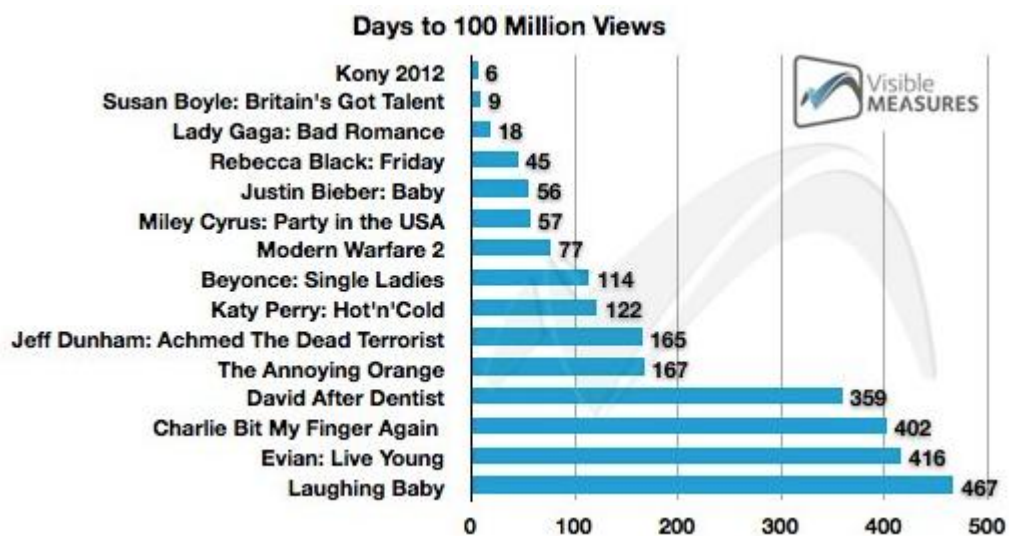
region of Africa. They also operate as a charitable organization by raising money through selling merchandise and accepting donations. To promote their cause, they present to high schools & colleges and create videos to view online. On their official website, Invisible Children.com, they state the reasons for focusing on this topic of Kony and the LRA. They chose to draw attention to this cause instead of many other inhuman causes in the world because of their awareness of the issue in 2003. They were there to document the events in southern Sudan but saw conflict in northern Uganda. This wasn't shown in the western media so they did their own research.

Interviewing the children showed the fear they had of being abducted at any moment by Kony and the LRA. By going after Kony, they hope to remove the face and leader of the LRA since he is the group's highest leader. They are aware it won't fully breakup the LRA but it would be a start to the disbandment process. The organization acknowledges that the LRA and Kony are currently not in Uganda anymore. They have been actively spreading their message in DR Congo, Central African Republic, and South Sudan. Kony is presumed to be a live due to some unsubstantial facts. In December 2, 2011, an escapee from Central African Republic reported that Joseph Kony was alive in southeastern CAR and was aware of the US military deployment in the region. The United Nations was stated on their website as the source of this.

On March 5th, 2012, Invisible Children released a documentary film online to spread their cause of finding Joseph Kony and LRA. The 30 minute film depicted how Jason Russell is trying to put the name of Joseph Kony as a household name so people don't forget about his actions on the children of Uganda. He talks of how all of this started nine years ago when he met a boy named Jacob who told him his story of how he and other children in Uganda are living. This moved him to want to take action somehow so he started a campaign to spread their story across to others to bring forth help from the western world. He uses the term invisible to

describe the children and Kony since they are not known to a majority of the public. If he can spread the message to as many people as he can he would be able to make the children and Kony visible so the cause could not be ignored. As of May 3, their YouTube video has reached 88,975,285 views alone. The video has been circulated throughout the web. More than half of the young Americans have heard of Kony 2012.

This viral spread of the video is what Solove in *The Future of Reputation, Gossip, Rumor, and Privacy on the Internet* talks about when gossip is spread. Gossip is information that is circulated from one person to another among a community. The spread of gossip is usually stagnant among a small group of people unless there is a supernova that is able to reach a wide range of people. The film can be looked at as a piece of gossip that has all the attributes of controversy and drama due to its contents. It took only six days for the video to surpass 100 million views. Here are the stats of Kony 2012 compared to sudden viral videos courtesy of [dennyburke.com](http://dennyburke.com):



The successful spread of the campaign can be accredited to Invisible Children's strategic plan to campaign to young adults/teenagers from the beginning of their plight. Social media such as

tweet and Facebook helped bring in viewers. There was also the help of celebrities such as George Clooney, Rihanna, Oprah, Taylor Swift, Christina Milian, Nicki Minaj, Bill Gates and Kim Kardashian. Best of all was the good old fashion word of mouth or re-linking by viewers. I myself heard of this film from class and was able to spread it to friends and family. There were so many supernovas helping to amplify the amount of people who heard of this video. The website of Invisible Children even crashed due to a sharp increase of traffic. With its short existence, it has become the fastest viral video on the internet of all time.

Since the very public release of Kony 2012, what has been the effect of its viral popularity to the cause, the people behind Invisible Children, Inc., the public, and politics? For starters there were a lot of debates among the films contents. On one hand some are debating how the film paints a black and white picture of the struggles the Uganda people had faced. The situation was quite complex with both the government and Kony's army causing grief to the people. Others saw this as an unjust cause since it simplifies all the problems that are faced by those impacted by the army to just one person who is not even in Uganda anymore. Getting rid of Kony won't automatically solve the issue. The facts of the video are misleading to believe this is an issue that is affecting Uganda today, when in reality the issue is taking place in neighboring countries such as Congo. Those with a positive attitude towards Kony 2012 see this as a simple moving tool to get people who never heard of the issue to start talking about it and doing their own research. The American government has taken interest in helping to find Kony. In the NY Daily News article, US special-forces are teaming with Uganda military and local troops to track Kony in the thick jungle borders of the Central African Republic, South Sudan and Congo. There Kony was able to elude capture for many years. Sent by President Barack Obama at the end of 2011, the 100 U.S. soldiers are split up about 15 to 30 per base. The troops

bring forth American technology and experience to assist local forces. Also five hundred million dollars was given to the Uganda government to help aide them in tracking LRA and Kony.

It is seen as great work of moving people through the use of internet, something Shirkey in *Cognitive Surplus: How Technology Makes Consumers into Collaborator* talks about. Shirkey believed the internet could be used to mobilize people to do great social acts for the world. Kony 2012 falls into this category as a tool used to elicit worldwide knowledge by its people and government. The campaign can be seen as somewhat of a successful since America is providing military assistance to the Uganda and neighboring government, although this occurred months before the release of the Kony 2012 video. The true impact of the video as a tool to move people to do more than just learn about the plights of Uganda and other neighboring countries is yet to be measured. An attempt to mobilize regular viewers into action for a “Cover the Night” movement failed to draw in large numbers. The event was to take place on April 20, 2012. Supporters were supposed to take part in a charitable event earlier that day in their community. It can be volunteering at a soup kitchen or washing cars. Later in the evening they will spread posters of Kony 2012 all over their neighborhood. When the community wakes up in the morning they would see their place blanketed with the Kony 2012 campaign. There was no planned meeting ground for the event to take place. Invisible Children left it upon the public to coordinate the event themselves between friends and family, stated in their tweet when specifying the details of Cover the Night. When the night came for the greatly anticipated sign of immobilizing amongst supporters, it came up very short in the amount supporters it had a month ago. A gathering in Vancouver had only a small group of 17 people and the one in Brisbane had less than 50 attendees. In Kelowna, several signs and posters were put up, including two large banners. Several Face book groups worked together to form a number of



groups consisting of two or three people. Pierre Johannessen, a law firm partner who runs a charity for disadvantaged children, distributed around 3,000 posters to the groups to be put up throughout the city. Two hundred posters were put up by college students and other people in their teens and 20s along with a number of chalk and stencil messages in Phoenix. This was the trend throughout America, Europe, and Canada. Contributing factors of the diminished impact of this event can be because of the controversial issues facing Invisible Children. The front face and spokes person Jason Russen was accused of public masturbation and had an extremely public mental breakdown, which discredit him as an inspirational leader. Another cause is the organization unable to have another viral video after the famous Kony 2012. The videos made after Kony 2012 only reached a few million if the most, diminishing the effect of a video showcasing people coming out for "Cover the Night". Its latest video barely surpassed 100,000 viewers on YouTube. Maybe if the event was made on March 20<sup>th</sup> instead of April 20<sup>th</sup> there would have been a much larger support since it's close to the time people were fired up. Around the times of the first posting of the video, there were so many celebrity tweets encouraging this cause. There were no celebrity tweets encouraging the events for April 20<sup>th</sup>. Lastly, the controversy of the issues depicted in the film along with a month of backlash from the oppose side (Americans, Ugandans, etc.) has decrease the numbers of active supporters. Opposing people/organizations saw this as a Hollywood-ization of a complex problem. On twitter some have tweeted that Kony 2012 "is so last month". The attitude was we cared then, but we've all just moved on to other things was among the feeling on twitter by those who chose not to come out. The term Slacktivism or clicktivism could also be the cause of it. This the modern tendency for people to think they are engaging in a social action that involves clicking on a web page and reposting it via tweet, Face book, or other internet outlets. At the end they don't need to do

nothing more but just that so there is no real push for actual action in the real world, especially if the organization themselves didn't coordinate the event. Kony 2012 didn't hit the public in real life as it would hope due to the failure to really believe in Invisible Children by a vast majority. If they could have held it together by keeping a clean image for the public instead of cracking from the pressure, more people would still be at their side. They can't control critics' views, but they are in control of their own action and image through their public appearances and uploaded videos.

The realities of moving a cause to the online community to real life isn't always a smooth transition as shown by Kony 2012. Their message was heard loud by the public in the safety of their computer desks, but those vast numbers seen in signups dwindled from many contributing factors. Decrease faith in Invisible Children, Inc. increased due to controversy and wrong timing. Shirkey's belief in online causes can move into the real realm did come partially true with government help such as the American special forces, United Nations, and many more. A huge testament to their power of affecting change in everyday people would've been shown through the success of "Cover the Night". What is great about this is opening the door to future use of the internet as a tool that can bring forth Shirkey's idea of social change, given the right moment. It is just the beginning of the real possibilities Kony 2012 provides us.

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