



FIRST REPORT

ONLINE # MEMORIES

MEMORY CONFLICTS IN SOCIAL MEDIA. TWITTER DATA ANALYSYS



Author

FERNANDO JIMÉNEZ HERRERA

Data collection

MARILUZ CONGOSTO

With the advice of

HISMEDI - UNIVERSITY CARLOS III

Twitter offers its users the capacity to transmit what they think, see or feel without filters or intermediaries.

The importance in modern society of social networks for keeping up to date cannot be denied. The relationship between technology and social networks means we can find out immediately what is happening around the world, both at a micro or local level and a macro or supranational level. One of the most important networks is Twitter as it has more than 500 million users. With this application, a user can receive news and send it to any contact. Due to its immediacy and the number of users, many politicians around the world use it to further their own and their party's interests. Donald Trump is a good example of this. Twitter offers its users the possibility to transmit what they think, see or feel without filters or intermediaries. At a political level, the intermediaries would be the traditional media (TV, radio and newspapers). Now politicians can transmit their messages every day without these media, and they can even avoid them in certain cases.

Twitter is also used to find out about and evaluate politicians' initiatives

Twitter is also used to find out about and evaluate politicians' initiatives. It is a way to advertise actions which would go unnoticed by other media and to learn users' opinions immediately. This is the context in which this report has been drafted with the aim of analysing the impact in Twitter of four different initiatives during 2019: three of them at an international level (International Holocaust Remembrance Day on 27 January, the commemoration of the day the Mauthausen concentration camp was liberated on 5 May, and Europe Day on 9 May); and one initiative at a Spanish level (a plaque placed in a Barcelona Police Station commemorating torture victims and the subsequent controversy from 27 March until 1 April).

This report is part of a project carried out by the Observatorio Europeo de Memorias (EUROM), which aims to follow online memories mainly through Twitter. This project analyses the messages and the behaviour of social network users in relation to certain European commemorations and the emerging debates. Below is a summary of the results of the initial data compiled for this project.

International Holocaust Remembrance Day in Memory of the Holocaust Victims



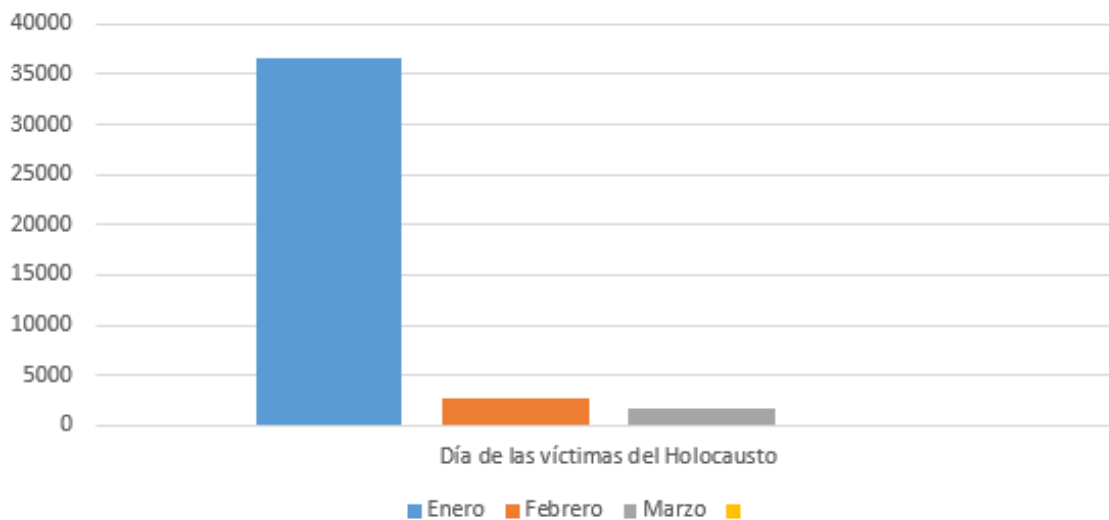
The first of the studied events is the International Holocaust Remembrance Day on 27 January. We aimed to assess the impact of this day in Twitter and evaluate the awareness level about the Holocaust. At a general level, the social networks, and Twitter in particular, are good tools for assessing the impact of certain events or news. We can determine the users' attitudes and their emotions through their comments. We can also see comments by people whose relatives were involved and therefore understand their heart-breaking testimonies, so we can empathise with their suffering. Thus, social networks help to transmit values. This is why many organizations and people use them with a didactic purpose.

The impact of the International Holocaust Remembrance Day was higher compared to other commemoration days studied in this work. A total of 41,000 tweets were recorded in relation to this subject between 1 January and 1 April. This sample is the highest in relation to the time frame, since it covered three months. The rest of the commemorations analysed contain smaller samples taken in shorter times (around a week). Generally, users responded with empathy in relation to the Nazi massacres during the Second World War. However, the discussion space opened was used to include other claims for recognising victims of other holocausts and indiscriminate slaughter of civilians. As an example, there were mentions to other cases in Africa and Asia. A big controversy rose up around the holocaust concept and when it can be applied, for example to the Soviet Gulags. However, the prevailing attitude was retweeting texts written by institutions, government representatives, organizations, popular people in the culture and art field and anonymous people, victims' relatives in some cases, who transmitted their opinions or their relatives' stories. In conclusion, in this case, we can find a wider range of authors but the general action is the retweet.

The discussion space created was also used to mention the situation in Europe. The open discussions included, among others, mentions about the situation in England created by Brexit, the diplomatic situation in Russia, China and their attitude towards Europe, and the actions taken by Trump in the U.S.A., particularly regarding immigration, as well as the European experience in 1938-1945. Some of the authors who participated most were @BarnabasBalint, @inartfairNYK, @DrPetra, @ArmandaAndrade, @AnitaSchelde and @bydefault. Though they wrote messages throughout the whole study, above all in January, the highest number of messages were published in the social network on the day of the commemoration. The user @AmbassadorOPTV was also very critical of the role played by Israel, and therefore, he also participated extensively on the days before and after the commemoration. It should also be noted that some users only reproduced hashtags in their messages, such as @GreatScent or @blackbird9_9. However, public political figures, their parties, national and supranational institutions, the media and famous people in the cultural area also took part in the commemoration. Nevertheless, individual users were the most numerous group and they enriched the debate by introducing different messages. They reproduced and retweeted messages related to remembrance in memory of the victims and criticised Nazi brutality, as well as introducing all sorts of topics that they compared with the past situation.

There are also the messages written by the Holocaust deniers who actively participated posting several messages every day, mainly on 27 January. An example of this is the account of @catamitechemist. Unfortunately, we do not know the details of the origins of the users who participated in this discussion. However, through the languages we can affirm that they were mainly English-speaking users compared to the rest of the groups, which were German, Greek, Portuguese, French, Arabic or Spanish-speaking groups. We can therefore presume users come from all over the world. This is an important point, since the prevailing language during the rest of the periods studied is Spanish. Other information that is partially missing is the influence of the messages and the size of the accounts publishing them. This information allows us to determine the approximate reception capacity of the message.

Commemoration in Memory of the Victims of the Holocaust



The distribution of the number of tweets each month showed that January was clearly the month with the highest number of mentions (almost 36,500), particularly on 27 (the commemoration day) and 28 January. The comments on this matter fell sharply in February and March, and did not rise above the merely superficial compared to January (2,800 comments in February and 1,700 comments in March). In addition, in the following months there was an increasing number of references to the events taking place in relation to the indiscriminate slaughter of civilians. The clearest example found in this report was the reactions to Donald Trump's attitude and his relationship with Judge Judy. The users' data are also obtained through the topics of the tweets. Like the rest of the social networks, Twitter offers immediacy, and thus the news and the commemorations do not last long. The discussions that arose after the International Holocaust Remembrance Day might be the exception, since they lasted three months (findings of this study).

The Police Station in Via Laietana (Barcelona) and its impact in Twitter

Instal·lat davant d'un lloc d'infesta memòria, en tant que espai de repressió i tortura, l'antiga 'Jefatura' de Via Laietana.



Ateneu Memòria Popular @Ateneu_Memoria · Siguinto

Fem una crida a participar en la concentració de rebuig aquesta tarda a les 18 hores al 43 de Via Laietana. Micro obert per a que les víctimes de tortures expressin el seu testimoni i diguin ben ben fort: #AquiEsVaTorturar #CuéntaseloAMEjías

Un grup d'ultradreta ha atacat la placa que recorda la repressió franquista a la comissaria de Via Laietana

Avui dijous 28 de març a les 18h anirem a Via Laietana. 43, a posar-hi clavells vermells. Micro obert per a les víctimes de la tortura franquista que vulguin expressar el seu testimoni

12:21 - 28 mar. 2019

122 Retweets 101 Me gusta

Ateneu Memòria Popular @Ateneu_Memoria · 28 mar. El seu odi i intolerància mai han estat més forts que la dignitat de totes i tots aquells a qui no van poder doblegar. #AquiEsVaTorturar

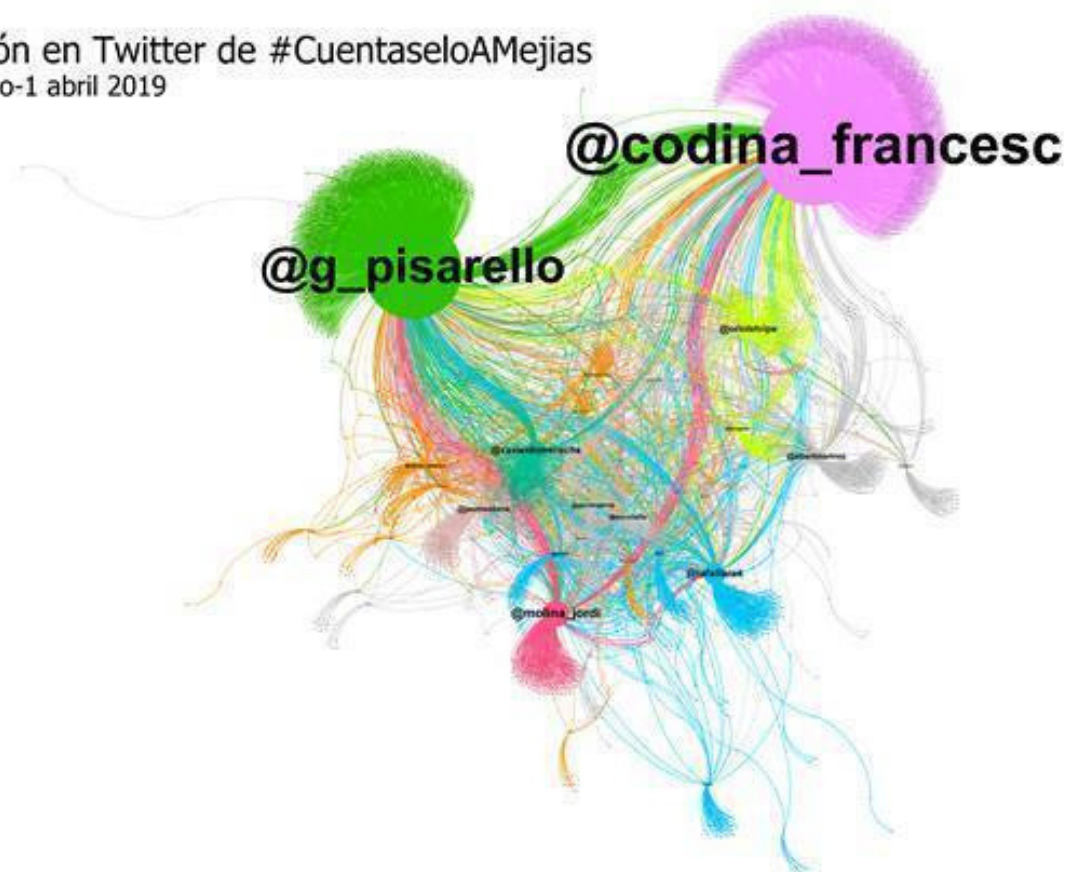
youtube.com/watch?v=jDd1bq...



We studied the Twitter reactions to the plaque in memory of torture victims placed on the old Francoist Police Station in Via Laietana (Barcelona). The study was launched after the politician Carina Mejías posted a tweet criticizing this initiative and one of its promoters, the deputy mayor of the City of Barcelona, Gerardo Pisarello. When Pisarello posted a tweet with the hashtag “cuéntaselo AMejías” (tell it to Mejías) on the 27 March, more than 7,000 tweets were posted on this issue until 1 April 2019. Most of the messages users posted were in favour of the plaque. This support was generally represented in the social network by retweeting the messages posted by the deputy mayor Pisarello. Out of the 7,035 messages, more than 4,800 were retweets. The most repeated tweets were those posted by institutions or their representatives. But also by members of Associations and Political Parties such as Esquerra Unida i Alternativa, EUiA. To a lesser extent, we found retweets from popular people from the Catalan cultural area, such as Cristina Fallarás; or anonymous persons, generally relatives of people who were tortured in the Via Laietana Police Station, or the actual torture victims sharing their experience, and stating the need for acknowledgement.

It should be taken into account that most of the users came from the cities and towns of Catalonia, and mostly from the city of Barcelona. Therefore, this is a phenomenon with a local impact, both in terms of numbers of participants and their origin. Messages were mainly written in Catalan and Spanish.

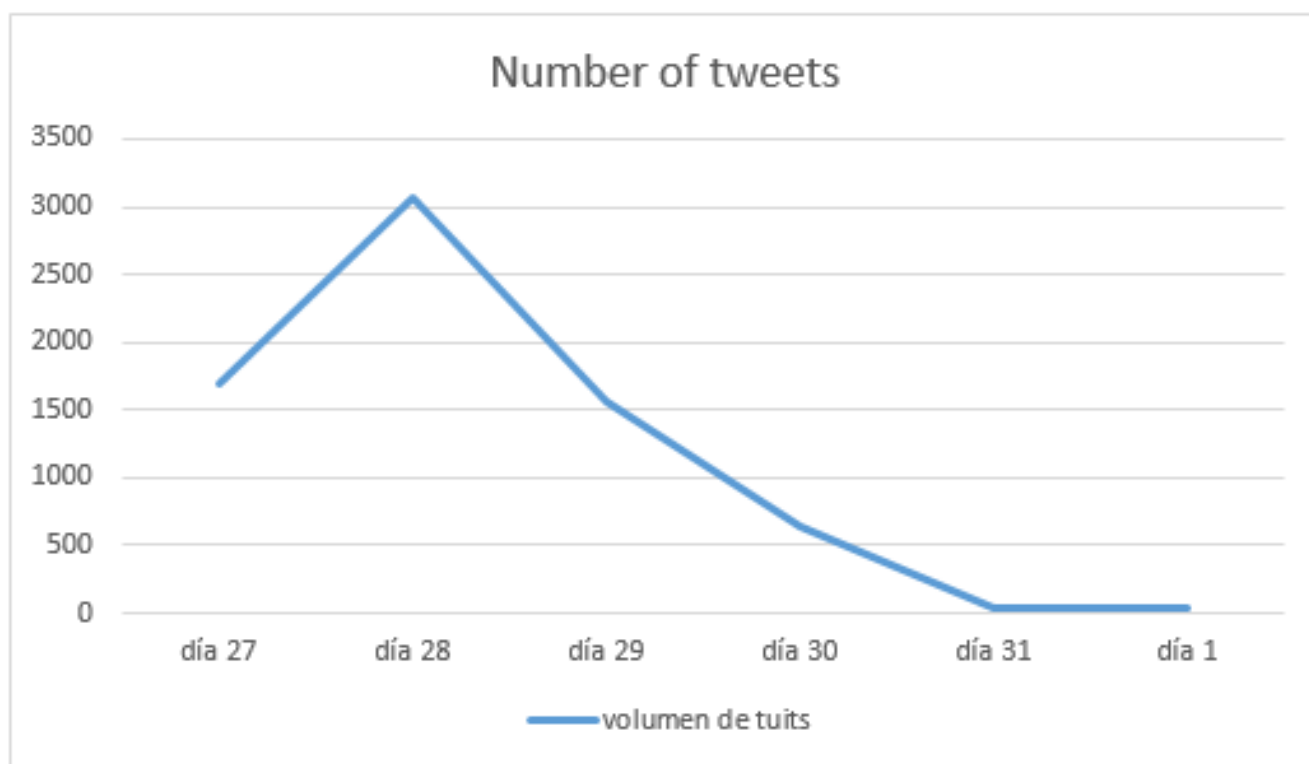
Difusión en Twitter de #CuentaseloAMEjias
27 marzo-1 abril 2019



Twitter dissemination of #CuentaseloAMEjias March 27 - April 01, 2019

Most messages praised the initiative and claimed it to be necessary in view of Mejías' comments. References were made to remember and give visibility to a space where tortures were committed over the years and which were kept secret by their perpetrators: the authorities of the Franco dictatorship. Testimonies and appreciations were also collected through messages of relatives and friends. References were made of ex-political prisoners who were detained and tortured in the police station, such as Enric Pubill, and young students, men and women, who were tortured due to their activism. It is important to highlight the female participation in the support and commemoration messages, because they were doubly silenced: for being women and for being activists. To a lesser extent, there were messages that criticized the politician Carina Mejías, who condemned the plaque, and her political party, Ciudadanos. There were also messages as time went on stating that the plaque had been attacked by extreme right-wing groups, which resulted in several critical tweets against these groups. The last day of the study ended with the news of the plaque being restored.

The activity in Twitter was very much related to the events taking place. The main impact was recorded on the first three days of the study, that is, on the 27th, when Pisarello responded to Mejías, until the 29th, when the controversy took place after the attack on the plaque. On the following days recorded by the study (the 30th, 31st and 1st), the interest decreased and therefore the number of tweets also decreased. This sharp decrease in the last two days is partly due to the social model governing social networks, which is characterised by the impact of the immediacy of the news and the rapid loss of interest due to the large amount of events we are exposed to through our social networks. The day most messages were posted coincides with the attack on the plaque, on the 28th, one day after it was inaugurated. The opening and the attack on the plaque register a high number of posts. The following graph shows the data.



Commemoration of the Liberation of the Mauthausen Concentration Camp

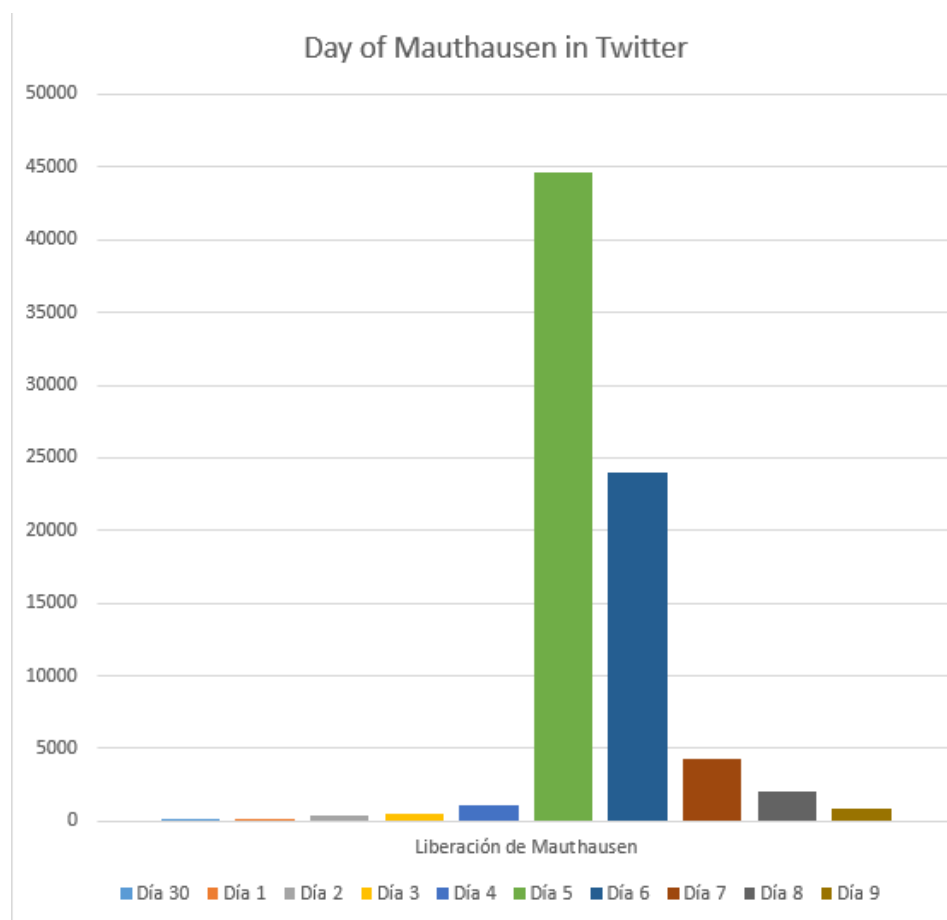


The Mauthausen Liberation Commemoration Day on 5 May was one of the most prolific in the networks along with the Holocaust day. Almost 80,000 tweets were registered between 30 April and 9 May 2019. This commemoration day had a special impact this year in Spain after it was designated by the Socialist Government of Pedro Sanchez as the Memorial Day for those Spaniards who were deported and died in Mauthausen. The social networks noticed this decision, including Twitter, where messages from the Iberian Peninsula increased. According to the study, the messages and discussions around the Spaniards in Mauthausen lasted for some days.

At a European level, the messages were mainly on the day of the commemoration, 5 May. Like the holocaust commemoration day, there are only a few messages concerning the Mauthausen Concentration Camp on the preceding or following days. The first characteristic observed when we look at the data obtained is the wide range of male and female authors who took part in this discussion. Despite the prevalence of the retweet of original texts, the diversity of content and message creators is very varied. The importance of the institutional accounts in the spread of the commemoration should be stressed. Among these institutions we find @AuschwitzMuseum, whose content was reproduced slightly more than 2,000 times. Its messages are to remember the victims of Nazism and the troops that liberated the Mauthausen camp.

Another account that stands out is @TC-Viyana, the official account of the Turkish embassy in Vienna. This account contains messages to remember those Turkish people who lost their lives in the concentration camp and the commemoration of the 74th anniversary of the liberation of Mauthausen. The messages about remembering the victims of the concentration camps based on their national origin are very common; and therefore, there were also similar comments regarding Polish and Spanish people, for example. Other institutions that joined the commemoration were @Inafra_Oficial, the French Audiovisual National Institute, @mhistoriacat, the Catalan Museum of History, and @ArchivosEst, the Spanish State Archives.

Generally, we found messages against the brutality of Fascism and Totalitarianism in remembrance of the hundreds of thousands of victims of Mauthausen and the rest of the Nazi concentration camps. Those groups that suffered the repression most are mentioned and the liberation of the camp by the American troops 74 years ago is also commemorated. To conclude, messages of remembrance and sorrow for what happened were posted.



A common demand repeated in the tweets of several countries is the need to educate and making the future generations aware of the atrocities committed by Nazism.

We noticed an overwhelming absence of messages by political parties, European institutions or politicians. The only exception is the Spanish case. However, this, as previously explained, is because the day to commemorate the Spaniards who were deported and died in Mauthausen was made on the same day as the commemoration of the liberation of the concentration camp. After the commemoration event, different discussions developed and spread through the social networks, among them, Twitter. Thus, official accounts of political parties, such as @PSEO, or politicians from different parties, such as @Joan Tardá, @raulromeva, @toni_comin, @QuimTorraIPla and @gabrielrufian took part in the discussions. This was due to the controversy at a Spanish level concerning political prisoners. Almost 20,000 tweets were recorded.

Among the most retweeted accounts, we can find @amauthausen (Amical de Mauthausen) and @MyLMadrid (Memoria y Libertad Madrid), apart from the institutions. These are commemorative associations whose content is based on spreading commemorative acts and messages to remember, in this case, the victims of Nazism. They are also in accordance with the messages related to the institutions, such as the commemoration of the liberation. However, an essential difference among the associations and the institutions lies in the reappraising character of the associations compared to the institutions. This type of reappraisal is echoed in Twitter, and above all, on commemorative dates such as 5 May. Among their demands are more recognition for victims, greater emphasis on the persecution of groups that spread fascist or Nazi ideologies, and above all, wider sharing of information to educate future generations. A common demand repeated in the tweets of several countries is the need to educate and make the future generations aware of the atrocities committed by Nazism. There are also widespread claims that the younger generations are not interested in these topics. Social networks are also used to publish initiatives related to these events, such as readings, group movements or testimonies.

The social criticism of the lack of reparation and the injustice of the perpetrators' impunity were the main topics

However, the most followed and retweeted messages come from anonymous users and not from associations or institutions. There are users with many followers whose messages reach a wider public, such as @PabloMM, a Spanish activist with more than 10,000 retweets according to the study. Other popular people from the cultural world also join him, such as @demiguelch, alias of Carlos Hernández, a Spanish writer, who recently published a book on Francoist concentration camps. His tweets were retweeted more than 2,400 times. The journalist and activist @caval100 also had a large number of retweets (1661) as well as the activist account @censurometro (1030). Generally, anonymous users discuss a wider range of topics than the rest of the users (institutions, associations or media).

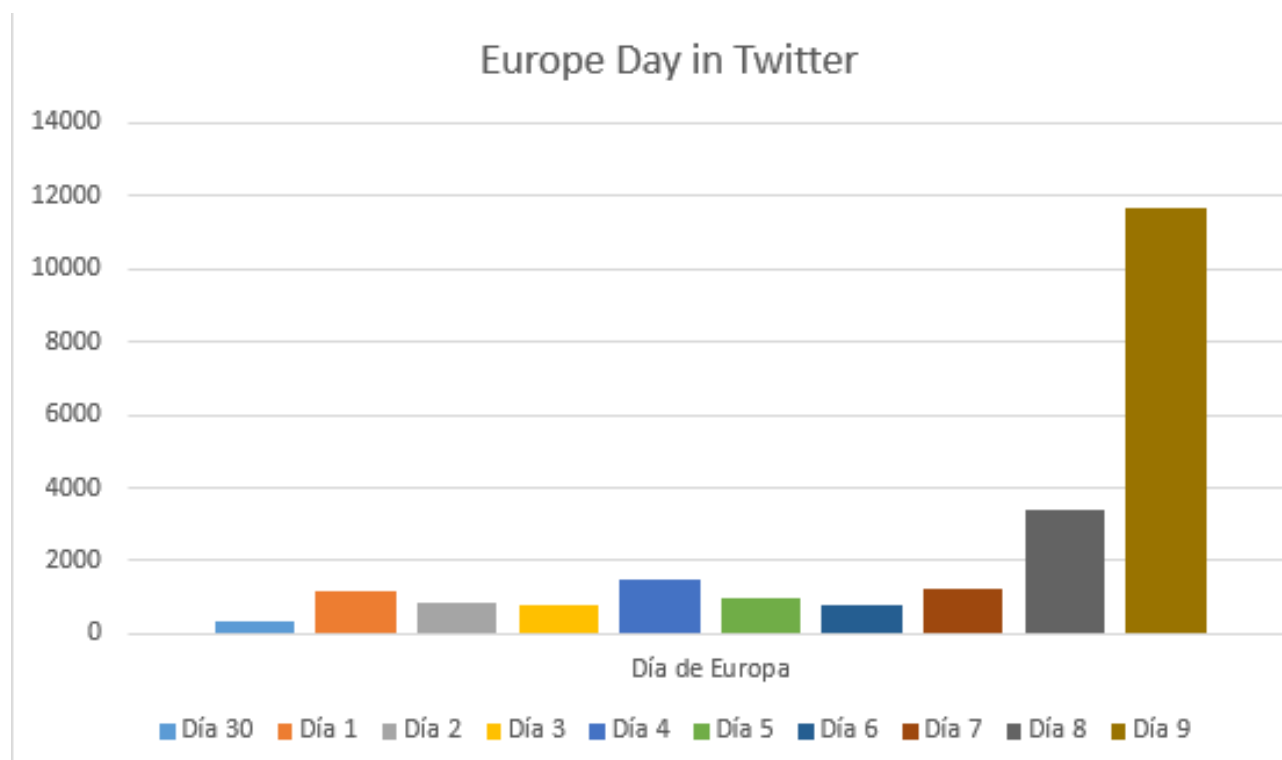
Anonymous users also make up the majority of users, and therefore, overall the opinions expressed are more diverse. We can find other types of messages among the users; however, this study did not find any messages against this type of event. These messages encompassed topics ranging from national vindications to messages of remembrance, from relatives' testimonies to messages against the perpetrators, from messages expressing worry about the rise of extremist parties or the lack of awareness of younger generations about the consequences of the commemorative events themselves, to the criticism of the abuse of the victims and events to demand justice and reparation. According to this study, the commemorative and reappraisal messages have a wider echo among users. The social criticism of the lack of reparation and the injustice of the perpetrators' impunity were the main topics. According to the study, a matter of particular concern is the rise of extreme right-wing movements in Europe, and users put them at the same level as those of the second world war.

The media are also among the most retweeted, and they usually give a brief analysis of the event. The media post similar messages to those of the associations and institutions, echoing their demands or making an appeal to remember the victims.

Europe Day in Twitter



The following event the study focused on was Europe Day, on 9 May. This study collected the related messages posted on 30 April until 9 May. The number of tweets fluctuated during this time period. An important point to bear in mind is that the contents of the tweets are influenced by the events taking place that day. The defeat of Nazism, Mother's Day (@equipoGabilondo), Workers' Day (@SputnikMundo and @MorenoG_Agustin), the Day of the Madrid Regional Government (Ignacio Aguado, @ignacioaguado, candidate to the regional government of Madrid for Ciudadanos was one of the most retweeted, along with the institutions associated with the Madrid regional government, such as @CsMadVicalvaro, @CsSanFernandoH, @CsCiudadLineal and @Cs_Alcobendas_), the Free Press' Day (@JC_Ortega_ and @Europarl_ES had the highest impact on 3 May), the opening of the campaign for the European elections (@HablamosdEuropa and @LiberalPT), the local Spanish elections and sport events, such as the Europa League, all share the limelight. The interest in the European commemoration on 9 May was progressive. As the date approached, the interest increased. This was promoted by several institutions and media through sport events, commemorative acts and the European elections on 26 May. Below is a graph that shows the activity in Twitter during the study.



The celebration of Europe Day led to widespread debate in Twitter with more than eleven thousand tweets. In general, most messages were in favour of the European Institutions and expressed the need to preserve them in view of the growing Europhobe groups. There were few posts against the celebration compared to the messages in favour. The criticism came from extreme right-wing parties (expressing arguments that Europe exploits member countries, eliminates culture and tradition and promotes hate under the premise that Europe and its institutions steal and are corrupted), several left groups (due to the impoverishment of the working classes) and users from non-European countries, mainly from North America (who criticised the imperialist nature of European Union countries). An example is found in @jpintocoelho60, an account belonging to José Pinto Coelho, president of the Portuguese National Renovator Party against the European Union, who achieved a certain resonance during these days.

Individual users and associations posted messages of celebration and memory, associating them, in certain cases, with the current situation and the rise of the extreme right-wing movements

Before the celebration on 9 May, there were two types of messages that were particularly widespread concerning the European Union Day. One of them is related to the day previously studied, the Commemoration Day of Mauthausen. The content of these messages was focused on commemorating the defeat of Nazism and Fascism in Europe. Individual users and associations posted messages of celebration and memory, associating them, in certain cases, with the current situation and the rise of the extreme right-wing movements. Some examples of the accounts with a wider impact were @Manuelfilosofia, @hoje_no, @catalanconflict, @confidencialand, @j_victorica, @tarcisiogdf and @Arcdelahistori. The second type of message was associated with the celebration of Europe Day through sports, particularly football, as an expression of unity. There were a lot of messages in the previous days announcing results, signing-ups and matches among teams of different member countries. The most influential were: @JuanDisciascio, @InvictosSomos, @gradaderio, @Juezcentral, @renaldinhos and @ESPNFutbolClub.

However, as previously stated, the study shows that the messages supporting the European Institutions were predominant. There were also other types of users whose comments were in favour of the European Union. In the days before the commemoration, the prevailing messages were from institutions and associations explaining the activities they were preparing. Examples are found in different accounts such as @psocialista and @cdeuropull. Nevertheless, most of the messages about Europe, its institutions and unity against Europhobes were posted on 9 May. Twitter was filled with messages of celebration, announcements of events and those congratulating other users. Some of the most retweeted accounts were @dirueulpgc, @EDGirona, @Labradadelpob1, @CEEUCLMTOLEDO, @UEenARG, @europeistas, @Cs_Europa, @EmbEspPan, @UGT_Andalucia, @kanciller and @ernesturtasun.

Conclusions

This information makes it possible to determine the impact of these commemorations on certain areas and groups.

The case study of Twitter posts provides an in-depth analysis of the population's reactions to commemorations and events in remembrance of traumatic memory. The use of social networks is global and unstoppable. They are a tool for communicating and keeping up to date quickly. Although there is some controversy about the use of user data and the truthfulness of the news and testimonies in social networks, they are a fundamental tool for sociologists and anthropologists who study the current state of our society in relation to our recent past. Projects such as the current one allow us to determine the impact of measures to support memory, remembrance and commemoration of the victims of dictatorships. They are also a tool for other branches of the Social Sciences and Humanities, such as History.

We can determine the impact that these types of measures on today's society through Twitter, more specifically, on the community generated around this platform. But most importantly, they allow us to ascertain the relevance of certain events compared to others, the temporary nature of the aspects that users discuss, the discussions they initiate around commemoration, the controversies, whether the platform helps to mobilize people and create spaces for awareness and dissemination, or whether, on the contrary, the noise created on the platform prevents the messages from the institutions and promoters from getting through. Moreover, the platform provides access to the users' profiles, and thus to data on their location and age. This information makes it possible to determine the impact of these commemorations on certain areas and groups.

The comparative study of commemorative phenomena also provides a whole series of important data for analysis. In contrast to the local case of Barcelona, in this report we compare three commemoration days at the international level. The effects of the impact are clear. While the plaque of the Via Laietana police station is at the local-provincial level, with little participation outside Catalonia, the International Holocaust Remembrance Day, the Mauthausen Liberation Day and Europe Day have a global dimension. It is also true that under the umbrella of the holocaust concept there is room to study the social reactions to an endless number of atrocities committed against the civilian population on a massive scale. This phenomenon is not exclusive to Europe and this dimension also influenced the subject of the tweets.

In the case of Barcelona, stories at a family and personal level were predominating, and an attitude of reproach towards the politician who initiated the criticism of the plaque, compared to the attitude of remembrance, commemoration and condemnation of the atrocities of the International Holocaust Remembrance Day. That is, in the first case there was need to justify the plaque, and not to forget, while in the case of the Holocaust there was no need for vindication, except in the unrecognised cases, such as that of Francoist Spain. However, some messages in relation to Europe Day, given the current context of the rise of Europhobes and detractors, also allude to the need for European institutions. Given the criticisms made by members of some political parties, this is yet another example of the lack of awareness about this type of aspect that exists in Spain compared to the rest of Europe. However, the study of 27 January and 5 May, the International Holocaust Remembrance Day and the Liberation of Mauthausen, respectively, showed that the need to educate and raise awareness is clear in some messages. However, there are also revisionist messages on this aspect. The International Holocaust Remembrance Day and the Mauthausen Liberation Day invited users to debate on current affairs while the case of the criticism of the placement of a plaque in Barcelona was related to the impact of a specific news item, and led to short-lived and similar responses.

Likewise, there are also negative messages on this aspect.

One aspect that is common in all cases is the scarce presence of authors in comparison to the number of users who opt for the retweet. However, this is much greater in the case of the Holocaust, Mauthausen and Europe Day examples, since, given that the case of the plaque is more local, the testimonies and references are closer, as opposed to a global event where these references tend to be watered down among the large number of users participating in the discussion. There were also similarities in duration time. The memory is short-lived, except in the case of the Holocaust, with a duration of three months, as opposed to the plaque of the police station of via Laietana, the Europe Day and the liberation of Mauthausen, which all had an approximate duration of one week.