



Towards a Critical Understanding of Social Networks for the Feminist Movement: Twitter and the Women's Strike

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The intensive use of digital platforms by the feminist movement has been identified as one of its main characteristics. Numerous studies address the tactical use of social networks by this movement, especially on 8 March in Spain. This paper studies the action repertoires of different actors who participated in the 2019 Women's Strike conversation, including automated accounts. Empirical results demonstrate that Twitter is not an exclusive field for the feminist movement. Along with activists who promoted and informed the Women's Strike, political parties proposed concrete policy measures,

and conservative factions criticized the movement calling for demobilization. In this sense, for the first time in these M8 mobilizations, bots participated in this polarisation of the debate through partisan hashtags and the dissemination of fake news. The investigation thus confirms that automation techniques and contradictory flows of power are critical elements to understand the real potential of social networks for feminist social change.

Keywords: media ecology, action repertoires, Twitter, social movements, Women's Strike.

Many authors have characterized contemporary feminism by the movement's presence on the Internet (Maclaran, 2015; Matich, Ashman, and Parsons, 2019; Munro, 2013; Wrye, 2009). In this context, some authors have paid attention to digital platforms' potential to educate, organize, and empower feminist activism (Baer, 2016; Elsheikh and Lilleker, 2021). This research has mainly focused on the ability of the feminist movement to

create a new contention repertoire and disseminate an alternative discourse to the hegemonic one (Banet-Weiser and Miltner, 2016; Fischer, 2016; Harp, Grimm, and Loke, 2018).

Simultaneously, feminist approaches to the Internet aim to avoid technological determinism and gender essentialism, proposing that the relationship between gender and technology is fluid rather than unidirectional. In other words, activists and scholars have been reflecting on how “the materiality of technology affords or inhibits the doing of particular gender power relations” and how “women’s identities, needs, and priorities are configured together with digital technologies” (Wajcman, 2010: 150).

Some authors have warned that Internet technologies can reinforce rather than subvert the problematic gender tropes (Baer, 2016; Kensinger, 2003). Thus, the tactical use of technologies with feminist purposes must be understood within the digital context where activists organize and spread their messages. In short, activism does not exist in a vacuum but a dynamic and contradictory context. Its technological appropriation involves tensions with the digital platform’s infrastructure and the influence of other political and economic actors that have traditionally accumulated greater power (Ferrari, 2020; Youmans and York, 2012).

In this research, we consider the need to address the Internet conditions to situate social networks’ potential when used by social movements. We argue that this perspective is central in investigating current feminist activism, as in the particular case of International Women’s Day. The massive support for 8 March in Spain—i.e., the Women’s Strike since 2018—has led to the blossoming of investigations on the role of the Internet in the movements’ organization, coordination, and communication in this country (Fernández-Romero and Sánchez-Duarte, 2019; Núñez-Puente, D’Antonio Maceiras, and Fernández-Romero, 2019). In turn, the year 2019 was especially relevant in this context due to the growth of a conservative and populist force, Vox, which gained seats at Congress for the first time. Several studies have pointed to the party’s use of social media to mobilize its electorate through an emotional narrative (Cervi and Carillo-Andrade, 2019).

We propose to adopt an ecological perspective (Mattoni, 2017; Tréré, 2019) in the investigation of this phenomenon to delve further into the relationships between different actors, practices, and technologies on the Internet (Barassi, 2015; Couldry, 2015; Calvo, 2020) that resize the potential of social networks for the feminist movement. To do so, we conduct an ethnographic content analysis to examine the conversation on Twitter on 8 March 2019. Based on this qualitative data, we conclude that this year is a turning point because conservative forces and institutional actors influenced the Twitter debate on the feminist Strike, so academics and activists must consider this social network’s condition when reflecting on social networks’ usage by this movement.

SOCIAL NETWORKS FOR FEMINIST COLLECTIVE ACTION

The Internet has received significant attention in analyzing social movements since its expansion in the 1990s, so that the feminist movement has been the

object of research on the repertoires of action in social networks. Regarding Twitter, activists have used it with different objectives: to protest against regulations and political institutions from a gender perspective (Eslen-Ziya, 2013; Fischer, 2016); to denounce sexist behavior and toxic masculinity (Kay and Banet-Weiser, 2019); to mobilize against various forms of gender violence (Losh, 2014); to articulate an intersectional feminist imaginary (Kuo, 2018); or to oppose hegemonic sexist discourse (Piñeiro-Otero and Martínez-Rolán, 2016; Rentschler, 2015), mainly when it is disseminated through the media (Clark 2016; Harp, Grimm, and Loke, 2018). However, the authors agree that more empirical research is needed to examine both the possibilities and limitations of these Twitter actions that some have called “hashtag feminism” (Linabary, Corple, and Cooky, 2020).

Given the widespread interest in social networks, some authors raise the need for activists and academics to conduct a thorough analysis of their condition as corporate platforms (Ferrari, 2020; Poell and Borra, 2012). This critical perspective argues that they are not conceived with a democratic purpose, neither in their structure nor in their design (Mattoni, 2017). Notably, recent literature questions computer algorithms’ bias and claims code construction from a feminist and intersectional perspective (Buolamwini and Gebru, 2018; Costanza-Chock, 2018; Milan and Tréré, 2019).

From the political economy analysis, authors warn that corporate social networks —e.g., Facebook, Twitter, YouTube— aim to maximize their economic benefit, so participating in them implies a capitalization of online socialization (Fuchs, 2014; Zuboff, 2015). These digital platforms’ structural conditions also tend towards faster and more external use (Barassi, 2015) and fragmented communication (Pariser, 2011). Using these digital platforms, social movements then have to assume technological corporations’ logic that frequently contradicts their imaginary and values (Galis and Neumayer, 2016).

Besides, these tools are also available to political and economic actors that traditionally dominated the public sphere (Carragee, 2019). That is, conservative forces can also appropriate technologies to mobilize and communicate their messages as progressive movements do (Schradie, 2019). Academic literature on feminism has been already aware of this situation by addressing misogynist discourses and campaigns on social networks, which attempt to delegitimize the movement and attack activists (Banet-Weiser and Miltner, 2016; Gámez-Fuentes, 2015; Lopez, Muldoon, and McKeown, 2019; Weber and Davis, 2019; Wrenn, 2019).

Most powerful actors can also benefit from their greater technological capacity (Bradshaw and Howard, 2017). In recent years, the use of automated mechanisms to manipulate political conversations in social networks has become a public matter (Grimme *et al.*, 2017). For instance, bots can boycott opinion flows, attack specific profiles, viralize a message—including fake news, or promote one particular ideology (Powers and Kounalakis, 2017). They facilitate strategies to implement more subtle forms of censorship and fictitious opinion flows (Tucker *et al.*, 2018; Woolley and Howard, 2016; Yan *et al.*, 2020).

THE SPANISH WOMEN'S STRIKE

At the international level, the new cycle of feminist protests has been accompanied by mobilizations such as the 2015 Argentine campaign #NotOneLess, which demanded explicit and adequate institutional support against gender-based violence (Chenou and Cepeda-Másmela, 2019). In 2016, the Polish Black Monday called for an intergenerational mobilization against a total abortion ban (Król and Pustułka, 2018). The 2017 U.S. Women's March expressed an intersectional spirit to connect feminism with anti-racist, LGBTI, class, and climate change struggles (Brewer and Dundes, 2018; Wrenn, 2019; Gantt-Shafer, Wallis, and Miles, 2019). These mobilizations can be comprehended as relevant precedents of subsequent international women's strikes.

Unlike other international dates —e.g., 25 November— the International Women's Day on 8 March opens its discursive space to multiple struggles and political subjects who holistically debated and reflect on gender inequality (Pavan and Mainardi, 2018). These protests' construction expresses a transversal character whose articulation does not depend solely on a collective identity but the shared experience against the daily gender violence (Gámez-Fuentes, 2015).

The Women's Strike has achieved tremendous support in Spain due to the multitudinous participation. It has received the impulse of previous feminist protests (Campillo, 2019; Núñez-Puente and Fernández-Romero, 2017) and the Spanish Indignados Movement. The latter did generate a new social scene for the visibility of feminism and proposed new strategies of coordination and political action on the Internet (Galdón-Corbella, 2018; Gámez-Fuentes, 2015).

Given the Women's Strike's birth under the 2018 proposals, the analysis of the Internet and social networks' role in the mobilization and coordination of these protests is developing. In their study of the Facebook accounts *Huelga Feminista 8M* and *Feminismos Madrid*, Fernández-Romero and Sánchez-Duarte (2019) point out that the activists succeeded in activating the online and offline participation through emotional appeal, the generation of news content, and the publication of information about the Strike.

In this vision are Pavan and Mainardi (2018), who analyze the "Not One Less" campaign during the Italian 8 March 2017. The authors indicate that the movement unified and consolidated the weakest online ties that connected, communicated, and protested gender violence on the Internet. Núñez-Puente, D'Antonio-Maceiras, and Fernández-Romero (2019) focus on that same demonstration to address how feminist activism can politically instrumentalize Twitter for social mobilization through personal testimonies of male violence.

Their findings contribute to studies on technological mediation in the context of political protest. Beyond being a complement to offline collective action repertoires, online participation enables articulating cross-cutting feminist discourses, positing a political agenda against gender-based violence and subverting dominant patriarchal narratives (Banet-Weiser and Miltner, 2016; Lopez, Muldoon, and McKeown, 2019; Orgad and Gill, 2019). In this research, we intend to contextualize these findings within the networks where they engage

in this participation. To do so, we consider Twitter a space with complex power relations in which activists coordinate and communicate.

METHODS

This research analyses the practices of feminist activists on Twitter from a media ecology perspective (Croeser and Highfield, 2014; Treré, 2019), which encompasses the multitude of actors with unequal power of influence on the Internet. We approach this objective through three research questions:

- RQ 1. Which actors took part in the conversation on Twitter on the Women's Strike?
- RQ 2. What were the action repertoires in this social network on 8 March?
- RQ 3. What was the role of social bots during the 2019 Women's Strike?

We conducted an ethnographic content analysis (Beneito-Montagut, 2011; Guasch, 1991; Hine, 2000) to answer these questions. According to this technique, each researcher notes the most unusual facts and evidence, based on theoretical assumptions and systematized concepts, previously structured to guide aspects of priority detection in the research.

We obtained the research corpus (i.e., tweets) with the Brandwatch tool, which extracted information employing a queries system [Table 1]. The 2019 Women's Strike took place on 8 March. To better describe the dynamics of the conversations around the mobilization day, we decided to extend the period for collecting messages to one week: it covered the days before the date of the protest (from 4 March to 7), the day of the Strike (8 March) and the day after (9 March). Along with the criteria for the extraction date (March 4-9, 2019) and the site (twitter.com), we used an additional factor to limit the study: the location of messages in Spain.

After establishing these criteria, we conducted a search on Twitter with keywords and mentions. First, we included two general terms related to mobilization. Also, we added 27 hashtags that we found in an exploratory way in the accounts of different Spanish cities' communication commissions. Finally, we selected the mentions of two specific Twitter profiles that disseminate information on 8 March at the national level. Brandwatch only collected messages written in Spanish, which can be considered a limitation of the study given the coexistence of diverse official languages in this country. At last, the corpus consists of 529,738 tweets published by 147,928 unique authors.

Due to the importance of profile resonance in the Twitter sphere in this article, we extracted a sample of the 1,000 users with the broadest reach during the collection period to perform the analysis. Brandwatch calculates that number by metrics of followers, estimated visits, mentions, and interactions that receive specific profiles so that we selected profiles with higher rates according to this platform. After selecting the sample, we performed a manual coding by two coders ($k=0.8$) to classify the user type based on Pavan and Mainardi (2018)

Table 1. Query used to search for messages

Delimitation		Search				
Site	Date	Country	Language	Words	Hashtags	Mentions
Twitter	From 4 to 9 March 2019	Spain	Spanish	huelga + (feminismo / feminista / mujer* / 8M / "8 de marzo") / 8M	HuelgaFeminista / HuelgaFeminista2019 / HuelgaFeminista8M / 8M o 8M2019 / 8deMarzo / HaciaLaHuelgaFeminista / HaciaLaHuelgaFeminista2019 / EnHuelga / YoParo / NosotrasParamos / YoYo8M / HuelgaDeConsumo / HuelgaDeCuidados / HuelgaLaboral / HuelgaEstudiantil / HuelgaEstudiantil8M / HuelgaDeConsumo8M / HuelgaDeCuidados8M / HuelgaLaboral8M / 1000Motivos / NIUnPasoAtras / 8DiasDeRevuelta / HuelgaEducativa / HuelgaEducativa8M / Radio8M / 8DíasDeRevuelta / 8Marzo	HuelgaFeminista / Coordinadora8m

Source: Authors' own elaboration.

categories. We include the bots (Acker, 2018) in this classification to determine the automation of the analyzed accounts. After codifying the type of profile, we qualitatively investigate their specific action repertoire on Twitter (García-Albacete and Theocharis, 2014; Lasén and Martínez de Albéniz, 2011). In the results, the name of the real accounts has been removed to respect the privacy of the users.

Table 2. Profile typology

Profile/User	Description
Activists and civil society organizations	Users who identify themselves as activists and/or are actively involved with feminist movement causes and organizations.
Citizens	Users who participate in the debate without identifying directly with any movement, organization, or institution.
Journalist and media	Individuals linked to professional journalism or freelancers such as photographers, writers, reporters.
Influencers and celebrities	Individuals who are famous for reasons unrelated to gender-based violence and/or politics.
Politicians, trade unionists, parties, and trade unions	Political representatives, members of a political party or individuals who openly show their membership in a political organization on social networks.
Bots and automated accounts	Profiles that simulate human behaviour on social networks and thus can publish information, follow a user, or retweet content.

Source: From Acker (2018); Pavan and Mainardi (2018).

FINDINGS

Empirical data revealed differences between the type of profile and the reach of each of them on Twitter. Citizens profiles constituted the broadest category of the sample (43.4 percent of the total) with the most significant range. However, the data also showed that their average reach is the second most narrow, only above automated accounts. Bots were the second largest group in the sample (19.9 percent) and presented the smallest reach. Both categories showed the ability to be influential on Twitter when organized with similar profiles that share their message.

On the other side, some types of profiles showed more individual than collective influence. Activists and social organizations formed the category whose messages had the least overall capacity to be read by other profiles. However, given that the accounts' frequency is lower (10.4 percent), their average reach is higher than in the previous categories.

Celebrities and influencers comprised the group with the lowest number of profiles (1.6 percent), but the second in reach and the first in the average spread.

Journalists and media accounts (9.4 percent) showed one of the broadest scopes, both overall and separately. Finally, politicians, trade unionists, parties, and trade unions (13.5 percent) constituted the group with the most significant reach, although the average scope is lower than that of the two previous categories.

Table 3. Profiles and reach (n=1,000)

Profile	Frequency (%)	Reach (%)	Average reach (%)
Activists and civil society organizations	104 (10.4)	477,662 (8.70)	4,592.90 (4.88)
Citizens	434 (43.4)	1,420,617 (25.86)	3.273.31 (3.48)
Journalists and media	94 (9.4)	930,027 (16.93)	9,893.90 (10.51)
Influencers and celebrities	16 (1.6)	952,272 (17.34)	59,517.00 (63.19)
Politicians, trade unionists, parties and unions	135 (13.5)	1,099.023 (20.01)	8,140.91 (8.64)
Bots and automated accounts	199 (19.9)	501,118 (9.12)	2,518.18 (2.67)
Other	18 (1.8)	112,406 (2.05)	6,244.77 (6.63)

Source: Authors' own elaboration.

The category of activists brought together a diverse set of profiles and social organizations, not always directly related to feminism. LGBTI associations, anti-racist organizations, self-managed social centres, neighbourhood associations, social cooperatives, anti- eviction initiatives, and platforms for public pensions sent messages during these dates, highlighting the capacity of feminism to connect with other social struggles.

They expressed their participation in the protest by contributing an intersectional discourse to raise their demands as a collective from a gender perspective. In a similar line, the activists expressed their willingness to go on Strike with messages that included the proclamations of the protest ("Long live the struggle of #women!!!") or specific measures ("For equal pay. No salary below 1,000 euros per month").

Along with supportive tweets, this category organized activities, reported live demonstrations, and called for action. This tactic included the instructions and bits of advice, the schedule of 8 March, and the request to attend to concrete activities throughout the week. Usually, these tweets were accompanied by images, many of them created by the Women's Strike communication commissions and others designed in an amateur way. Both included the feminist symbolism of the movement, such as the purple heart together with fire.

This set of messages expressed the diversity of the feminist movement's repertoire of action, which hybridized traditional forms of protest such as demonstrations, pickets, or labor strikes with others connected to the feminist imaginary, like the organization of care points, group luncheons, or concerts:

“We hear songs of the feminist cocktail in Santo Domingo square through the windows.” The live reporting included images and videos of the protests to state the movement’s symbology and success.

Feminist activists and organizations also expressed their political imaginary and the specific political culture of the Women’s Strike. These tweets frequently denounced the appropriation of feminism by political parties. The movement also highlighted its connection with anti-capitalist and anti-liberal positions, as the critical theory: “Feminism is equality. Citizens speak of ‘liberal feminism’ to defend the ‘rights’ of whoremongers and surrogacy supporters to satisfy their parents’ whims. It is a violation of human rights in favour of capitalism.” In line with this argumentative aspiration, some messages included journalistic information and statistical data that explained the inequality between genders.

As an exception to this trend, we found two civil associations positioned against the demonstration in this category, which were critical of feminism and activists’ actions. They frequently shared false news also collected in other categories such as citizens, politicians, and bots, as we described in the following lines.

Citizens showed a critical attitude towards conservative partisanship on Twitter. They frequently quoted a tweet to criticize the liberal party Citizens’ institutional declaration, considering it an appropriation of the movement. They also showed their opposition to the conservative People’s Party and the far-right party Vox. Given the upcoming general elections in April 2019, many messages expressed the need to vote on other political options that would support a feminist political project.

On the contrary, another sector of this category raised a critique of feminism through messages that stated the reasons against the demonstrations. These profiles even had a hashtag that proposed this demobilization: #ImNotGoingM8. The comments that delegitimized the movement concentrated their criticisms on four main axes.

First, they claimed that the movement was aggressive and radical (“Feminists insult the women of Citizens during M8 demonstration.”). Second, they considered that feminist associations were supported with public money (“The mercenary collectives of feminism, maintained by the governments, take women out into the street to continue living from their fairy tales.”). Third, they accused feminist activists of defending Islam, which was a threat to women’s equality and to Spanish culture (“Burka women are complaining about the oppressive patriarchy of the West. This is unbelievable.”). Finally, they published that the political parties and associations had imposed a “gender ideology” that disadvantaged the men (“They have approved an increase in the ORPHANS’ PENSION, but only when the FATHER kills the mother. If it is your mother who murders your father, fuck you.”).

In many cases, this movement’s delegitimization was justified based on disinformation and fake news published in conservative newspapers such as *Ok Diario* or *Libertad Digital*. They also acquired the discursive frames of Vox party, which had representation in Spanish Congress for the first time in April 2019. In the face of this, the pro-Strike citizens tried to argue the need for the protests:

“Why do we feminists fight? So, you won’t get raped. So, you don’t have to suffer. So that you can educate yourself freely”.

As in the activists’ case, part of the citizens expressed their intention to go on the Women’s Strike and encouraged other users to mobilize on Twitter. The accounts also reported images and videos to allude to the success of the call and show emotion for their massive support (“I got photos of the demonstration in Madrid, and I cried. It’s amazing. Thank you all.”). In many cases, they published posters with feminist proclamations that served to express their participation in the demonstration and their support for those specific messages.

Multiple media and journalists published audiovisual content of the demonstration on Friday afternoon. Many of them offered live reports and last-minute information from the different Spanish cities: “LIVE #M8 | The head of the demonstration in Granada is already arriving at its destination, and there are still people at the starting point.” On 8 March and the following day, many of the headings included the number of attendees and described the protest as multitudinous and successful. The political parties and their representatives were also part of the coverage because of supporting the protest or not participating in it. These types of messages usually had links to the media’s website.

Some media included opinion articles reflecting on the feminist movement. Besides, others had maps to localize the different activities and thus provided a resource for the activists’ organization. Journalists published personal messages where they mainly expressed their support for the Women’s Strike. Various media and journalists spread misinformation on other cases: “Vox denounces that three feminists beat a girl who refused to wear the purple ribbon.” This complaint was subsequently proved false, and the party had to apologize for publishing it later.¹

To a large extent, influencers and celebrities on Twitter grouped their activity on 8 March to send messages of support for International Women’s Day without a specific political position. These messages’ objective was to commemorate the event but not necessarily support the Women’s Strike.

Other messages expressed an intention to support it: “I’m going to strike on Twitter for 24 hours. No content, except for information about the Strike. See you in the streets, comrades. And to the others, see you on 9 March.” Other profiles delegitimized the protests and insulted their activists (“While I’m at home having coffee and reading after getting up early to go to work, the feminazis are on the street making a racket and making a mess.”). Once again, the influential profiles belonged to progressive factions and the anti-movement part of the Twitter network.

The accounts of the group of politicians and trade unions published images of the demonstration and expressed their intention to mobilize on 8 March in the previous days. Part of the live content reported on Twitter focused on displaying

1 See <<https://www.publico.es/politica/vox-desmiente-bulo-agresion-parte-feministas-radicales-difundio-dia-mujer.html>>, accessed 12 February 2021.

the banners of political and trade union organizations, as well as photos of their representatives participating in the march. They also created their materials to go to the demonstration or publish on social networks: flags, stickers, t-shirts, videos, and posters. For example, Unidas Podemos (Podemos and United Left) used its motto to publish about the Women's Strike (#NothingStopsUsM8), and Citizens used the term "liberal feminism" to defend its position on this movement.

It is worth noting that this category published concrete proposals related to equality measures for political parties and trade unions. These were sometimes associated with requests for votes for April 2019 elections. Unions and parties also shared the news with their leaders' statements and opinion articles signed by them. Vox moved away from this position to present the campaign "Do not speak on my name," in which they urged not to participate in the Women's Strike. Several of its leaders shared misinformation about an educational institution that had proposed an activity on 8 March: "It's a shame. At Andévalo High School in Puebla de Guzmán (Huelva), the principal has ordered to punish the boys without recess for being men." However, the media pointed out later that the real activity consisted of delaying the boys' exit to recess by 5 minutes.²

On 8 March, some local Vox profiles condemned that their headquarters had been attacked during feminist actions. Once again, the falsehood of this information was sometimes demonstrated, as in the following tweet: "Totalitarians have once again attacked the base of #VOX in #Murcia. Justified by radical feminism, they throw all kinds of objects at the frontage, and they introduced the eggs inside the office." As reported by Twitter users, the eggshells were inside the headquarters in the photograph accompanying this message.

Also, automated accounts replied misinformation, especially the news about the punishment at Andévalo High School in Huelva and the aggression of three feminists to a Vox militant. In general, these profiles shared polarised information to attack or defend feminism and criticize their political opponents regarding the Women's Strike. The bots with a political position against feminism criticized the movement from the same arguments as the citizens. They usually shared links to news or YouTube videos with an explanation of their statements ("THE TRUTH ABOUT GENDER VIOLENCE LAW' @IsaacParejo. RT <https://youtu.be/kEk36RWg5Fc>").

With the same viewpoint, some profiles expressed their intention not to support the Women's Strike. Many hashtags accompanied their messages: #StopFeminazis, #M8DoesNotRepresentMe, #M8IDoNotGo, #ILoveMen. Bots and automated accounts frequently used multiple tags, including some that appealed to specific parties, as well as the 2019 general elections slogans: #elections2019rightwingvote, #FollowBackVox, #SpainAlive (Vox).

² See <<https://maldita.es/malditobulo/que-sabemos-sobre-la-supuesta-decision-de-castigar-el-8m-sin-recreo-a-los-alumnos-varones-de-un-instituto-de-huelva/>>, accessed 10 February 2021.

The set of publications that supported the demonstration and encouraged to attend it followed a similar structure. They included a supportive hashtag (#IGoM8) along with other electoral and party mottos: #SPAlways, #TheSpainYouLikeIsFeminist (Socialist Party), #M8UnidasPodemos, #NothingStopUs (Unidas Podemos). These messages were also accompanied by photomontages of low graphic and aesthetic quality, both in the feminist and antifeminist profiles.

Table 4. Main action repertoires by type of profile

Action repertoire	Profile					
	Activists and civil society organizations	Citizens	Journalists and media	Influencers and celebrities	Politicians, trade unionists, parties, and trade unions	Bots and automated accounts
Calls for mobilization in its different actions	+					
Information on the convened events	+		+			
Organizational instructions for concrete actions	+					
Live reports of the scheduled actions	+	+	-		*	
Express political positioning	*	*	*	*	*	*
Expression of abstract proclamations	+	+				
Sending emotional messages	+	+				
Proposition of concrete policy measures	+				+	
Express intention to mobilize in favor of the Women's Strike	+	+	+	+	+	+
Express intention not to mobilize or break with the Women's Strike		×		×	×	×

Dissemination of information and data related to the Women's Strike or the feminist movement		+	-		+	+
Dissemination of misleading information about the Women's Strike or the feminist movement			×		×	×
Use of non-generic posters, memes, and hashtags	+	*			*	*

Position on feminism: + Support × Opposition * Both - Not applicable

Source: Authors' own elaboration.

CONCLUSIONS

The Women's Strike has received support from a large part of the Spanish population since 2018, and recent academic literature has collected the characteristics of this movement and its contention repertoires (Fernández-Romero and Sánchez-Duarte, 2019; Núñez-Puente, D'Antonio Maceiras, and Fernández-Romero, 2019). The empirical data provided in this research highlight the need to contextualize online participation in a broader context to include the dynamic and contradictory nature of social networks' in the struggle for gender equality.

This paper has limitations. Conducting an eminently qualitative analysis meant reducing the sample for the accounts that participated in the debate. Additionally, the manual coding of bots allowed us to recognize only some of them. An automated analysis could comprehend the bots' coordinated activities and quantitatively analyze all their strategies. Therefore, we hope that this research will contribute to further computer-assisted work on 8 March.

Our empirical data indicates that activists and social organizations resize their power (Barassi, 2015; Couldry, 2015) when other actors who participated in the Twitter debate are considered [Research Question 1]. The traditional dominant subjects in the public sphere show the most significant capacity to spread their message during protest days. Citizens can subvert this trend when they tweet massively —i.e., when they are a multitude, in the words of Hardt and Negri (2004)— and articulate an alternative discourse to the hegemonic one. However, in this work, we prove opinions against the Strike and feminism sharing the same digital platform. Twitter is then a playground for both feminism movements and the antifeminist countermovement, as previously described by Blais and Dupuis-Déri (2012).

For this reason, it is necessary not to assume that civil initiatives on the Internet will necessarily be progressive, and the population will undoubtedly position

itself in favour of social struggles. The data obtained in this research documents a misogynist discourse in networks (Banet-Weiser and Miltner, 2016; Wrenn, 2019). In this case, it presents two main objectives: to discourage participation and to delegitimize the movement. To do so, these profiles argue that feminism restricts freedom of expression, attacks men's rights, and survives due to the institutional support of left-wing parties. Furthermore, disinformation dissemination aims to create negative opinion flows and is employed by conservative factions.

Thus, it is crucial to consider the conservative forces' capacity to appropriate social networks and action repertoires (Schradie, 2019) [Research Question 2]. Aware of these personal and ideological attacks (Weber and Davis, 2019), activists show a willingness to explain the economic and political implications of feminism. Therefore, political positioning and publishing hashtags and memes contribute to both supporting the movement and opposing it. The action repertoires and strategies are not exclusive to activists and social organizations (Carragee, 2019), but all the actors in dispute appropriate them. It is necessary to understand the tactical use of these tools within the logic of analyzed categories.

This matter is particularly explicit in political parties, as 8 March was close to the general elections of April 2019. Despite the 8 March organizing commissions' will to be autonomous organizations (Campillo, 2019), the political parties join the journey with their symbols. They use the Strike to propose their position regarding feminism, spreading their leaders' statements and political measures. Vox, which would become a political force with institutional relevance in 2019, shows its capacity to fragment the debate on feminism. This phenomenon of polarisation channelled by far-right populism has also occurred in the United States with Donald Trump, as documented by Gantt-Shafer, Wallis, and Miles (2019).

The Feminist Strike's action repertoires are not static but hybrid (Treré, 2019). The 8 March organizing commissions also demonstrated their ability to combine traditional and innovative online and offline political action forms. However, we perceive a much more simplistic understanding of the repertoires of the feminist movement on Twitter. In particular, the media and politicians focus their attention on the 8 March demonstration in the afternoon.

Research should also consider new techniques for automating network activity to understand current action repertoires [Research Question 3]. Hashtags are no longer only a complement to published messages; they are crucial when articulating discourses, setting topics in the Twitter agenda (i.e., Trending Topics), and identifying opinion flows. The term "hashtag activism" has already addressed the use of this resource for feminist purposes (Rentschler, 2015). However, it is critical to consider that hashtags also allow bots to intervene in the online debate (Grimme *et al.*, 2017).

On 8 March, such profiles try to mobilize or demobilize participants. Their scope is minimal, so their usefulness is not understood separately but coordinated with other bots (Earl and Garrett, 2017). Their publication of polarised messages and partisan hashtags clarifies that dominant actors of the sphere are adapting these automatization techniques to their tactical objectives (Bradshaw and Howard, 2017). Therefore, recognizing the concrete structure of social networks

allows us to understand the extent to which they facilitate the reproduction of dominant power flows (Ferrari, 2020, Youmans, and York, 2012).

In short, the feminist movement faces a contradictory scenario on the Internet when participating in social networks (Galis and Neumayer, 2016). In the case of the 2019 Women's Strike, the use of Twitter cannot avoid its current limitations: the appearance of a polarising antifeminist discourse; the existence of fake news and demobilization campaigns; the automated mechanisms that function in a coordinated manner; and the appropriation of their repertoires of action by the dominant actors of the system, especially political parties, even when they support feminist politics. Future studies may explain the consequences of the pandemic in this movement and their use of digital technologies for a feminist social change.

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