

[INSTAGRAM HASHTAGS RESEARCH]

649,895 BRAND POSTS SHOW
IF IT'S BETTER TO PUT
INSTAGRAM HASHTAGS IN THE
POST'S CAPTION OR IN THE
FIRST COMMENT

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ABOUT THE STUDY

There's always been a lot of back and forth when it comes to the best practices of hashtags placement on Instagram.

Socialinsider has partnered up with content curation and promotion platform, **Quuu**, in trying to debunk the myths and see how Instagram hashtags actually work. We looked through 649,895 posts from over 6,700 accounts of different sizes to see what the data tells us about how to use hashtags for better Instagram performance.

THE PREMISE

There are advocates for both using Instagram hashtags in the post's caption, as well as putting the Instagram hashtags in the first comment to get followers, engagement and reach.

Without a clear answer about how the Instagram algorithm works in this case, no one could come to a consensus.

Within this study, 649,895 Instagram Posts from a total of 6,784 business profiles (different profile sizes) were analyzed to understand how brands are using hashtags and what strategies have driven the most engagement.

Here's what we now know ↓

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Instagram Hashtags Research

Hashtags in the Caption or in the First Comment?

650,000 brand posts on Instagram show what works best.



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4. The engagement rate depends on the profile size, placement and number of hashtags.
5. Posts with hidden hashtags in the caption are more engaging.
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7. On average, Instagram posts with hashtags in the first comment receive a few more likes.
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A. SUMMARY

Reading this study, you'll discover:

- **How most brands use their Instagram hashtags to get followers** - we reveal brands' habits when using hashtags depending on their profile size.
- **When it is better to put Instagram hashtags in the posts' caption and when it's preferred to use them in the first comment** - we discover how engagement, reach, likes and comments are affected by hashtag placements.
- **How many hashtags should brands use** - we explore how many hashtags are generally used in posts, and how that affects performance for different Instagram profile sizes.
- **If hiding hashtags in the caption or in the comment works** - we look into the performance of posts with and without hidden hashtags.

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B. KEY FINDINGS

Here's what you learn reading this report:

- **Brands place hashtags in the caption.**

Most accounts prefer to use hashtags in the caption: 87.7% vs 12.3%. An overwhelming majority of posts include hashtags in the caption: 93.8% vs 6.2%.

- **Brands use fewer hashtags when placing them in the comments, and more hashtags when posting them in the caption.**

Most posts have 2 hashtags when looking only at hashtags in the first comment. However, when brands are using hashtags in the caption, they either go with 7 hashtags per post, either use up to 30 hashtags.

- **Posts with 27-30 hashtags do not bring the best engagement.**

Despite not performing bad across the board, posts with close to 30 hashtags never went up to the higher levels of engagement, compared to posts with a lower number of hashtags.

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- **Profiles up to 100k followers have a better Reach Rate when using hashtags in the caption.**

Data shows that using hashtags in the caption brings small and medium-size Instagram pages more reach per post.

- **Profiles with more than 100k followers have a better Reach Rate when posting their hashtags in comments (15.9%).**

Judging by the reach metrics, large Instagram profiles - with over 100k followers - perform the exact opposite from the smaller and medium sized profile.

- **The Engagement Rate calculated per Post is affected by the placement of the hashtags, the number of hashtags and the size of your Instagram profile.**

It is not enough to only look at the placement of the hashtags to understand what works best when it comes to engagement.

- **The engagement rate per post is higher for posts with shown hashtags in the first comment and posts with hidden hashtags in the caption.**

Brands prefer not hiding their hashtags across the board, but that's not always the best decision. Hide the caption hashtags, but don't hide the ones in the first comment.

Continue reading, and you'll discover 15+ charts that uncover some fascinating findings.

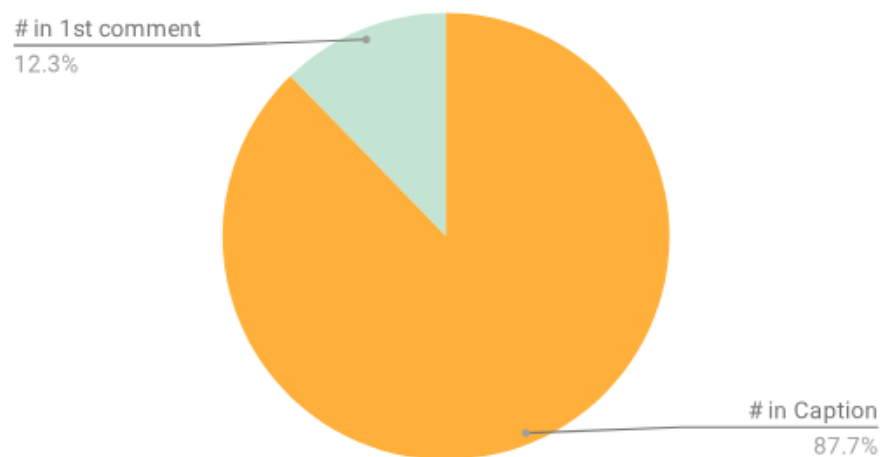
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1. 87% OF BRANDS PREFER USING HASHTAGS IN THE CAPTION

When looking at how brands prefer to place hashtags, there is a clear takeaway: 87% of profiles use hashtags in the caption, through an overwhelming majority of 93.8% posts.

This leaves only 6.2% of the total posts we analyzed with hashtags placed in the first comment.

Instagram Profiles: Hashtag Placement



Source: Socialinsider data
Data range: August 2018 - June 2019



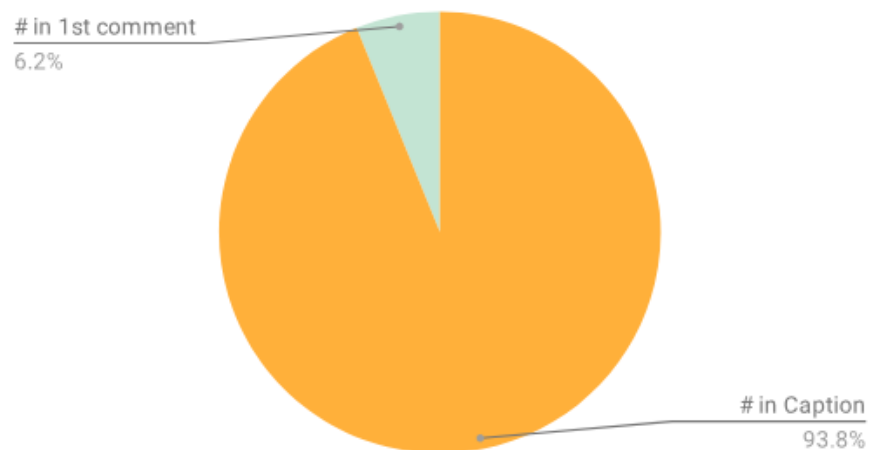
09

There is a general idea sustained by several social media publications that putting your hashtags in the comments gives your post a cleaner, more elegant look, while using a bulk of hashtags in the caption tends to seem “spammy”.

However, this mindset doesn’t seem to affect most brands, who clearly believe that placing hashtags in the caption is the way to go.

Is that always the case? ☐

Instagram Posts: Hashtag Placement



Source: Socialinsider data
Data range: August 2018 - June 2019



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2. PROFILES WITH UP TO 100K FOLLOWERS HAVE BETTER REACH AND IMPRESSION RATES WHEN POSTING THEIR HASHTAGS IN THE CAPTION

Looking at the best average reach rates, there is a clear division between accounts with under 100k and over 100k followers.

This means that the big players need to adjust their post strategies accordingly.

However, **using hashtags in the caption brings the most impressions**, regardless of the size of the Instagram account.

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HOW TO USE HASHTAGS TO GET THE BEST REACH RATE

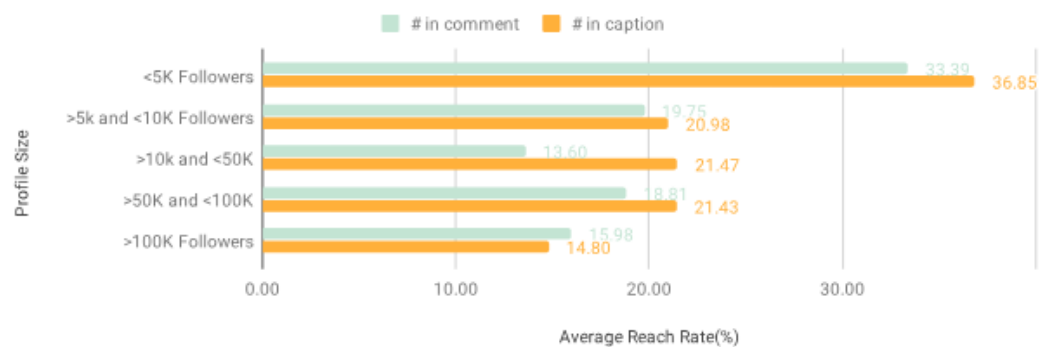
Data shows that using hashtags in caption brings small and medium-size Instagram pages more reach per post:

- **Profiles with under 5k followers:** 36.85% average reach rate per post with hashtags in the caption
- **Profiles with 5k-10k followers:** 20.98% average reach rate per post with hashtags in the caption
- **Profiles with 10k-50k followers:** 21.47% average reach rate per post with hashtags in the caption
- **Profiles with 50k-100k followers:** 21.43% average reach rate per post with hashtags in the caption

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On the other hand, **profiles with more than 100k followers that place hashtags in the first comment have gotten a 15.9% average reach rate per post**, as opposed to a 14.8% reach rate of posts with hashtags in the caption.

Average Reach Rate per Post for hashtags in caption vs. in first comment - by Profile Size



Source: Socialinsider data
Data range: August 2018 - June 2019



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JENN HERMAN

“SOCIAL MEDIA STRATEGIST

There is no significant difference to the algorithm or post reach in terms of where you place your hashtags.

The caveat to that is the use of popular hashtags that have saturated search results.

For example, if you use #love which is incredibly popular, placing that in a comment, will likely produce LESS reach and exposure in the hashtag hub.

”



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HOW TO USE HASHTAGS TO GET THE BEST IMPRESSION RATE

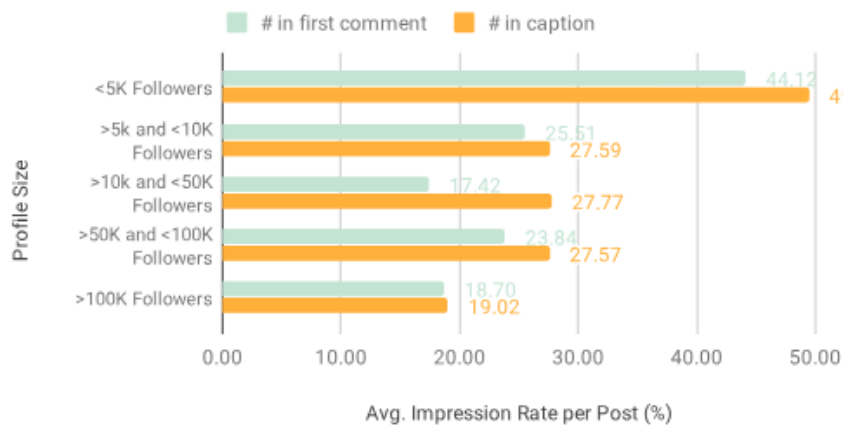
If the goal of your instagram post is simply to spread the word, without really needing people to interact with it, then the focus should mainly be on impressions. In that case, **placing the hashtags in the caption seems the way to go, regardless of your profile size.**

- **Profiles with under 5k followers:** 49.46% average reach rate per post with hashtags in the caption.
- **Profiles with 5k-10k followers:** 27.59% average reach rate per post with hashtags in the caption.
- **Profiles with 10k-50k followers:** 27.77% average reach rate per post with hashtags in the caption.
- **Profiles with 50k-100k followers:** 27.57% average reach rate per post with hashtags in the caption.

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The Impression Rate per Post of big Instagram profiles with over 100 000 followers isn't too affected by the placement of the hashtags. That's not the case for smaller profiles.

Average Impression Rate per Post for hashtags in caption vs. in first comment - by Profile Size



Source: Socialinsider data
Data range: August 2018 - June 2019



Of course, the performance is also affected by the number of hashtags added in the post.

3. BRANDS PREFER EXTREMES: EITHER 7, EITHER 30 HASHTAGS, PLACED IN THE POST'S CAPTION

When it comes to the number of hashtags each post should have, there is also a cloud of uncertainty among experts, which have been trying to figure out “best practices”.

All over the media you'll see professionals opting for using up to 7 hashtags, up to 11 hashtags, or even the full 30 hashtag limit permitted by Instagram. Others fall in the middle and advise brands to “find the magic number”.

And we're no exception, with Socialinsider's *Instagram hashtag guide* and Quuu's *how to use hashtags to boost your business*, which have been trying to underline how to go about it.

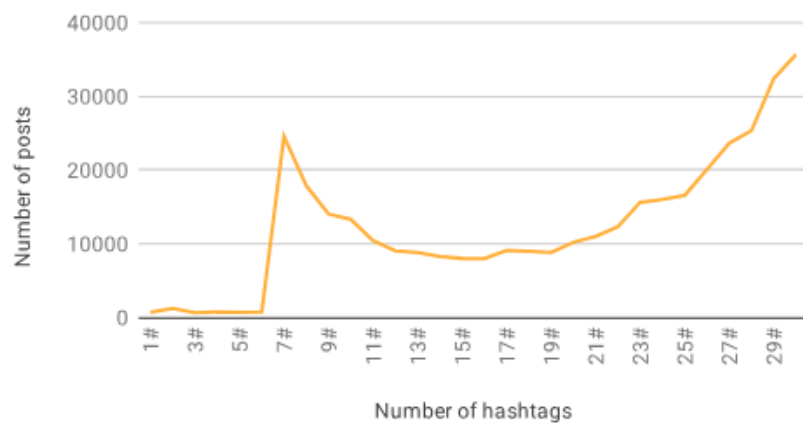
All of the expert advice is reflected in how brands have actually used their hashtags.

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When brands are using **hashtags in the caption**, which is the majority of the time, the behavior is generally split: **they either go with 7 hashtags per post, either use up to 30 hashtags.**

The chart below clearly points out the two extremes.

Distribution of Posts by number of hashtags used in the Caption



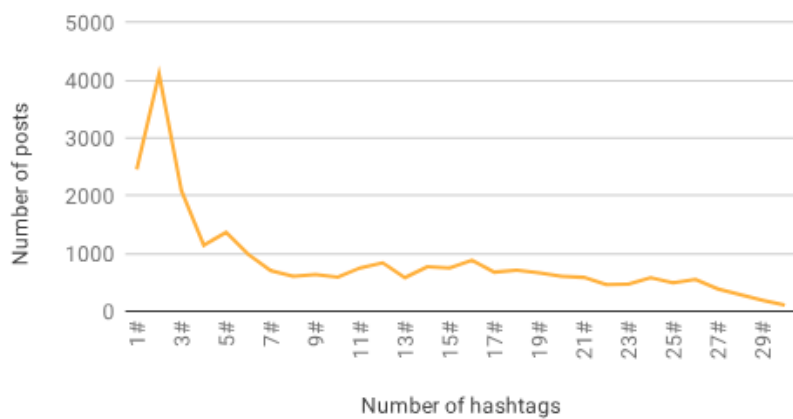
Source: Socialinsider data
Data range: August 2018 - June 2019



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On the other side of the spectrum, when it comes to **hashtags the first comment**, most posts contain **only 2 hashtags**.

Distribution of Posts by number of hashtags used in the First Comment



Source: Socialinsider data
Data range: August 2018 - June 2019



But is that the best way to go about it?□

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ALEX KHAN:

“SOCIAL MEDIA COACH

I think it's all about A/B testing.

In my experience it makes no difference if you use hashtags in the comments or in the caption.

As Instagram changes their algorithm from time to time, it is more important to test what works for you best and make sure to use different hashtags and try to use new ones.”

”



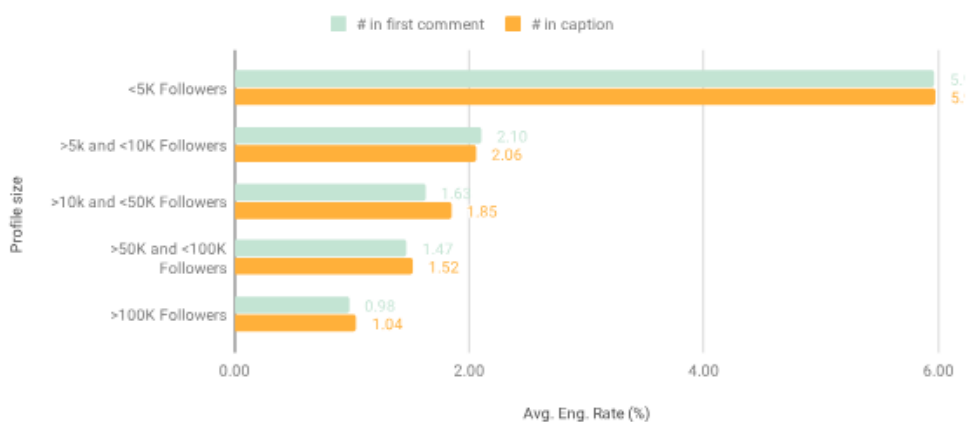
4. THE ENGAGEMENT RATE DEPENDS ON THE PROFILE SIZE, PLACEMENT AND NUMBER OF HASHTAGS

As an overview, the engagement does not seem to be too affected when only looking at posts with hashtags in the caption versus posts with hashtags in the first comment. Which is also the reason why there was no clear-cut answer to this question.

Although using your hashtags in the caption seems to bring slightly better engagement, the difference is not big enough to make a significant impact (0.5 % or less).

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Average Engagement Rate per Post for hashtags in caption vs. in first comment - by Profile Size



Source: Socialinsider data
Data range: August 2018 - June 2019



However, the devil is in the details, so to speak.

! At a closer look, the Engagement Rate per Post is affected by both the placement of the hashtags in the caption or the first comment, as well as the size of your profile.

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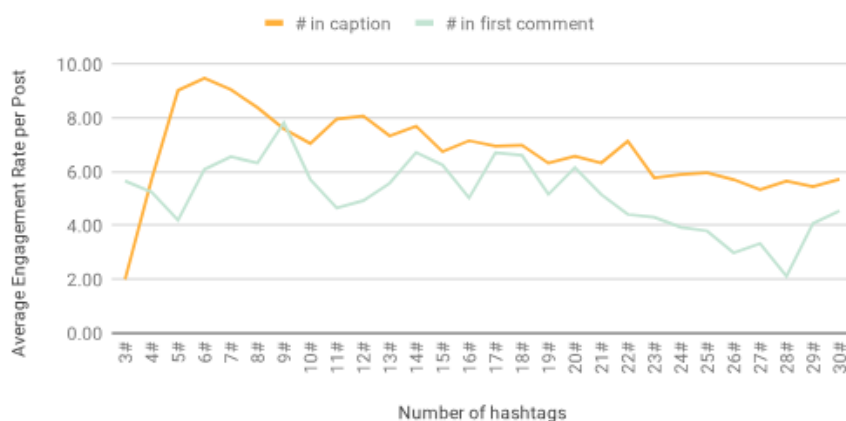
INSTAGRAM HASHTAG RULES: HOW MANY HASHTAGS SHOULD BRANDS USE AND WHERE?

By splitting the profile sizes and looking at each group individually, you can get a general idea of what were the top-performing posts

Here is a breakdown of best-performing scenarios:

- **Profiles with fewer than 5K followers** have performed best when using **6 hashtags in the caption.**

<5K Followers Profiles: Avg. Engagement Rate per Post by number of hashtags



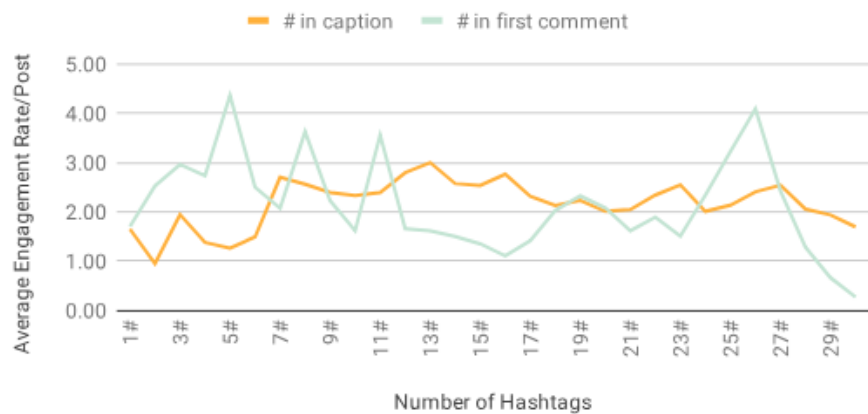
Source: Socialinsider data
Data range: August 2018 - June 2019



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- Profiles that have between 5K and 10K followers have performed best when using 5 hashtags in the first comment.

5K-10K Followers Profiles: Avg. Engagement Rate per Post by number of hashtags



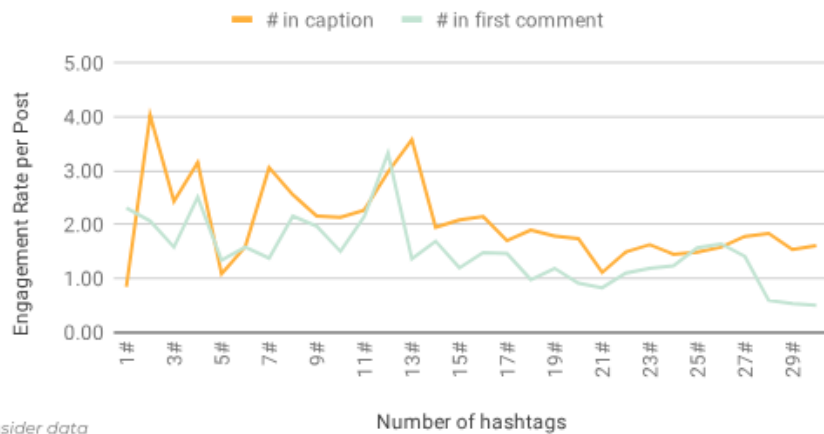
Source: Socialinsider data
Data range: August 2018 - June 2019



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- **Profiles that have between 10K and 50K followers have performed best when using 2 hashtags in the caption.**

10K-50K Followers Profiles: Avg. Engagement Rate per Post by number of hashtags



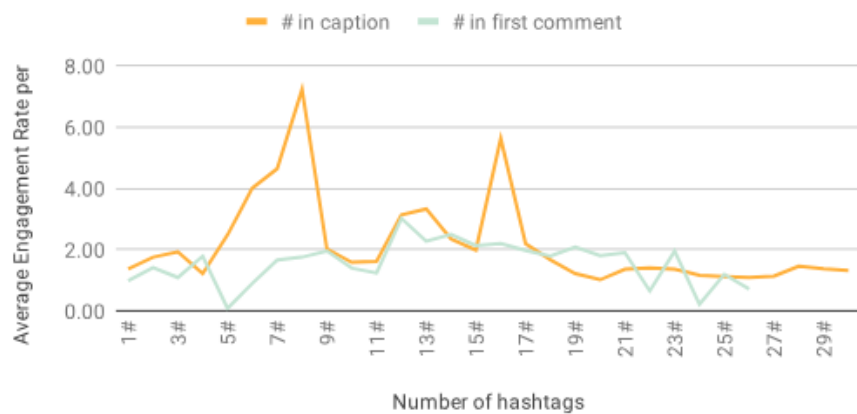
Source: Socialinsider data
Data range: August 2018 - June 2019



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- **Profiles that have between 50K and 100K followers** have performed best when using **8 hashtags in the caption.**

50K-100K Followers Profiles: Avg. Engagement Rate per Post by number of hashtags



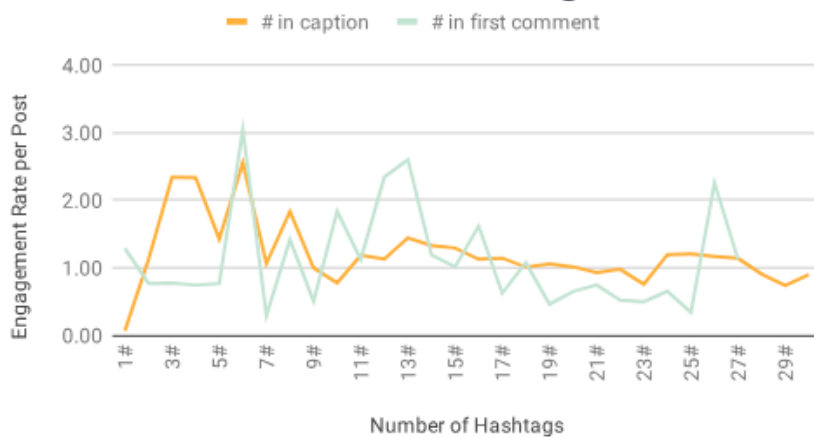
Source: Socialinsider data
Data range: August 2018 - June 2019



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- **Profiles that have over 100K followers** have performed best when using **6 hashtags in the first comment**.

>100K Followers Profiles: Avg. Engagement Rate per Post by number of hashtags



Source: Socialinsider data
Data range: August 2018 - June 2019



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The above-mentioned results only include the peak levels of engagement, but the charts also show other good-performing scenarios.

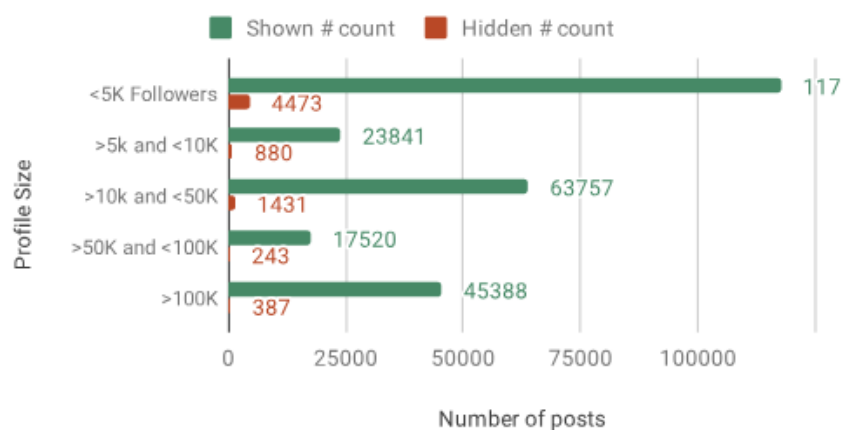
This means that by taking into account your profile size and using a correct number of hashtags in the correct section, you will increase your chances of reaching the peak level of engagement.

!The surprise here is that although using a double-digit number of hashtags doesn't always lead to bad performance, none of the posts that had the full 30 hashtags (or close to 30) did not get their top results, regardless of the profile size.

5. POSTS WITH HIDDEN HASHTAGS IN THE CAPTION ARE MORE ENGAGING

When using hashtags in the Caption, **most brands show the hashtags in the caption of their posts** (instead of hiding them).

Number of Hidden and Shown Hashtags in the Caption - by Profile Size



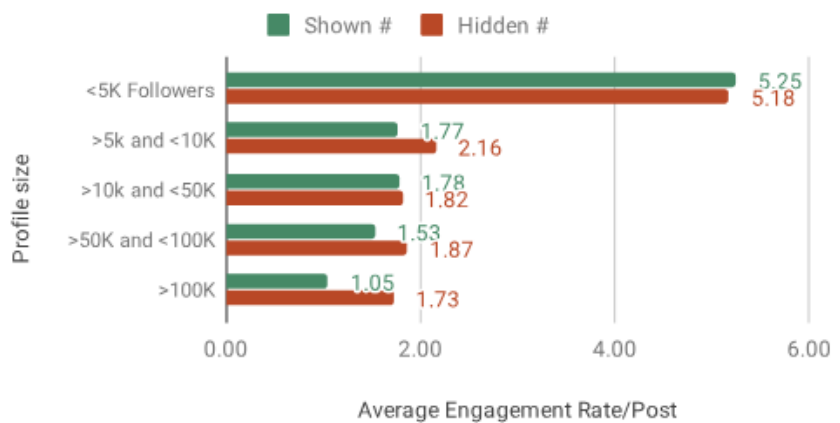
Source: Socialinsider data
Data range: August 2018 - June 2019



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But the engagement rate per post tends to be higher for posts with hidden hashtags.

Avg. Engagement Rate for Hidden and Shown Hashtags in the Caption - by Profile Size



Source: Socialinsider data
Data range: August 2018 - June 2019



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SHANE BARKER

“DIGITAL STRATEGIST & BRAND
CONSULTANT

I prefer adding hashtags in captions because it lends more credibility and authenticity to my posts.

We are marketers, and using hashtags is a useful marketing tactic, so, there is no shame in hiding them.

”

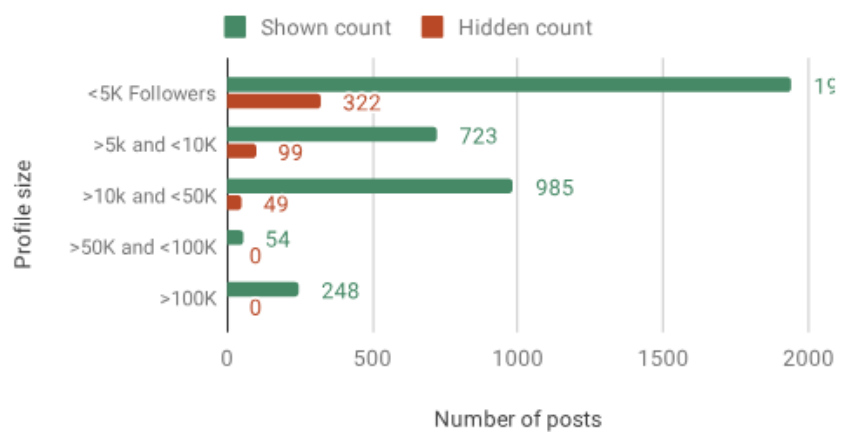
And, if your only concern is that too many hashtags will make your captions look messy, then there are ways to hide the hashtags from plain view unless someone opens and reads the entire caption.



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When using hashtags in the first comment, most brands show the hashtags (and not hide them).

Number of Hidden and Shown Hashtag in the First Comment - by Profile Size



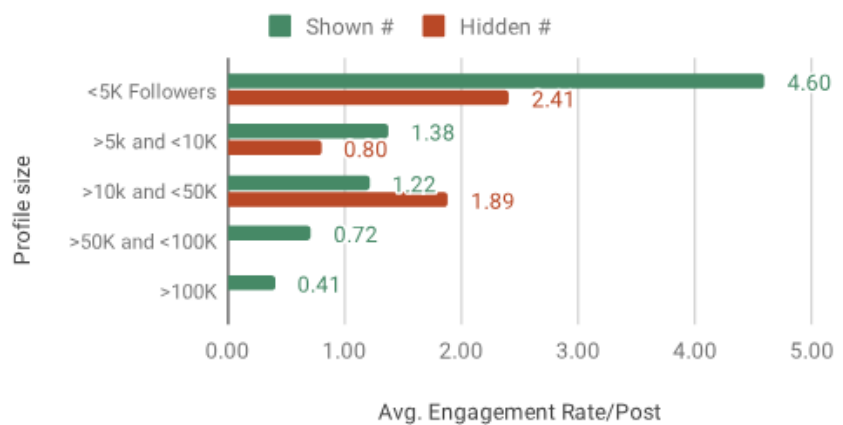
Source: Socialinsider data
Data range: August 2018 - June 2019



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The engagement rate per post is higher for posts with shown hashtags in the first comment, which shows this tactic to be effective.

Avg. Engagement Rate for Hidden and Shown Hashtag in the First Comment - by Profile Size



Source: Socialinsider data
Data range: August 2018 - June 2019



WHAT ARE HIDDEN HASHTAGS?

You've often heard about the concept of "hidden" hashtags. No, this does not refer to a secret Instagram option or function.

Hiding the hashtags can create a cleaner overall aspect of your post and eliminates any chance that your hashtags take away focus from your message.

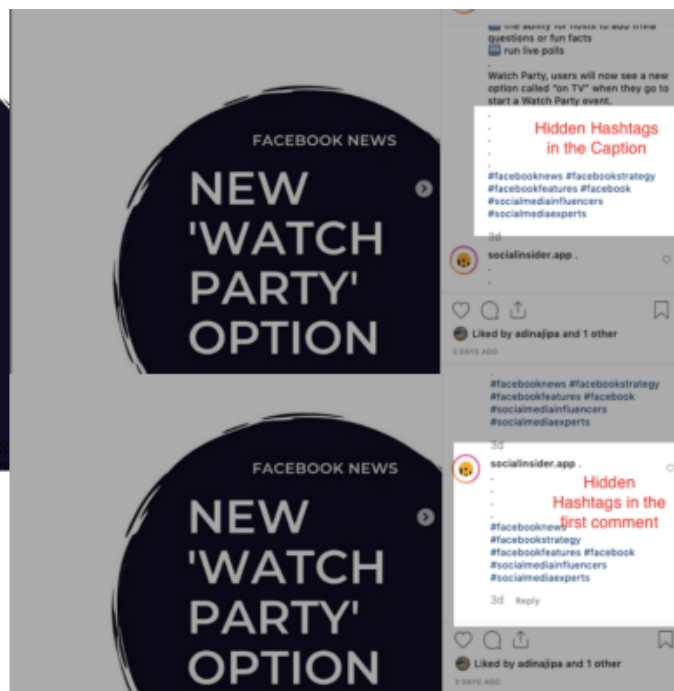
This is simply done by an easy "dot + return" technique.

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HOW TO HIDE INSTAGRAM HASHTAGS?

By “hiding your hashtags”, one simply means leaving some space between the message in the caption and the hashtags, so that once you hit “post”, that messy strain of hashtags cannot be seen by followers unless they opt to press “more”.

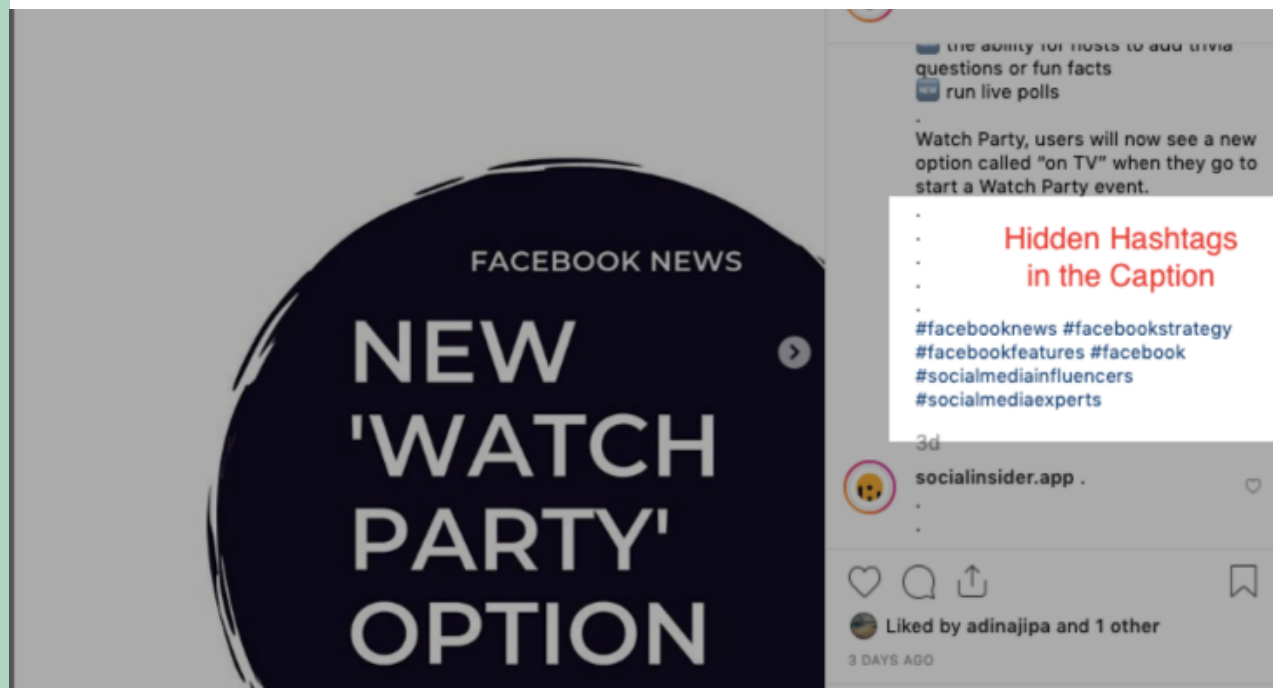
You can hide your hashtags in the caption or in the first comment.



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You do so by opening a text editor, simply typing a dot · and pressing “Return”. You repeat this three or five times, after which you insert your hashtags underneath the last dot, and copy paste everything to your Instagram post.

The dots create clear line breaks and move the hashtags lower and further away from the message you want to share.



36**6. ON AVERAGE, PROFILES SMALLER THAN 100K GET ONE OR TWO MORE COMMENTS WHEN PLACING HASHTAGS IN THE FIRST COMMENT**

Bigger profiles typically means bigger brands, which translates into more funds for sponsored posts, activations or other paid activities on social media.

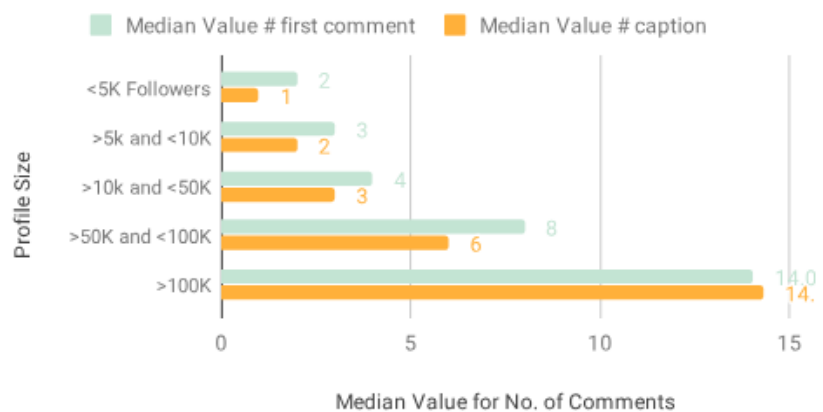
To clear things up and be able to see how brands organically receive comments, we calculated a median number of comments.

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The differences made by the placement of the hashtags were not too impressive.

It's safe to say that accounts smaller than 100K get one or two more comments for posts that have hashtags in the first comment.

Median Number of Comments for Posts with hashtags in caption vs. in first comment - by Profile Size



Source: Socialinsider data
Data range: August 2018 - June 2019



7. ON AVERAGE, INSTAGRAM POSTS WITH HASHTAGS IN THE FIRST COMMENT RECEIVE A FEW MORE LIKES

Using Instagram hashtags for more likes seems to mainly follow the same principle as with the comments.

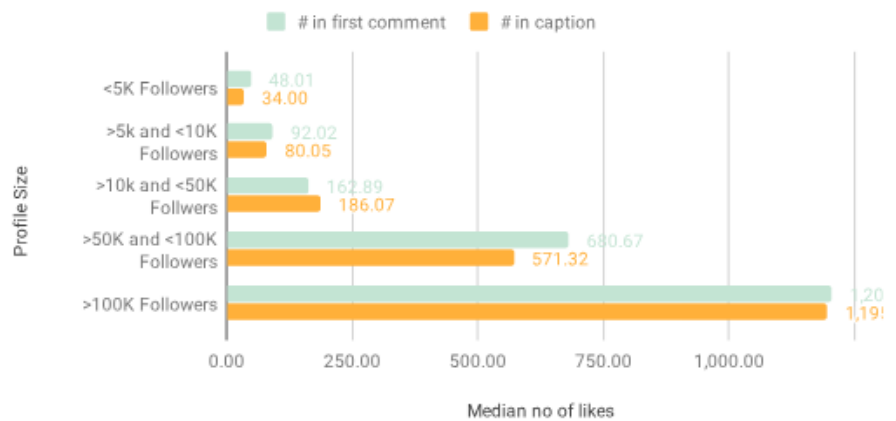
When looking at the median, the numbers are higher for posts with their hashtags in the first comment.

One notable exception is for profiles with between 10k and 50k followers, who seem to have had better results on their posts with hashtags in the caption.

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Placing hashtags in the first comment seems to attract more likes for most profile sized.

Median number of likes for posts with hashtags in caption vs. in first comment - by Profile Size



Source: Socialinsider data
Data range: August 2018 - June 2019



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WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR YOUR INSTAGRAM POSTS? ACTIONABLE INSIGHTS

After going through everything, it becomes quite clear that it's not just a matter of generally placing hashtags in the caption or in the first comment. **You need to set some clear goals about what performance KPIs are important for you, keep in mind the brand's profile size, and use the optimal number of hashtags correctly.**

If the purpose of the posts is to bring awareness and spread the word about a certain message, then the goal is to have better reach and impressions, regardless of whether people interact with the post or not.

In this case, focus on the best scenarios that bring the best average reach rate per post and the top average impression rate per post. For profiles with under 100 followers, that means using hidden hashtags in the caption.

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In case you're more interested in people interacting with the messages you post, the engagement is the metric of interest.

Here are a few hashtag best practices engagement wise, by profile size:

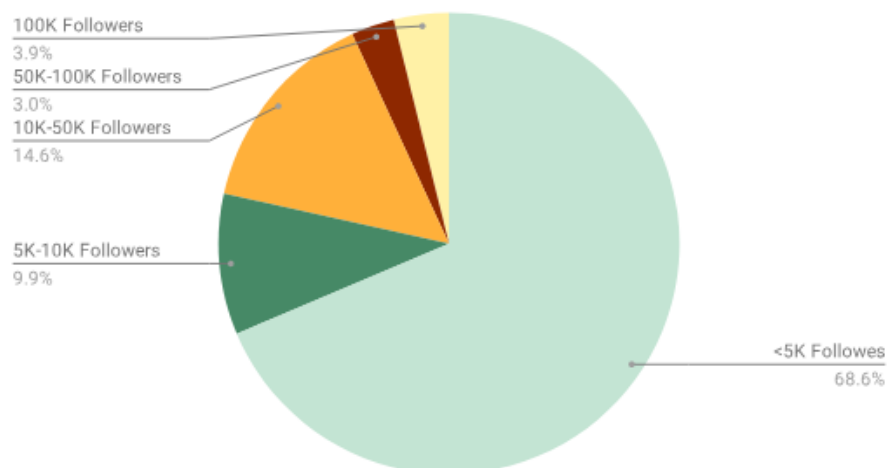
- **Profiles with under 5k followers:** 6 hidden hashtags in the caption achieved better engagement, reach and more impressions.
- **Profiles with 5k-10k followers:** 5 shown hashtags in the first comment achieved better engagement (despite the reach and impression rates).
- **Profiles with 10k-50k followers:** 2 hidden hashtags in the caption achieved better engagement, reach and more impressions.
- **Profiles with 50k-100k followers:** 8 hidden hashtags in the caption achieved better engagement, reach and more impressions.
- **Profiles with over 100k followers:** 6 shown hashtags in the first comment achieved better engagement, reach and more impressions.

C. METHODOLOGY

To identify the best ways to use hashtags on Instagram in order to maximize the engagement, impression as reach of each post, **we analyzed more than 649,895 Instagram Posts from a total of 6,784 business profiles** with an active presence on Instagram between August 2018 to June 2019.

These business profiles were segmented as follows: under 5,000 followers, between 5,000 and 10,000 followers, between 10,000 and 50,000 followers, between 50,000 and 100,000 followers and over 100,000 followers.

Distribution of Analysed Profiles



Source: Socialinsider data
Data range: August 2018 - June 2019

socialinsider
Quuu

C. METHODOLOGY

We used Socialinsider to see how brands have previously used hashtags and whether they are usually placed in the caption or in the first comment of posts, as well as the performance that comes along with these decisions.

One of the main metrics used to measure that performance was the average engagement rate per post. Socialinsider defines total engagement as the sum of likes and comments, while the engagement rate is the average engagement per 100 followers.

The study also examines the effects of hidden hashtags. Taking into account the steps required to create hidden hashtags which are also explained in more detail above, we considered the posts with a minimum of 3 dots per line, followed by the hashtags underneath.

[Discover more studies on our blog!](#)

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