

TERRORISM AND SOCIAL MEDIA

REACTIONS OF THE EUROPEAN PUBLIC AFTER THE CHARLIE HEBDO ATTACKS

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OBJECTIVE

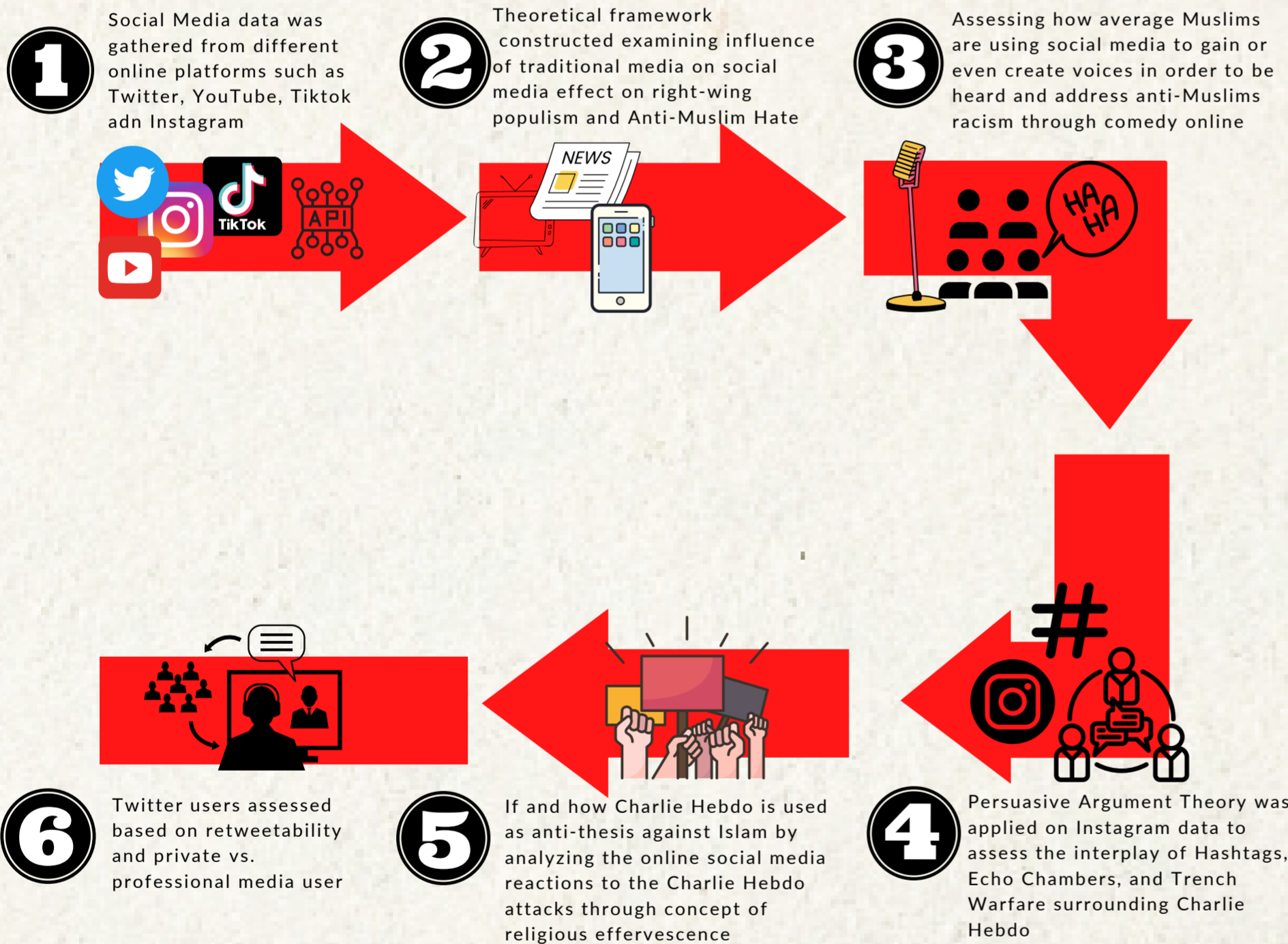
This doctoral project aims to examine the online reactions of the European public after the Charlie Hebdo attacks on January 7-9, 2015.

INTRODUCTION

The increase in international terror attacks and secondly the evolution of media and information consumption based on technological advancements together have led to the figurative and literal blowing up of mass media coverage, but, increasingly and more importantly, social media traffic. This shift in information consumption by the general public, especially after terror attacks, is leading to a fragmentation of authority that traditional media gained after years of being the monopoly of verified information exchange.

The increased usage and wide accessibility of social media is allowing more people to feel connected globally after terror attacks and is leading to the creation of mediascapes by defining in-groups of like-minded people against Islam, as a common enemy, which leads to a drastic increase in online hate against Islam and Muslims. Digital mediascapes, therefore, have the ability to unify participants around an "us" that is specifically against the "other" that is labeled as an enemy.

METHODS



RESULTS

- Anti-Muslim Hate works acts as a community builder and unifier of communities that might be otherwise very removed from one another -> Right-wing populist groups
- Asymmetric form of communication between right-wing populist leaders and social media users spreading anti-muslim hate
- Comedy is used often by self-identifying Muslims to share burdens of their life and to humanize "Muslims"
- Both echo-chamber processes and trench warfare mechanisms play a role in the discussing the image of Islam online
- Charlie Hebdo, the magazine, is a prime representative for French secularism and support for the magazine is key for standing for French values
- Blue tick variation has some impact on retweet behavior although it is not vital for tweet virality
- High-profile actors and people with a large follower count before the attack are more likely to be retweeted ie. mediatized opinion leaders
- The tweets in total can be divided into cluster groups: 'respect for Muslims', 'solidarity', 'pro-Charlie', 'anti-Charlie', 'other attacks', and 'episodic'



DISCUSSION

Although anti-Muslim hate is found to be a very real and key part in the discussion that ensued after the Charlie Hebdo attacks, it is important to mention that this type of response is a minority within the debate. This does not, however, reduce the impact this type of discussion has. The debate is not symmetrical, meaning that popular users are retweeted more, however, they do not engage very often in the debate. This is especially the case for right-wing populist leaders.

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