The public interest behind #JeSuisCharlie and #JeSuisAhmed:

Social media and hashtag virality as mechanisms for western cultural imperialism

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**Abstract**

As social creatures, humans are highly involved in storytelling. With the continued advancement of communication systems, the mechanisms for telling the narrative of human events have also evolved. Social media and the memetic properties of hashtags going viral are the apex of modern, digitally-mediated, storytelling tools. This paper offered an analysis of two hashtags, i.e. narratives, of the Charlie Hebdo Paris shooting to illustrate how hashtag virality can be a mechanism for the spread and enforcement of western perspectives. It then explored the precedent under which international law could regulate such behavior. Concerned with the protection of human diversity and cultural pluralism, this paper advanced a course of action to facilitate social change as conceived by an interdisciplinary framework.

*Keywords*: hashtag, virality, Je Suis Charlie, electronic colonialism theory,

international law

**Author biography**

Phillip Arceneaux is a Ph.D. student in the College of Journalism and Communications at the University of Florida. His research attempts to blend the fields of communication, international relations, and law, via a critical studies lens, to address contemporary social issues as propagated by the digital nature of globalization.