Exploring emotional responses on Twitter after the Algeciras attack on Catholic churches in 2023: Between anti-immigration discourse and sadness reactions

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Abstract

On 25 February, a Muslim man attacked several churches in Algeciras (Spain) and killed a sexton. After the attack, many people turned to social media, especially Twitter, to express their emotions about what had happened, send their condolences to the deceased's family, or criticize the government, as the perpetrator was allegedly an undocumented migrant with a pending deportation order. The aim of this work is to study the emotional reactions of Twitter users who participated in conversations about the Algeciras case by applying sentiment analysis techniques. Using the academictwitteR package, more than 300,000 tweets containing the word 'Algeciras' were obtained. We then filtered out the RTs and kept 36,104 original tweets for this work. After data cleaning and tokenization, sentiment analysis was applied using the syuzhet package in R, which allowed to obtain the intensity of positive or negative sentiments and eight different emotions. The results suggest a higher prevalence of negative sentiments related to conversations about attacks, murder, or grief. The use of negative words reflects Twitter users' emotions, which are mainly concentrated on fear, anger, and sadness. Tweets expressing these emotions also indicated signs of Islamophobia and racism towards the murderer and, by extension, other Muslim immigrants.

Keywords: *Algeciras attack; anti-immigration emotions; sentiment analysis; syuzhet; Twitter; islamophobia.*