

Study of gender violences against women communicators in Catalonia within the social network Twitter¹

Estudio de las violencias de género contra mujeres comunicadoras en Cataluña en el marco de la red social Twitter

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ARTICLE



Diana Morena Balaguer

University of Vic – Central University of Catalonia (UVic-UCC)

TRACTE and CEIG (UVic-UCC) member, has a degree in Audiovisual Communication (UPF) and has two Master's degrees: International Studies in Media, Power and Diversity (UPF) and Women, Gender and Citizenship Studies (UB). Currently, she combines her doctoral thesis in Gender Studies (IIEDG - UVic) with her academic work as a researcher on gender violence .

diana.morena@uvic.cat

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4934-0439>

Maria Forga Martel

University of Vic – Central University of Catalonia (UVic-UCC)

Professor in Journalism and Communication at the University of Vic - Central University of Catalonia. Graduated in Law and a PhD in Communication from the Autonomous University of Barcelona, she investigates ethics applied to journalism and communication, with special attention to documentary film and gender studies, having participated in European projects such as the Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP) on the presence of women in the media (2015 - 2020) or studying the presence of women behind the cameras in Spanish soap operas (2013). She is the author of the Guide for university teaching with a gender perspective in Communication studies.

maria.forga@uvic.cat

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1542-1102>

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Abstract

Based on a previous study addressing the violence that feminist activist women receive on Twitter, it was proposed to transfer that methodology to the field of women who, due to their profession (journalists, writers, influencers...) we have called communicators. All of them share both professional public visibility and presence and activity on Twitter. To measure the relationship that these online attacks have with gender-related issues, the study was carried out during the weeks leading to and departing after the International Day of Women. Among other results, the investigation concluded that 1 out of 5 tweets aroused some form of aggression and a significant increase in violence during the 8th of March.

KEYWORDS

Aggressions, harassment, women communicators, gender, twitter, digital violence

Resumen

Partiendo de un estudio previo sobre la violencia que las mujeres activistas feministas reciben en Twitter, se planteó trasladar esta observación a aquellas que, por su profesión (periodistas, escritoras, influencers...) se ha decidido llamar comunicadoras, ya que convergen en ellas visibilidad pública profesional y presencia y actividad en Twitter. Para observar la relación de estos ataques con cuestiones de género, el estudio se planteó durante la semana anterior y la posterior al Día Internacional de las Mujeres. Entre otros resultados, se observó que 1 de cada 5 tuits originó agresiones y un incremento significativo de violencia durante la jornada del 8M.

PALABRAS CLAVE

Agresiones, acoso, mujeres comunicadoras, género, twitter, violencia digital

1. INTRODUCTION

In 2021, a research on digital aggressions directed towards feminist women activists was published (Morena-Balaguer *et al.*, 2021). In that study, 462,281 aggressions were collected on Twitter towards 50 feminist activists over the course of a year. The results were shocking, although expected, insofar as they coincided with what other recent studies had concluded. Amnesty International's Troll Patrol report (2018) found 1.1 million abusive tweets sent to 778 women -politicians and journalists- during 2017. At the Spanish level, Calala's study (2020) found that 82.61% of the women surveyed in their research had received some form of digital violence. At the same time, it concluded that Twitter was the most aggressive social network (72.73%).

Twitter turned out to be a markedly violent space for feminist activists. Morena-Balaguer *et al.* (2021), observed the preponderance and special virulence of collective attacks, initiated from a specific account and massively joined by other profiles. It was determined that changes or events in the context caused the number of attacks to fluctuate; that the greater public visibility of women as well as the fact that they were more active in networks were clear risk factors. In addition, there were topics such as feminism or racism that aroused most of the aggressions (Morena-Balaguer *et al.*, 2021).

In view of these results, the need for further progress in understanding the functioning of digital violence was identified. Gender-based digital violence is a problem that still requires

the development of specific legislation. Additionally, work needs to be done on prevention and protection tools to make the networks an accessible and safe space. In order to continue in this direction, the question arose as to whether the same situation affected other groups or with what particularities. To answer this question, it was decided to partially replicate the research in a new case study focused on women communicators who do not necessarily define themselves as feminists and/or activists, but who have a public presence and who carry out their work -or part of it- in a manner which is linked to one or more media outlets.

Unlike the research that precedes this paper, in this case the sample was limited to the Catalan context. In the previous study, which covered the whole country of Spain, it was observed that, sometimes, political particularities arose that were difficult to understand given the magnitude of the study and the diversity of situations to which the digital violence responded. For example, there used to be aggressions against Catalan and Galician activists that, although was gender-based, usually referred to the specific socio-political context of each autonomous community, so they did not share characteristics with the rest. This made it difficult to draw meaningful general conclusions. On the other hand, in order to further define the sample – and having observed in the preceding study that a smaller sample yielded similar results – it was decided to limit the investigation to two weeks; the week before and the week after March 8, which is the International Women’s Day. This was because it was of interest to analyze to what extent gender issues are at the origin of these aggressions.

1.1. OBJECTIVES

The purpose of this study is to analyze the attacks received by women communicators on Twitter in the catalan context and their main characteristics. The specific objectives are:

- To count the number of aggressions and determine whether they are punctual or respond to a collective attack. The aim is to observe the functioning of the social network facilitates group attacks that are particularly harmful due to the amplification they imply.
- To observe whether the 8th of March, International Women’s Day, represents an increase in attacks and to establish whether aggressions increase as a function of the socio-political and cultural context.
- To observe to what extent the variables of greater public visibility (number of followers) and greater participation (number of publications) of the assaulted women influence aggressions, in order to determine the degree of correspondence between their greater or lesser presence in the social network and the number of attacks.
- To check which topics are most likely to provoke aggressions against women on Twitter.
- To assess whether age is a determining factor regarding the number of assaults received.

1.2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Hate speech directed at women journalists and activists is not a new phenomenon. Harassment that use to materialize in handwritten letters or with calls to landlines is now in full view of everyone through social networks or online sections of the media (Landsverk, 2016). In this sense, violence in social networks is the new front of journalistic insecurity, and it is particularly dangerous for women, as harassment and abuse are used to silence them (Possetti *et al*, 2020).

Misogyny and online violence are a real threat to women's participation in the public sphere in the digital age. Journalists increasingly live their professional lives online, as they rely on social networks to report and disseminate news, interact with their audience and build their profile. Thus, "the suggestion that journalists facing online threats should simply stay away from social networks is impractical and may even amplify abuse" (Radsch, 2016, p.36).

According to a study conducted in Norway, approximately 1 in 4 female and 1 in 20 male journalists have received sexualized comments or threats. Age also plays a role: almost twice as many young female journalists (aged 26-35) report having experienced harassment compared to their male colleagues of the same age. When looking at older journalists, the results are reversed (Landsverk, 2016).

Internet anonymity and actions such as *trolling*, aimed at boycotting someone, pose a threat to freedom of expression online, especially in the case of women. This was already denounced by journalist Pamela Paul (2015) in her article *She Sounds Smart, but Look at Her Hair*, published in the New York Times.

The first step in combating this violence is to understand it in depth. In order to do that, in 2020, the International Center For Journalists [ICFJ] was commissioned by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO] to conduct a study on online violence against women journalists. This study included a large survey of women communicators conducted in conjunction with the Center for Freedom of the Media [CFOM] at the University of Sheffield. The study covered 15 countries. Among its first results, Posetti and Shabbir (2022) detected that there is a worrying spillover from online to offline violence, materialized in several cases such as that of the Maltese journalist Daphne Caruana Galizia, murdered in 2017.

Some characteristics that converge in online violence against women journalists emerge from this study, which are synthesized in three main characteristics: it is often organized, frequently by misogynist groups that carry out campaigns; this violence radiates to women in their own families and their environment as their sources or their followers; and it concerns

intimacy, as the attacks are personal and are usually highly sexualized (Posetti *et al.*, 2020). In addition, three types of attacks were identified. The first was misogynistic harassment and abuse, which is usually highly sexualized, ranging from gendered insults to those directed against her appearance, sexuality and professionalism; these were designed to diminish their confidence and tarnish their reputation. This abuse could come from individuals, as well as become an organised network attack by misogynist groups. A second typology was organized misinformation campaigns with misogynist narratives (fake porn videos, ridiculing memes, etc.) which aimed to undermine the credibility and trust of the journalist to get her to withdraw. The third consisted of threats to digital security and privacy that increased the physical risks associated with online violence (Posetti *et al.*, 2020).

In addition, levels of hostility and violence against women journalists have seen a rise during the pandemic, reflected in another global survey also conducted in 2020 by ICFJ and Columbia University's Tow Center for Digital Journalism as part of the Journalism and Pandemic project. 16% of female journalists claimed that online abuse and harassment were worse than usual (Posetti *et al.*, 2020; Bell *et al.*, 2020).

Women journalists cannot be left alone in the face of online threats and violence as if physical and sexual harassment were acceptable professional risks for women. Nor should they be burdened with the responsibility of preven-

ting them or dealing with them alone (Posetti, 2020; Harrison *et al.*, 2020). The International Women's Media Foundation has created the Coalition Against Online Violence [CAOV]¹, which offers help and strategies against online violence.

2. METHODOLOGY

A quantitative methodology following the counting matrix (Table 1) proposed in the report by Morena-Balaguer *et al.* (2021) has been proposed to carry out this research.

Two complementary tables were also created. In the first, the age and digital indicators (visibility and participation) of the users were related to the cadence of the attacks (Table 2).

In the second table, the attacks were broken down by days and users to detect when the aggression was individual or collective, a so-called pack attack (Bonet-Martí, cited in Morena-Balaguer *et al.*, 2021) or flaming (Donestech, 2017; Martínez, 2020). This attack consists of "a coordinated attack, usually instigated by one or several accounts (...) in which tens, hundreds or thousands of users target [a woman's] profile to harass, insult, threaten or make fun of her" (Morena-Balaguer *et al.*, 2021, p.26). We categorize as collective aggression when a single tweet receives five or more attacks; it is labeled as individual when the same tweet receives four or fewer attacks; it is also labeled as individual when there are more than five attacks but they are scattered among different tweets of the user, even if they are issued on the same day.

1 CAOV: <https://www.iwmf.org/our-programs/coalition-against-online-violence/>

Table 1

Analytical matrix for research

Subject of the tweet originating the attack	Subtopic	Date	Total Responses	Total Mentions	Responses with aggressions	Mentions with aggressions	% Aggression in responses	% Aggression in mentions
COVID								
Feminism								
Transfeminism								
Sexual Orientation								
Policy								
Racism								
Aesthetic canons								
Others								
Own initiative tweet								
Total			0	0	0	0	-%	
			0	0				

Source: Own elaboration based on Morena-Balaguer et al. (2021).

Table 2

Triangulation of demographic, digital and attack cadence data

Age	Number of followers (Digital Visibility)	Total Tweets (Digital Participation)	Total Attacks Responses	Total Attacks Mentions	Total Aggressions	Percentage of aggression by interaction
User name 1						
Total		0	0	0	0	-%

Source: Own elaboration

Table 3

Breakdown of the number of attacks per day and user.

	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7	Day 8	Day 9	Day 10	Day 11	Day 12	Day 13	Day 14	Day 15	Total Attacks
User name 1																0
Total	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Source: Own elaboration																

2.1 SELECTION OF THE UNIVERSE AND SAMPLE POPULATION

Among all the available social networks, the work focuses on Twitter because it is the social network most used to express political opinions (Larrondo *et al.*, 2019) and because of its communicative design proposal, facilitates the proliferation of hate speech (Núñez-Puente and Fernández-Romero, 2018). Moreover, the study by Morena-Balaguer *et al.* (2021) showed that Twitter was a markedly violent space for feminist activists.

The research sample consists of 20 Twitter profiles of women communicators -who work or are recognized as journalists, writers, actresses or influencers- in the Catalan territory. We included communications from traditional media -press, radio and television- but also digital platforms. For the selection of the sample, we used the snowball technique without the intervention of the participants. In the first phase, a list of women communicators in Catalonia was drawn up. Subsequently, four selection variables were established:

- **Origin:** ensure the representation of racialized women in the sample.
- **Age:** incorporate a broad spectrum of ages.

- **Digital visibility:** select profiles with a high, medium and low number of followers.
- **Digital participation:** choose women who participate regularly, occasionally and sporadically in the social network.

It was decided to limit the time frame of the study to the weeks between March 1 and 15, 2022. These dates make it possible to place March 8 (8M), International Women’s Day, at the centre of the sample, which will make it possible to observe whether there is an increase in aggressions as this day approaches and whether they decrease thereafter. March 8 was chosen because of its significance and symbolism, which tends to translate into greater participation in the networks.

2.2 DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Data was collected and classified in an analytical matrix (see Table 1) that contemplates two types of attack (responses to specific topics, and self-initiated). Thus, the tweets that have originated attacks are organized by themes, specifically eight, which were selected deductively according to the ethnographic study carried out in the aforementioned research (Morena-Balaguer *et al.*, 2021):

- **COVID:** the user takes a public position or reports on the COVID-19 pandemic, containment, precautionary measures, vaccines, or any other pandemic-related topic.
- **Feminism:** the user speaks or informs, directly or indirectly, about feminist movements, gender equality or discriminations suffered by women in the patriarchal system.
- **Transfeminism:** the user gives an opinion or reports on the inclusion of trans and/or non-binary people in the feminist movement, or the rights of trans people.
- **Sexual Orientation:** the user talks about gay, lesbian or bisexual rights or discrimination, or makes public her experience or that of a person close to her.
- **Policy:** the user tweets information about a political news item, takes a political position or gives her opinion on an issue on the political agenda.
- **Racism:** the user reports a news item that refers to racist acts, takes a stand against racism or gives her opinion on a topic on the public agenda that has to do with racist acts.
- **Aesthetic canons:** the user tweets opinions or information about the discrimination suffered by women (or herself) due to the current aesthetic canons, or publishes an image in which her face or physique appears.
- **Others:** any other subject that has not been included in this classification.
- The **“Own initiative tweet”** category includes aggressions in which a user decides to attack or insult the aggressor without being a previous publication by the woman to which he/she is responding.

Once all the tweets of the period analysed had been collected and classified by theme, the sub-

theme category was summarized in one or two words. This qualitative distinction has not been relevant for the elaboration of the quantitative analysis -with the exception of the study of the sub-theme “8M” within the Feminism theme-, but it is expected to be highly relevant during the subsequent process of qualitative analysis.

In the classification of the tweets, the date of publication was collected and the total number of replies (replies to the initial tweet) and mentions (i.e. quotes: instead of directly replying to the initial tweet, the user makes a mention quoting the original tweet to give his opinion on it or make a comment) were counted.

Once these data were collected, the process of counting the aggressions began. In the first instance, those related to gender were considered; that is, all violence that is a consequence of the cisheteropatriarchal system originated by reason of the position, identity, or expression of gender and/or sexual orientation of the person assaulted (Morena-Balaguer *et al.*, 2021).

Direct insults, threats, and other forms of indirect or less evident violence such as mansplaining or sealioning were taken into consideration. However, given that Twitter is a social network that eliminates most non-verbal communication, when comments or responses were of dubious interpretation, they were discarded in order to avoid false positives that could alter the sample and the results of the analysis. Thus, when there was no evident aggression, the interaction was not included, unless the user receiving it responded and evidenced that had felt offended.

Once the total number of replies and mentions were counted, as well as the number of aggressions for each tweet, nine parameters were calculated:

1. Percent of aggression in responses

2. Percentage of aggression in mentions
3. Total responses
4. Total mentions
5. Total interactions (responses + mentions)
6. Total responses with aggression
7. Total mentions with aggression
8. Total aggressions
9. Total percentage of aggressions

3. RESULTS

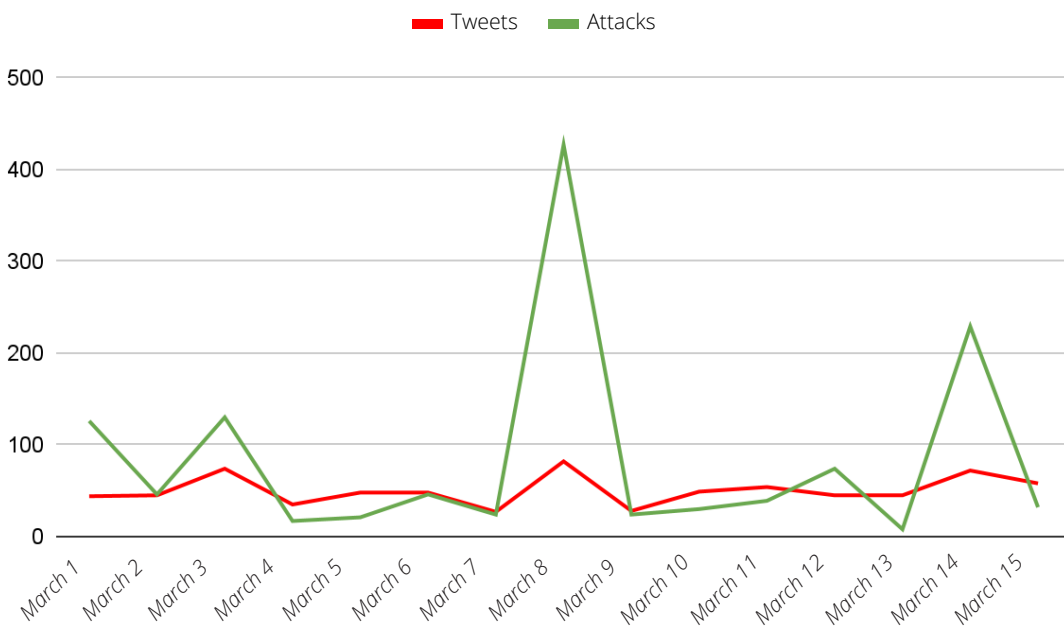
The study collected a total of 1,279 attacks on 20 women communicators in a period of 2

weeks. This represents an average of 85.3 attacks per day.

A significant increase in aggressions was found during the course of March 8 (see Figure 1). This was accompanied by an increase in the number of tweets issued by female users on that day (n=82) regarding the day before and the day after (March 7, n=27; March 9, n=28). In other words, women were more active than usual, but the aggressions they received multiplied up to 17 times more. On March 7 there were 24 aggressions, on March 8 there were 427 aggressions, and on March 9 there were, again, 24 aggressions. Therefore, March 8 is a date on which there is much more tension and violence than on the other days of the study. (Figure 1)

Figure 1

Correlation between number of tweets and attacks between March 1 and March 15, 2022.



Source: Own elaboration

Analysing in detail the topics that caused the most attacks that day (this is, March 8th)(Table 4), it can be seen that the topic that clearly stands out was Politics (n=349); this was followed in second place by Feminism (n=54) and, in third place, Others (n=3). There were also three attacks by Own initiative that did not respond to any previous tweet. (Table 4)

Table 4

Aggressions on March 8, according to theme

	Total
COVID	0
Feminism	54
Transfeminism	0
Sexual orientation	0
Policy	349
Racism	0
Aesthetic canons	0
Other	3
Own initiative	3

Source: Own elaboration

The research shows in Table 5 that, during the whole research, the topic that provoked most of the aggressions is Politics (n=761), which in turn was the topic most talked about by users (n=306). In second place was Feminism, with 362 aggressions among the 173 tweets on the subject. It is interesting to note that Feminism is the topic with the highest percentage of aggression; 21.91% of tweets regarding the total number of interactions, while Politics has 19.72% of tweets with aggressions. In this classification, in third place was the topic of Others (6.53%, n=63) followed by Transfeminism (5%, n=1). COVID, Sexual Orientation, Racism and Aesthetic Canons aroused 0% of aggressions. (Table 5)

The data obtained shows that 19.36% of the interactions were aggressions. This proves that

about 1 in 5 tweets generated some form of violence against women.

The Own initiative type of aggression stands out, which has been counted in 92 direct attacks on users without there being a response to a previous tweet. This figure is even higher than that reported by some topics -such as Others- which proves that this is a recurrent form of violence on the part of the aggressors.

On the other hand, the percentage of aggression in direct responses (18.58%) is slightly higher than in the case of mentions (16.90%).

The research confirms the trend noted in the previous research by Morena-Balaguer *et al.* (2021) where it was pointed out that the attacks mainly took the form of collective action. A total of 25 collective attacks on the sample users were collected, representing 1090 attacks and 76 individual attacks, with 189 attacks (Table 6).

The number of attacks received by the users was uneven, ranging from 0 to 380 insults or aggressions on the dates of the study (Table 7). Of all the women selected for the study, Marta Roqueta received the highest percentage of attacks, 52.53% in relation to the total number of interactions (Table 8). The fact that other women received a similar number of aggressions but have a lower percentage should be treated as proof that Twitter is also a space of support and sorority for some women (such as Ana Bernal, who received 107 unique aggressions but has 10.95% of aggressions in relation to interactions). This fact shows, therefore, that the study of communicational phenomena on Twitter must be approached from multiple and correlated methodologies, since statistics isolated from the context do not correctly represent the processes through which people who make up the sample go through. (Table 7)

Table 5

Sample research results following the data collection matrix and analysis parameters.

Topic	Number of tweets	Total responses	Total mentions	Total interactions	Responses with attacks	Mentions with attacks	Total aggressions	% Aggression in responses	% Aggression in mentions	% Aggression
COVID	4	6	2	8	0	0	0	0,00 %	0,00 %	0,00 %
Feminism	173	1154	498	1652	276	86	362	23,92 %	17,27 %	21,91 %
Transfeminism	6	16	4	20	0	1	1	0,00 %	25,00 %	5,00 %
Sexual orientation	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0,00 %	0,00 %	0,00 %
Policy	306	3177	683	3860	626	135	761	19,70 %	19,77 %	19,72 %
Racism	4	3	1	4	0	0	0	0,00 %	0,00 %	0,00 %
Aesthetic canons	4	6	1	7	0	0	0	0,00 %	0,00 %	0,00 %
Others	255	752	213	965	48	15	63	6,38 %	7,04 %	6,53 %
Subtotal		5114	1402							
Own initiative				92			92			
Total	752	6516		92		950	237	18,58 %		16,90 %
		6608			1279			19,36 %		

Source: Own elaboration

Table 6

Correlation between the number of women assaulted per day and the number of assaults they received

Month of march	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7	Day 8	Day 9	Day 10	Day 11	Day 12	Day 13	Day 14	Day 15	Total Aggressions
Total Women Collectively Assaulted	4	1	2	0	0	1	1	4	1	2	2	2	0	3	2	25
Total Collective Aggressions	119	25	135	0	0	33	5	416	12	26	19	70	0	212	18	1090
Total Women Attacked Individually	5	6	4	5	8	6	7	5	3	2	5	4	4	5	7	76
Total Individual Aggressions	7	21	5	17	21	13	19	15	12	4	10	4	8	17	16	189

Source: Own elaboration

Also noteworthy is the non-direct correlation between digital visibility and the number or percentage of aggressions (Table 9). The users who receive the most digital violence are not strictly those with the most followers. If we look at the percentage of aggressions in relation to the total number of interactions received, the user with the highest number has 14,078 followers, while the following have 60,840, 177,187 and 1,221,568, respectively. (Table 8)

There is no direct correlation between the number of tweets and the fact of receiving an aggression, but it is observed that the solution adopted by many of the users is not to tweet, or to do so less frequently, regardless of the women's digital visibility. Thus, virtual silence, which means a voluntary renunciation of the occupation of a basic space in our daily lives, tends to be a protective resource. For example, it is noted that 11 of the 20 women communicators who adopt a feminist activist role chose not to tweet about 8M during the course of the day as a way, potentially, of protection. This is, de facto, a form of silencing.

4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

4.1. TWITTER: A SPACE FOR PACKS OF HOUNDS

The study has corroborated the hypothesis that presents Twitter as an intrinsically violent space for women communicators in Catalonia. Other studies have already concluded that women are insulted on Twitter because of their gender (Landsverk, 2016; Morena-Balaguer *et al.*, 2021); hence, detecting that almost 1 out of every 5 tweets published by women communicators generates some form of violence means providing symbolic-practical weight to research on digital gender violence in this social network,

since it once again demonstrates that we are not facing a casual or sporadic phenomenon, but a systematic and serious one.

It is worth mentioning that although violence occurs on a recurrent basis, as only 5 of the 20 women in the sample did not receive any form of aggression, the high numbers respond to the viralization of tweets, which leads to collective aggressions. Most attacks (n=1,090) are part of collective aggressions, while individual aggressions (n=189) are a minority. This data confirms the theory already explained in Morena-Balaguer *et al.* (2021), which presents the idea that Twitter is a form of corrective and punitive violence against women.

In other words, the research proves that when a user observes that a tweet starts to go viral and becomes popular on the social network, he or she joins the exercise of violence more easily than when no one has yet attacked or insulted. Therefore, to the violence of an aggression itself we must add the complex hybridation of the collective attack, which as being amplified are more harmful to the victim.

4.2. MORE VIOLENCE DURING MARCH 8

The data from this research show that March 8 is a day when women receive more violence on Twitter than usual. Aggressions spike from 24 aggressions on the days directly before and after Women's Day to 427 aggressions on 8M. This leads us to consider that the analogical socio-cultural context significantly influences aggressions in the digital world.

The increase in aggressions is not strictly motivated by a greater activity of the users in the sample during 8M. It is true that the number of publications arose from 27 to 82, but the difference is exponentially greater when we look at the rate of aggressions, from 24 to 427.

Table 7*Distribution of users according to the percentage of aggressions received (from highest to lowest)*

User Name	Percentage of aggressions in relation to interactions received	Number of interactions	Number of aggressions
Marta Roqueta	52,53 %	514	280
Laura Rosel	46,86 %	811	384
Empar Moliner	42,42 %	33	14
Julia Otero	20,28%	212	43
Agnès Marquès	16,13 %	62	10
Maruja Torres	14,13 %	2.343	331
Juliana Canet	11,11 %	18	2
Ana Bernal	10,95 %	977	107
Ana Polo	9,65 %	114	11
Natza Ferrer	8,56 %	631	54
Paula Carreras	8,13 %	123	10
Itziar Castro	7,39 %	203	15
Mònica Planas	7,41 %	27	2
Bel Olid	5,04 %	119	6
Montserrat Dameson	2,98 %	336	10
Miriam Hatibi	0 %	3	0
Llucia Ramis	0 %	20	0
Beatrice Duodu	0 %	0	0
Tania Adam	0 %	1	0
Cristina Puig	0 %	1	0
Total		6548	1279

Source: Own elaboration

Table 8*Synthesis of demographic data and quantitative results*

	Age	Number of Followers (Digital Visibility) as of September 20, 2022	Total Tweets (Digital Participa- tion)	Number of aggressions	Percentage of aggression by interaction
Marta Roqueta	34	14.078	101	280	52,53 %
Laura Rosel	42	60.840	11	384	46,86 %
Empar Moliner	56	177.187	22	14	42 %
Julia Otero	63	1.221.568	3	43	20,28 %
Agnes Marques	43	46.242	16	10	16,13 %
Maruja Torres	79	234.441	246	331	14,13 %
Juliana Canet	23	52.496	8	2	11,11 %
Ana Bernal	42	89.227	42	107	10,95 %
Ana Polo	30*	38.367	9	11	9,65 %
Natza Farré	50	71.299	43	54	8,56 %
Paula Carreras	28*	4.977	16	10	8,13 %
Itziar Castro	45	57.632	110	15	7,39 %
Mònica Planas	47	65.280	23	2	7 %
Bel Olid	45	59.303	49	6	5,04 %
Montserrat Dameson	26*	13.901	37	10	2,98 %
Míriam Hatibi	29	33.812	3	0	0,00 %
Llucia Ramis	45	15.363	5	0	0,00 %
Beatrice Duodu	26	1.262	0	0	0,00 %
Tania Adam	43	3.219	2	0	0,00 %
Cristina Puig	50	23.336	8	0	0,00 %

*Note: Cases where age could not be fully verified are marked with an *.
Source: Own elaboration*

On the day of 8M, the topic that aroused more aggressions was politics, while the day before and the day after, the same topic generated only eight aggressions. This reinforces the idea that on 8M there is greater tension and tension against women than on other days on the calendar.

In second place, Feminism collected 54 aggressions during this day. This same topic provoked only one aggression on March 7, and 20 on March 9. The detected increase in violence, as well as the considerable distance of this topic regarding the following ones, which had only three attacks during the day, demonstrates that talking about gender equality, even during 8M, entails a greater possibility of receiving digital aggressions.

4.3. UNPREDICTABILITY OF ATTACKS

Unlike the previous study, the results show that users who tweet less are less likely to receive attacks, which entails the risk of women opting for self-silencing and renouncing their right to express themselves and to have a space in the networks. The five users who received zero attacks are, except for Julia Otero, the ones who tweeted the least (between zero and eight tweets in a 15-day period).

However, no significant correlation was found between the most active users and the number of aggressions they received. Marta Roqueta, the user who received the most aggressions, tweeted 72 times; Laura Rosel, in second place in number of aggressions, only tweeted 11 times. The user with the most tweets published, Maruja Torres (n=246), was in sixth place in terms of aggressions, behind women such as Julia Otero, who tweeted only four times.

Therefore, a greater number of tweets does not necessarily mean receiving more attacks,

since these follow the pattern described above: they happen suddenly and massively, when a user crosses a line that the aggressor group considers intolerable. This fact makes it difficult to foresee whether a tweet will generate or not massive aggression, which can increase the feeling of insecurity and fear.

Age does not seem to be a determining variable either. Regarding the ten top users, ordered by percentage of attacks according to interaction, the two who received the most aggressions, Marta Roqueta and Laura Rosel, belong to Generation Y or *Millennial*. The next three, Empar Moliner, Julia Otero and Agnes Marqués, are from Generation X; the sixth is Maruja Torres, from the *Baby Boom* Generation and the seventh is Juliana Canet, from Generation Z. Ana Bernal, Ana Polo and Natza Farré are, respectively, Generation X, *Millennial* and Generation X again.

Unlike the results obtained in past research, in the case of women communicators with public projection, it is not primarily their tweets that trigger aggression (i.e., insults do not tend to exist in the form of a response to what they have tweeted). These, often, are related to what is called a transfer of the crispness of the analogical context. In order to provide an example we will explain the case of Laura Rosel. On March 1st 2022, during the broadcast of the show *El matí de Catalunya Ràdio*, Rosel criticized in the statements that Borrell (a Catalan-Spanish politician) had previously made about the war in Ukraine and about Puigdemont, former Catalan president. Because of this event that happened in analogue life, Laura Rosel observed an increase in the number of aggressions she received: March 1 (n=11), March 2 (n=0), March 3 (n=2).

4.4. THE DANGER OF SILENCE

It is worth mentioning a significant change regarding to previous literature. The research consulted indicated that racialized female users received a greater number of aggressions (Amnesty International, 2018; Calala, 2020; Morena-Balaguer *et al.*, 2021). In the present study, racialized women did not receive aggressions, but they were also the ones who tweeted the least and seemed to renounce their right to occupy the digital space.

This self-limitation happened even in the case of users who tweet considerably but avoid taking a public stance on controversial issues or those related to feminism or gender. For example, Bel Olid, a renowned feminist, tweeted on 51 occasions, but only 13 of them in relation to feminism or equality.

In this sense, it has been observed that 11 of the 20 users in the study either did not tweet about the 8M demonstration or avoided gender issues around that iconic date, even though they identify themselves as feminists and have used their platform on other occasions to denounce gender inequalities. This element is directly linked to the feeling of terror, already noted in other research (Morena-Balaguer *et al.*, 2021), that many women communicators experience when using digital platforms to speak out on certain issues. Therefore, although there is no direct correlation between the number of attacks and the number of tweets, the strategy of silence and self-censorship is the one most often chosen as a measure of protection against digital attacks. On the other hand, Marta Roqueta, the user who did not limit herself and who frequently wrote about gender issues, was the one who received the most attacks: 52.53% of all her interactions are an aggression.

Therefore, we can speak of a self-imposed limitation: expressing opinions on gender issues and amplifying these discourses in the digital framework translates into a greater likelihood of being attacked. For this reason, many users consciously or unconsciously prefer not to do so in order to ensure their safety and mental health. However, this is a direct attack on women's freedom of expression on social networks.

In short, this research shows that Twitter is a dangerous space for women, both for those who use the platforms to disseminate a feminist discourse and for those who only inhabit the network, especially during significant dates for the celebration of gender equality, such as 8M. Collective actions continue to be the most common forms of attack, which shows that digital violence responds to corrective motives and channelling misogynist rage, which are aspects that are difficult to vertebrate in analogue life. In the face of this violence, many women choose to limit their digital participation or silence themselves. This means that women communicators, those who precisely have the power to influence the public agenda and opinion, avoid doing so out of fear. This is a considerable obstacle to spreading the message of gender equality.

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