

# How Online Information Spreads Like Wildfire



Jeff Hemsley

## CURRENT RESEARCH

Developing open source toolkits to understand viral events

In 2015, social media posts caused a firestorm of controversy by exposing several cases of police brutality and bringing issues of race, equality, and police conduct to the forefront. Without these viral videos, there likely would have been only one accepted version of what truly happened. Social information diffusion is powerful; it can hold those who abuse power accountable, bring attention to the grievances of minority groups, and highlight the best of humanity. Dr. Jeff Hemsley, Assistant Professor in the School of Information Studies at Syracuse University, studies viral information flows in online social media, to help people understand how to maximize attention in our new media landscape. By analyzing Twitter and other social media platforms, Dr. Hemsley hopes to understand how online posts go viral and make this knowledge accessible to the general public. In this way, we can work towards leveling the information field, and give voices to those who would otherwise not have one.

Co-author of *Going Viral* and a founding member of the [Behavior, Information, Technology and Society Laboratory](#) (BITS lab) at the Syracuse iSchool, Dr. Hemsley brings together the fields of sociology, organization studies, political science and computer science through his work on online virology. Fundamentally, viral events happen when enough people decide to "share" an event through social media, often facilitated by gatekeepers like BuzzFeed or Huffington Post who control information flows and connect together disparate parts of networks. When people create new links in their social networks, they make these networks denser and richer. Dr. Hemsley looks at how networks and...

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## AFFILIATION



Syracuse University

## EDUCATION

- Ph.D. in Information School 2014, University of Washington

## AWARDS

- Information Science Book of the Year Award for *Going Viral*, 2014
- Outstanding Academic Title for *Going Viral*, 2014

## RESEARCH AREAS

Technology, Informational Sciences / Internet, IOT, Devices, Data, Natural Disasters / Emergency

## FUNDING REQUEST

Your contributions will support the continued research of Dr. Jeff Hemsley at Syracuse University as he develops and extends open source toolkits to aggregate data across social media platforms. Your donations will help fund the \$300K/year for personnel, mainly student programmers who will assist in developing and maintaining the tools available for other researchers and the public for free. Partner with the team to understand how events turn viral, to give voices to those who have gone unheard.