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## **The Politicisation of Historical Memory on Twitter. “Positive Antisemitism” in the Holocaust Debate in Poland**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Political struggles on historical memory have adapted to the digital specificity of Twitter and are currently growing in significance. This study investigates the sentiment bias of a memory war between two major Polish political parties, the currently ruling conservative Law and Justice (PiS) and Civic Platform (PO), the main opposition party, concerning Polish-Jewish relations, and especially the Holocaust. 23699 PO tweets and 29441 PiS tweets from 2015-2019 were collected, out of which 241 concerning memory war were sampled with Lexicon-Based Approach. Sentiment was analyzed using tweet-wise consensual coding in ordinal 5-points scale and automated word-wise coding in 3-points scale. PiS tweets had more positive sentiment regarding the memory of the Holocaust and Jewish legacy in Poland. The final hermeneutical analysis showed that the ruling party narratives were aimed at appropriation of collective memory and “Polonizing” the Holocaust, and that the positive sentiment was a function of ‘positive anti-Semitism’.

### **KEYWORDS**

Twitter, Holocaust, antisemitism, memory war, historical narratives, sentiment bias

## **1. Introduction: Memory Games and Memory Wars**

Historical memory is a foundation of national identity and a vital aspect of political life (Rutten, Fedor, and Zvereva 2013; Berger and Lorenz 2016; Engelking and Grabowski 2018). It is shaped by historical narratives, the analysis of which is therefore essential to understanding its impact on national identity. Political regimes use historical narratives in their struggle for financial and territorial resources (Edele 2017;

McGlynn 2020; Kotkin 2016). Political parties competing for power also use their stance on historical issues as a political weapon (Chrobaczyński 2016; Tworzecki 2019).

In Eastern European countries and the post-soviet political space in general, historical narratives are becoming a more frequent means of communication between political elites and their voters (Achkasov et al. 2018; Malinova 2018, 2016; Rutten, Fedor, and Zvereva 2013; Rutten 2013; Moskalewicz and Przybylski 2019). Being an identity-building instrument, historical memory also influences voting preferences (Schieder 1978; Habermas 1988; Savin 2018).

We can observe correspondence between divisions in the political worldview and historical identities across the world:

- United States, e.g. Black Lives Matter & Black History Month (Leyh 2020),
- British Isles, e.g. Scottish Independence Referendum (Mason 2013; Wood and Payne 1999),
- Western Europe, e.g. Spanish-Catalan conflict of historical identity and politics (Boyd 2008),
- countries of Mitteleuropa (László 2013),
- Eastern Europe (Malczewska-Pawelec and Pawelec 2021; Pettai 2020; Werner 2018; Isaev 2018),
- conflict of Russia and Ukraine (Pakhomenko, Tryma et al. 2018; Dreyer 2018),
- Caucasian region, e.g. Azerbaijan and Armenian conflict (Garagozov 2016; Rauf 2006),

In the ongoing dynamics of political struggle, the clash of historical memories assumes the form of the so-called memory games. Such memory games are “played by political and administrative elites, activists, and professional groups in various local, national, and European venues” (Mink and Neumayer 2013). The concept of memory games encompasses how political and social actors perceive and relate to specific historical events, depending on the political interests they defend (Oseka 2018). Narratives of memory are linked to current political propaganda that uses historicising strategies to recall old dividing political lines, and thus, in the words of Mink and Neumayer “willfully bring discord and dissent back to the fore” (Mink and Neumayer 2013). When real political and ideological historical conflicts are strongly correlated and political tensions are high, memory games transform into memory wars (Portnov 2013; Belavusau, Gliszczynska-Grabias, and Mälksoo 2021; Torbakov 2011; Lewis 2017; Zhurzhenko 2013). One of their prominent contemporary channels is Twitter.

Memory wars on Twitter involve regular political, ethnic, and ideological tensions, the only difference is that their battlefield is digital. In addition, as proven by previous research, Twitter is vulnerable to the creation of so-called echo chambers (Matuszewski and Szabó 2019; Praet, Martens, and Van Aelst 2021). Thus, narratives used in memory wars should be polarised. The fact that Twitter communication is emotionally biased is another important component of narrative polarisation (Duncombe 2019). Our research investigates whether Twitter memory-war narratives are indeed biased and polarised in terms of their prevailing sentiments.

### 1.1. *Background: Polish-Jewish Relations in Poland and Positive Antisemitism*

Polish society is both internally and externally susceptible to memory wars. This is because, throughout its history, Poland has been multi-ethnic and multicultural, inhabited by Poles, Jews, Germans, Ukrainians and Lithuanians, among other nationalities.

Its borders have also changed several times (eighteenth- and nineteenth-century partitions, interwar restoration, post-WWII borders). Against the background of the Polish lands' repeated political and economic crises, this fact led to so-called "competitive victimhood". The perception of an ingroup's unique victimhood worsens intergroup relations, leading to a lack of trust and empathy and often resulting in memory conflicts (Bilewicz and Stefaniak 2013). One of the most prominent examples of a Polish "memory war" concerns the issue of the coexistence of the Jewish minority and Polish majority within the Polish state (Kucia 2013; Barkan, Cole, and Struve 2007).

For years, Polish-Jewish relations have been encumbered by differences in approach towards their mutual historical past during wartime. There are two dominant historical narratives in Poland. One stresses their harmonic coexistence (allegedly based on traditional Polish tolerance) and the heroic acts of Poles rescuing Jews during World War II (Wóycicka 2019; Janicka 2015; Zaborowski 1987). The other is far more critical and underlines that some Poles were involved in the Holocaust (Kapralski 2001; Ronen 2015; Ray and Kapralski 2019) and that "the killing of Jews was morally accepted by most of the Polish society" (Bochenska 2008). This remains a point of public dispute burdened by heavy historical baggage (Wróbel et al. 1997; Kapralski 2017; Maischein 2018). This Polish political memory war has far-reaching consequences in international politics. This is largely due to the fact that contemporary Polish-Jewish or rather more accurately Polish-Israeli relations (issues of economic, political or military cooperation between the states) are not strong enough to suppress the difficult issues of the shared past (Chrostowski 1994; Bartoszewski 1997; Cohn 2011; Lehrer 2013; Krajewski 2016; Dyduch 2021; Moskalewicz, Caumanns, and Dross 2019).

In the People's Republic of Poland, the victims of the Holocaust were not separated from the general wartime martyrdom of the "Polish nation" or, more broadly, the victims of fascism (Janicka 2014; Kwiatkowska-Moskalewicz 2022a). After 1989, however, the issue of Polish-Jewish relations during World War II became an essential element of public discourse (Forecki 2010). Attempts were made to "Polonise the Holocaust", the most famous emanation of which was the "more than ten-year-long symbolic battle around the Carmelite convent and the gravel site at Auschwitz" (Janicka 2014) throughout the nineteen-eighties and early nineteen-nineties<sup>1</sup>.

The currently ruling Law and Justice party (since 2015) has started to use a new strategy, which bears marks of "positive antisemitism" as defined by Yahuda Bauer and Moshe Fox (Bauer and Fox 2018). According to its classical definition, antisemitism is "purely motivated by antipathy to, disdain for, and hatred of Jews, culminating in a desire to eliminate them through murder" (Bilewicz and Stefaniak 2013; Michlic 2006; Marzec 2016; Janicka 2014). There is, however, another and a "positive" form of antisemitism, Bauer and Fox claim, one that "sees in the Jews an important, often dangerous, element that is worth having on one's side for a number of reasons and purposes. (...). It accepts the usual antisemitic trope of a worldwide cabal of powerful Jews who aim to influence or control parts or even all of the non-Jewish world." (Bauer and Fox 2018).

Bauer gives an example of positive antisemitism strictly connected to Polish-Jewish history during World War II. "The pro-Jewish statements [of the Polish government-in-exile in London] were explained internally by the need to generate American Jewry's support for Polish interests, especially the demand to recognise Poland's 1939 borders, which included the Soviet-occupied eastern borderlands. In what may be called 'positive antisemitism', Polish nationalists saw American Jews as a major influence on US policies—a completely unrealistic and false perception—and wanted to court them" (Bauer 2020).

In the Law and Justice version of historical policy, positive antisemitism manifests itself through attempts to deny the involvement of representatives of the Polish society in “supplementing and sealing the Nazi extermination machine” (Janicka 2014) by creating the mistaken impression of the universality of aid given to Jews by ethnic Poles. While negating the Holocaust based on hatred of Jews is clearly Antisemitic, so is denying the involvement of local populations in it, such as Poles, and putting them in a favourable light. However, the new Law and Justice strategy is no longer based on open negation and confrontation (negative sentiment), which usually ended in defeat in the face of international protests, including from Jewish communities, but on an apparent conciliation (positive sentiment). It consists of a stubborn insistence on a positive attitude towards “Polish citizens of Jewish origin”, nevertheless, this applies only in their top-down role as beneficiaries of massive aid from ethnic Poles. There is no place in the narrative for Jewish members of the resistance movement, especially as, outside the ghetto, they were primarily associated with the communist underground (however, research on wartime Jewish-rescued networks shows they were based to a large extent on Jewish self-help (Kwiatkowska-Moskalewicz 2022b)). The denial of the participation of part of the local population in the Nazi extermination machine and the widespread indifference to the Holocaust often goes against the results of professional historical research based on archival sources and personal accounts.

## 1.2. *Aims of the Study*

Analysis of Twitter accounts as a source of knowledge about political rhetoric and the process of communication between political forces and their electorate has recently been a promising research direction (Ross and Caldwell 2020; Matuszewski and Szabó 2019; Russell 2018; Johnson 2012; Bracciale and Martella 2017; Parmelee and Bichard 2011). This paper investigates the case of the Polish Twitter memory war concerning Polish-Jewish issues fought between the two main Polish political parties, the currently ruling Law and Justice (PiS) party and the Civic Platform (PO) party, the main opposition party. It analyses official party narratives and not particular politicians, for MPs fluctuate between parties and offices while the party lines remain relatively stable.

For the investigation, the time period of the creation of Tweets is selected as between 2015-11-12 and 2019-10-17. This time frame covers the second term of PiS in power (the first 2005-2007, the third being from 2019 until now). Since 2015, PiS has completely reshaped the Polish political landscapes and the country’s geopolitical position (e.g. distancing from the European Union). Changes were also observed in the area of historical policy and narratives. Spoken changes were fuelled by the ruling party legislative offensive e.g. attempts to introduce a new law punishing the “false” attribution of Holocaust organisation to Poles and Polish state. Such a position of the ruling party was triggered, in their opinion, by the constant neglect of the Polish perspective on Holocaust and simplification of the phrase “Polish death camps” (which in fact were Nazi Germany Death Camps in occupied Poland) in international debate, even

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<sup>1</sup>In 1983, General Wojciech Jaruzelski, who headed the Polish People’s Republic, going along with the Catholic Church, authorized the construction of a Carmelite convent at Auschwitz. Jewish circles protested against the appropriation of the territory. Despite the multilateral agreements reached on the matter and the pressure of international public opinion, the Carmelites did not move to a new off-site location until 1993. However, the so-called “Auschwitz cross” remained on the gravel site at the monastery, sparking a new round of conflict over the presence and hegemony of Catholic symbolism at the death camp. In late 1998 and early 1999, more than 300 crosses were set up on the grounds next to the camp at the call of the national-Catholic activist Kazimierz Switon. They were eventually removed amid an international scandal.

by President Barack Obama.<sup>2</sup>

### 1.3. *Hypotheses*

#### 1.3.1. *Hypothesis 1*

- Since political narratives on Twitter are intensely emotional (Su, Suk, and Rojas 2022; Luebke and Engelmann 2022), we hypothesised that both PiS and PO Tweets would be biased by strong sentiment (emotions). Furthermore, we assumed that PiS and PO stances would be polarised as they are the ruling and main opposition party. We have used mixed quantitative and qualitative sentiment analysis to address these issues. Additionally, we investigated the share of memory-war Tweets in the whole corpus (both the number of Tweets and their metadata) to highlight the importance of this subject to both parties.
- The ruling party’s strategy in recent years has been focused on “heroic” propaganda and breaking with the narrative of national shame – the so-called “pedagogy of shame” (Szkudlarek 2018; Majmurek 2019; Hall 2016; Solska 2017; Ziarek 2007; Ambrosewicz-Jacobs 2019). The historical aims of PiS have been to build a vision of Polish history as a treasure of positive role models (Poles saving Jews during the war, war heroes and anti-communist underground fighters etc.) and emphasising the “white cards” of Polish history. As this strategy aimed to gather votes and stay in power, we expected that sentiment bias in Twitter narratives of PiS would also be positive. The opposition party was expected to use more negative sentiment mainly connected with criticising the ruling party’s policy. Furthermore, we hypothesised that, similarly, PiS would have a higher sentiment intensity than PO, measured as a percentage of all words in the corpus.
- We also challenged the idea of the influence of sentiment polarity and intensity on Tweets reach by analysing the correlation between sentiment and metadata in the context of the whole memory war corpus.
- It is worth mentioning that prior to 2015, Polish historical policy had been marked by cultivating the martyrism of history<sup>3</sup>, which includes negative sentiment.

#### 1.3.2. *Hypothesis 2*

Finally, we questioned the meaning and direction of Twitter narratives. Did political discourse use the Holocaust issue in terms of the internal historical policy (the memory war on the Polish-Jewish issue) or as an argument in contemporary diplomatic relations between Poland and Israel (Polish-Jewish memory war)? In this context, we hypothesised that Twitter served as a tool of internal communication of political ideology in the area of historical policy rather than an internationally directed tool.

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<sup>2</sup>See: <https://www.president.pl/president-komorowski/news/president-on-barack-obamas-letter,38594>

<sup>3</sup>For the last two centuries, Polish history was marked by constant failed uprisings, lost defensive wars, and occupation by Nazis, Soviets and later communist regime; thus the topos of “martyrism” in appeared Polish historical narratives. This symbolises the heroic sacrifice of Polish independence actions against enemies and occupational authorities, which for the most part, ended with the execution of Polish freedom fighters.

## 2. Methods

In order to analyse the political narratives of both parties, we combined the quantitative approach towards data with a qualitative hermeneutic perspective. Results of the former were interpreted through the category of “positive antisemitism” that we contextualised in the qualitative section. We performed data mining on Twitter to prepare a representative data set. The data set was composed of Tweets written in the Polish language by official accounts of both parties. The data set was then used to compute basic statistics of the numerical descriptors of Tweets and perform a sentiment analysis of the text messages.

Although all Tweets were written in Polish, this does not necessarily mean they were meant only for internal use as political communication in important matters is often translated into other languages. Mostly, however, they were not aimed directly at the Jews or the state of Israel, but towards Polish voters. The “core” message was that the new ruling party was fulfilling its election promises in breaking with the (unjust) “pedagogy of shame”; on the other hand, the opposition party was highlighting the government’s “failings” and mistakes.

### 2.1. *Gathering and preprocessing data*

Due to the volatile nature of digital sources and the fact that every textual piece of information in the Web (in this case social media) has associated metadata, these kinds of sources require automatised collection methods. To create a raw database with Tweets from the assumed time period, the ID of Tweets from both parties profiles were collected. Knowing the ID enables the unambiguous identification of Tweets. Therefore, the Twitter API could be utilised to extract each Tweet’s text and metadata (including creation time, number of retweets, and favourite count). The data set consisted of 23,699 Tweets from the PO profile and 29,441 Tweets from PiS, created between 2015-11-12 and 2019-10-17. The data was cleaned by excluding stop words, such as “he” or “and”, special symbols (e.g. “@”) and URLs. In the final step, all the inflected or derived words were reduced to their word stems.

### 2.2. *Operationalization through phrases*

To distinguish Tweets concerning the main subject, we first listed phrases (in the Polish language) relating to “Jews” and “Holocaust” using a corpus-based approach (Almutairi 2016) (see table 1). The list of phrases was compiled after a hermeneutical investigation of the corpora. The whole corpus was divided into one-word tokens, sorted with the MFWs (most frequent words) method and investigated manually for phrases connected with the analysed topic. A corpus-based approach enables the investigation of a given corpora with knowledge of the real use of certain phrases including their context (which may not be present in the analysed sample – see Footnote 2). We checked for collocations ( $n$ -grams) of preselected phrases in Tweets in search for possibly missing Tweets. As a result a list of 15 phrases was prepared. We then created a list of word-stem monograms and filtered the whole corpus by regular expressions based on the phrases list, resulting in the “Jews” Tweets set, which consisted of 47 PO and 52 PiS Tweets, and the “Holocaust” Tweets set, formed by 66 PO and 76 PiS Tweets. In total, our final purposive sample listed 241 unique Tweets written in Polish.



Holocaust	Jews
auschwitz	antysemic
getc	antysemit
gett	izrael
holoc	semic
holok	semit
ipn <sup>4</sup>	żyd
ustawaipn	
oświęcim <sup>5</sup>	
zagład	

**Table 1.** Phrases related to Holocaust and Jews.

### 2.3. *Sentiment analysis*

Sentiment analysis is a natural language processing method allowing us to investigate the corpora in a quantitative way (Haselmayer and Jenny 2017). It measures the emotional meaning of words, phrases and sentences (Nausheen and Begum 2018). It is widely used in research on political communication (Haselmayer and Jenny 2017) underlining party stances and the rhetorical aspects of their messages. Sentiment analysis of historical narratives performed using automatic and semi-automatic (using predefined dictionaries of expressions) methods allows the examination of repositories containing internally diverse texts and text collections. The texts generated in social media are highly heterogeneous both stylistically and in terms of their message. Similar problems (heterogeneity of textual sources) are faced by nineteenth-century researchers (press sources, diaries, correspondence). NLP-based research tools open up new possibilities in areas of historical research where the size and heterogeneity of the source base has so far been an obstacle. The method based on the predefined dictionary that is used provides the historian with the opportunity to maintain control over the behaviour of the algorithm and adapt its operation to the specifics of the source and the era (Sprugnoli et al. 2016; Wijfjes 2017; Moreno-Ortiz 2017). In historical research, it supports the critical analysis of narratives by including the emotional aspects of the messages.

To distinguish negative, neutral and positive bias, we used ordinal three- and five-point scales. We performed the analysis both word-based (averaged over Tweets) and tweet-based. With regard to the former, we used a lexicon-based approach (Gupta and Agrawal 2020; Palanisamy, Yadav, and Elchuri 2013; Zhang et al. 2011; Aung and Myo 2017; Bonta and Janardhan 2019), which allowed us to investigate the given corpora while adjusting the sentiment value, including the subject context. Therefore, we assigned a value of -1, 0 or 1 to each word according to its bias. We then computed

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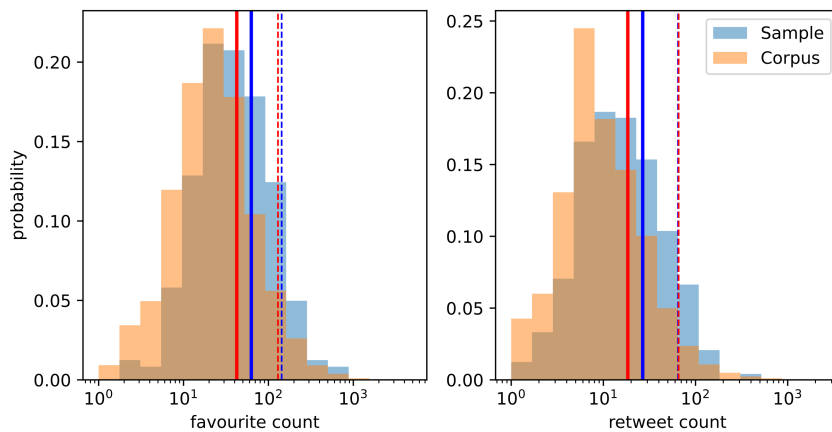
<sup>4</sup>“Institute of National Remembrance – Commission for the Prosecution of Crimes against the Polish Nation” is a Polish State institution responsible for both historical education and prosecuting Nazi and communist crimes on the Polish People during the World War II and soviet times. An infamous 2018 amendment referred to in media as “ustawaipn” was a point of a broader national and international debate on whether Poles were actively responsible for the Holocaust. In its original version, the 2018 amendment, later re-visioned and dropped, aimed at penalising public attribution of Holocaust responsibility to Poland or Poles. The origin of the amendment comes from the “Polish death camps” controversy; the bill was meant to be a tool in a fight against this false and simplified phrase.

<sup>5</sup>In the case of the phrase “Oświęcim”, we found some Tweets unrelated to the Holocaust and related to the local issues like Oświęcim Hospital or a political incident involving a car crash of the then Polish PM Beata Szydło in Oświęcim. We chose only Tweets coinciding with the dates of the Holocaust events (National Day of Commemoration in Memory of the Victims of the German Nazi Concentration and Death Camps, Liberation of Auschwitz Death Camp).

the average sentiment value for each Tweet and normalised it to fit in the range from -1 to 1. In the latter case, we assigned values of -1, -0.5, 0, 0.5 or 1 to each Tweet as a whole. This was based on the knowledge of the context of its content e.g., the metaphors used, external references, social connotations etc. To measure the total usage of emotionally biased words of a given corpus, we introduced the intensity parameter, calculated as the mean of absolute values of each word’s sentiment (Kaur et al. 2019).

### 3. Results

#### 3.1. *Holocaust debate in broader political discourse*



**Figure 1.** Comparison of distribution of favourite and retweet count for the whole corpus and selected sample. The horizontal axis scale is logarithmic. The solid lines indicates mean values of corresponding distributions and dashed – standard deviation range.

The share of Tweets focused on the analysed problem is relatively low. Out of 53,110 Tweets (both parties), only 241 directly pointed towards phrases linked with the memory war in question. The number of Tweets using “history” as a stem was twice as big as those concerning Jews and the Holocaust (445 Tweets).

Considering outreach related metadata (favourite and retweet count), the distributions of values for the whole corpus and selected sample (Jews and Holocaust Tweets) are very similar (fig. 1). There are no reasons to differentiate the corpus and sample. Thus, in this context, the analysed memory war is representative of the broader political discourse in Poland.

#### 3.2. *Sentiment impact on Tweets’ outreach*

In order to investigate the sentiment impact of the Tweets’ outreach, we computed the determination coefficient and normalised mutual information of Tweets’ sentiment and outreach metadata – retweet and favourite count (fig. 2).

Our sample shows neither correlation between sentiment intensity and retweet/favourite count nor between sentiment polarisation and retweet/favourite count.



		PO				PiS			
		$N$	$M$	$\sigma$	$M_e$	$N$	$M$	$\sigma$	$M_e$
Holocaust	word	66	-0.14	0.42	-0.12	76	-0.18	0.60	-0.19
	Tweet		-0.18	0.56	-0.5		0.08	0.67	0.5
Jews	word	47	-0.17	0.47	-0.19	52	0.06	0.48	0.00
	Tweet		-0.13	0.64	-0.5		0.26	0.48	0.5

**Table 2.** Basic statistics ( $N$  – count,  $M$  – mean,  $\sigma$  – standard deviation and  $M_e$  – median) of word-based and tweet-based sentiment distributions for Holocaust and Jew Tweets

### 3.3. Sentiment Analysis and Political Polarity

We computed word-based and tweet-based sentiment and their intensity for both parties on the Holocaust and Jews cases respectively (fig. 3 and table 2). We tested the following hypotheses:

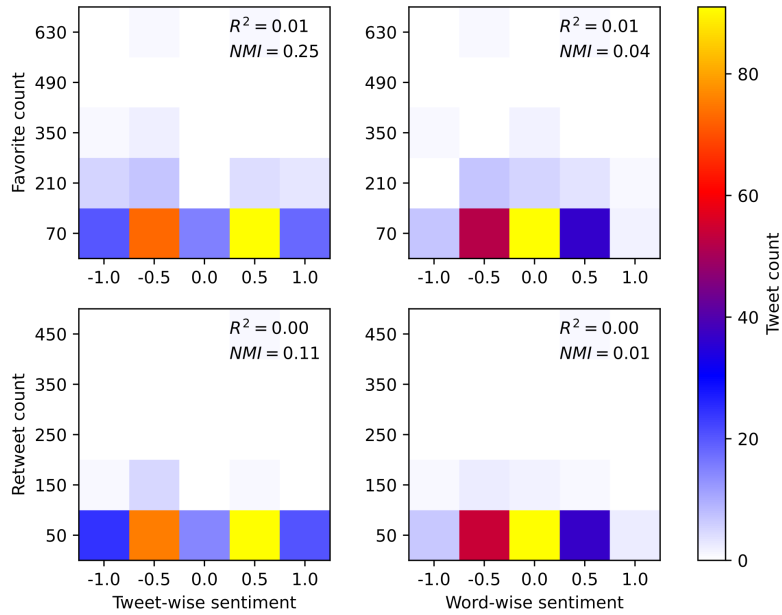
- (1) PO has higher sentiment intensity on the Holocaust than PiS.
- (2) PiS has higher sentiment intensity on the Holocaust than PO.
- (3) Both parties have the same stance on the Holocaust.
- (4) PO has higher sentiment intensity on Jews than PiS.
- (5) PiS has higher sentiment intensity on Jews than PO.
- (6) Both parties have the same stance on Jews.

In the Holocaust case, PiS had higher sentiment intensity than PO. In other words, for PiS, every fourth word that was not excluded during data cleaning was biased by emotion, whereas for PO, it was every fifth word. In the Jews case, both parties had almost the same sentiment intensity. Thus, the two former hypotheses could not be proven with a margin of merely one percent.

These results confirm that PiS used the Holocaust narrative to present heroic propaganda and break with the pedagogy of shame – both high positive and high-intensity sentiment (**Hypothesis 1**). The negative sentiment of PO’s Tweets stems came from the critical stance of the Polish government. Comparing these results inside party narratives, we highlighted that the opposition party used the same level of sentiment intensity, while the ruling party tended to use much more sentiment-biased phrases when speaking about the Holocaust than about the Jews. At this point, we assumed that the Holocaust issue was presented as distinct from the Jewish one, thus the ruling party extended the issue of the Holocaust to Poles as having been equally martyred during the war, blurring the specificity of the Shoah. PiS’ rhetoric thus attempted to “Polonize” the Shoah and gave it a “positive” sentimental flavour. These assumptions were later verified by critical hermeneutical analysis (**Hypothesis 2**).

We failed to reject the null hypothesis of the Mann-Whitney test (table 3) only for the first case – the Holocaust – while using word-based sentiment analysis. These results correspond with the remarks on our first main hypothesis (see **Hypothesis 1**) proving the concept of undervaluation of word-based sentiment analysis for PiS narratives of the Holocaust.

When analysing sentiment polarisation, we used both word- and tweet-based methods, whereas for results computing sentiment intensity, we used only the word-based method. The statistically significant results concern the tweet-based coded sentiment for the Holocaust ( $p < 0.05$ ) and both tweet-based and word-based coded sentiment for



**Figure 2.** Two-dimensional histogram presenting joint distribution of outreach metadata (favourite and retweet count) and sentiment values (tweet-based and word-based). The values of determination coefficient and normalised mutual information between the variables are also showed in the corner of each chart.

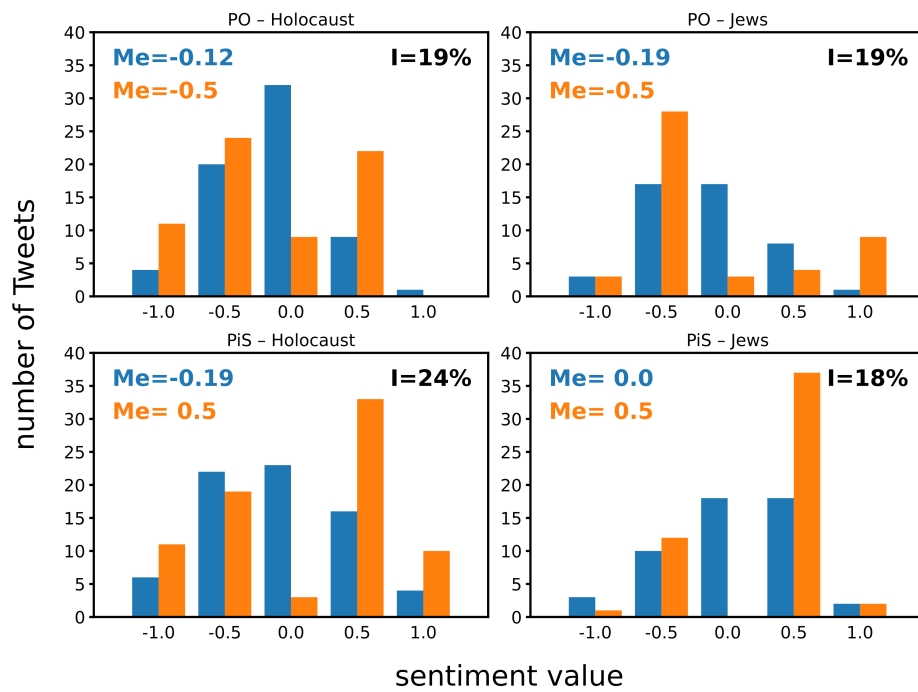
the Jews ( $p < 0.01$  and  $p < 0.05$ , respectively) – see table 3. Regarding the Holocaust, PiS’s tweet-based sentiment is thus significantly higher than that of PO.

The word-based coding does not show any significant differences ( $p > 0.05$ ). Let us note, however, that for both PiS and PO, the values are lower than in tweet-based coding, which leads to the tentative conclusion that automated coding is not sensitive enough to detect some positive tweet-based sentiment. Regarding the Jews, the tweet-based sentiment is again significantly higher for PiS, as is the word-based sentiment, even if its value is lower. Again, this leads to the tentative conclusion that word-based coding lacks sensitivity towards positive sentiment. Overall, Tweets from PiS presented a higher sentiment than those from PO and were higher when concerning the Holocaust than Jews.

Why do these two methods bring different results? The answer lies in the word-based methodological assumptions. This approach includes only word sentiment value and lacks the context of more sophisticated rhetorical figures presumably used by PiS. The same problem appears in the case of Jews, but this time, the word-based approach overlaps with tweet-based results.

### 3.4. *Hermeneutical analysis*

In order to answer the second hypothesis that the issue of the Holocaust was used for internal historical policy, we conducted a manual hermeneutical analysis of Tweets. The same sample was used as in the quantitative sentiment analysis, which allowed us to compare results obtained in both ways. We asked the following hermeneutical questions:



**Figure 3.** Histograms of Holocaust and Jews Tweets of each party. The height of the bar shows the number of Tweets in a 0.5 wide bin centred in the corresponding sentiment value (i.e., for a value of 0.5, all Tweets with sentiment values from 0.25 to 0.75 are counted). The numbers in the corners are medians of each distribution (blue and orange) and the intensity—the percentage of words with any sentiment in the whole corpus (black). The mean square error of the intensity in each case was about 0.2%. Two methods of sentiment assignment were carried out: word-based (blue) and tweet-based. (orange)

		$U$ -statistic	$p$ -value
Holocaust	word-based	2565.0	0.817
	tweet-based	1925.0	0.012
Jews	word-based	910.5	0.029
	tweet-based	821.5	0.003

**Table 3.** Results of Mann-Whitney test for the null hypothesis that PO and PiS populations of Tweet’s sentiment values are equal. **Red** highlights cases where we reject the null hypothesis and **green** – shows where we fail to reject the null hypothesis. The significance level of 0.05 is used.

- What metaphors were presented in the analysed narratives?
- To what extent was the Holocaust present in narratives about Jews and Poles? Was it associated only with Jews or extended towards Poles as well?
- Was the memory of the Holocaust accompanied by certain system of values?

For PiS, the dominant metaphors concerned the issue of historical truth and remembrance of that truth. Out of 128 PiS Tweets, 31% contained the phrases “truth”, “lies”, and “memory”. These were put in the context of contemporary events and, as such, were marked by presentism. Historical facts were presented only from one positive perspective, in which Poles were not involved in the Holocaust. Part of the context is the international misunderstanding of the Holocaust death camps, which were mostly located on Polish soil and as such named “Polish” in terms of their geolocation. PiS opposed such terminology, which in their words, resulted in white-washing the Nazi German responsibility and transferred it onto Polish society (“Polish death camps”). The actions of Polish government were presented as a positive fight for the “truth” against the “lies”, and as cultivating the “positive memory” of that truth. Both PMs, Beata Szydło (former) and Mateusz Morawiecki (current) pointed this out in their Tweets (cited in Tweets by official party account):

- (1) *Premier @MorawieckiM: Szerzenie prawdy o Holokauście to nie tylko zadanie Izraela, to również zadanie Polski. To walka o uniwersalną prawdę, która jest przestrożą dla całego świata.*

PM @MorawieckiM: Spreading the truth about the Holocaust is not only a mission for Israel, but for Poland as well. This is a fight for universal truth, which is an admonition for the whole world.

- (2) *Wicepremier @BeataSzydlo w @tvp\_info: Mówienie i poszukiwanie prawdy o polskiej historii jest bardzo ważne. Holocaust był wielką tragedią wywołaną przez Niemców. Nie możemy pozwolić na to, by kłamano, że były polskie obozy śmierci.*

Deputy PM @BeataSzydlo at @tvp\_info: Speaking of and searching for truth about Polish history is very important. The Holocaust was a great tragedy caused by the Germans. We can not allow the lie that death camps were Polish.

The second narratives strategy of PiS was marked by the so-called “Polonisation of the Holocaust” (Kucia, Duch-Dyngosz, and Magierowski 2013; Ricciardi 2020). In public debates, the term “Polocaust” was also used. A total of 24% of PiS Tweets underlined the sacrifice of Poles rescuing Jews, thus including Poles as the Holocaust victims. Simultaneously, PiS depicted Jews murdered in the Holocaust as Polish citizens. This

rhetoric pointed out that Jews lived in Poland and amongst Poles for centuries becoming more than neighbours but “brothers and sisters”, “ours”:

- (1) *Premier @BeataSzydlo w #Oświęcim: Pamiętamy o ofiarności Polaków, których poświęcenie przywracało wiarę w społeczeństwo.*  
PM @BeataSzydlo in #Oświęcim: We remember about the Polish dedication, whose sacrifice reinstated faith in the society.
- (2) *Premier @MorawieckiM: Holokaust był również niewyobrażalną polską tragedią. Wśród 6 mln polskich obywateli, którzy zginęli w czasie II WŚ, 3 mln ludzi pochodziło ze społeczności polskich Żydów.*  
PM @MorawieckiM: The Holocaust was also an unimaginable Polish tragedy. Amongst 6M Polish citizens, who died during II World War, 3M people were from the communities of Polish Jews.
- (3) *Wicepremier @BeataSzydlo w @tvn24: Musimy podkreślać, że Polacy, tak jak Żydzi, byli ofiarami. #UstawaIPN jest potrzebna.*  
Deputy PM @BeataSzydlo in @tvn24: We must emphasise that Poles, as Jews, were victims. #UstawaIPN is needed.
- (4) *Premier @MorawieckiM w #Warszawa: Nasi bracia i siostry żydowskiego pochodzenia nie byli obcy, byli swoi – to byli nasi obywatele, u siebie w domu.*  
PM @MorawieckiM in #Warszawa: Our brothers and sisters of Jewish ancestry were not strangers, they were ours – they were our citizens, they were home.

Further analysis showed a key difference between the ruling party and the opposition. At one point, PO tried to stay outside of the ruling party narrative, but was also forced to defend Poland against false claims concerning “Polish death camps”. This does not mean that PO adopted the PiS attitude of “positive antisemitism” strategy but rather that it was forced to react in relation with the general public opinion on “Polish death camps” controversy. Only 9% (11 out of 113) of their Tweets concerned false claims of Polish death camps while underlining Polish sacrifice in the Holocaust:

- (1) *Polacy to wspaniały Naród, który ma wspaniałą kartę w ratowaniu Żydów w trakcie II Wojny Światowej. Historia Polski to powód do dumy! #GermanDeathCamps*  
Poles are a great Nation, who has a magnificent history of saving Jews during II World War. Polish History is a thing to be proud of!  
#GermanDeathCamps

As mentioned before, PO did not create its own narrative strategy and stayed on the position of criticising the ruling party. It referred to contemporary political situation forty-four times, accusing the government of being in the “coalition” with anti-Semitic groups and organisations. This significant share (39% of PO Tweets) was clearly targeted towards local Polish voters. What broadened the scope of the international context was the fact that (as pointed out before) the analysed memory war and the Holocaust debate involved third-party countries e.g. the most important Polish ally – The United States. PO referred to the American government and the crisis of mutual diplomatic relation of Poland and the USA eighteen times (16% of all Tweets), placing this issue on the frontline of this memory war:

- (1) *@SchetynadlaPO w #Sejm: Dziś składamy wniosek o odwołanie rządu w związku z przyzwoleniem PiS na rasistowskie, antysemickie, kseno-*

*fobiczne hasła podczas marszu #11listopada, w #ŚwiętoNiepodległości. #WzywamyDoDymisji*

@SchetynadlaPO in #Sejm: Today, we come forward with a proposal to dismiss the government due to PiS consent for racist, anti-Semitic, xenophobic slogans during the march #11listopada, on #ŚwiętoNiepodległości. #WzywamyDoDymisji

- (2) @SlawekNeumann *ws. #ustawaIPN: Prezydent Duda podjął złą decyzję i uległ naciskom partyjnym oraz środowisk narodowców i antysemitów.*

@SlawekNeumann on #ustawaIPN: President Duda made a wrong decision and yielded party pressure and nationalist and anti-Semitic organisations.

- (3) @SchetynadlaPO w @PolsatNewsPL: *Oczekuję od Kaczyńskiego deklaracji, w której powie, że z rasistami i antysemitami nie będzie maszerował 11 listopada. Nie możemy iść razem, jeśli @pisorgpl akceptuje takich uczestników marszu i nazywa ich patriotami. <https://t.co/W8PliJ9aPc>*

SchetynadlaPO in @PolsatNewsPL: I expect from Kaczyński a declaration saying he will not be marching on 11 of November with racists and anti-Semites. We cannot go together if @pisorgpl accept such participants of the march while calling them patriots. <https://t.co/W8PliJ9aPc>

- (4) @SchetynadlaPO: *Relacje z USA są strategiczne dla Polski. Amerykanie w bardzo wyraźny sposób apelowali o szerokie konsultacje ustawy o #IPN*

@SchetynadlaPO: Relations with US are strategic for Poland. Americans very clearly called on a broad consultations on the bill amendment #IPN

#### 4. Discussion

The Tweets of two main Polish political parties, the ruling PiS and the opposition PO, were biased by emotions and were both polarised. Unfortunately, we failed to reject our first hypothesis. Although median values for both word-based and tweet-based sentiment analyses did not prove the dominance of strong sentiment, the polarisation is visible. In this research, we failed to prove the correlation between sentiment bias and Tweet outreach. Statistical sentiment analysis showed that the discourse is biased by emotions (intensity value) and polarised; however, this is in the opposite way to that which was expected. PiS used a more positive sentiment in both cases except for word-based Holocaust Tweets. We therefore suggested that the word-based method is not specific enough to give an account of the complicated ruling party narrative.

PiS was providing a positive, though dramatic, view of brave Polish people saving Jews during World War II. Such a strategy was meant to extend the view of the Polish nation also having suffered during the Holocaust. PiS underlined that Poles who were found to be helping Jews were sentenced to death. PiS narrative was based upon a triumphalist, although metaphoric style. It reversed symbolic meanings, e.g. “sacrifice” was shown as being positive since it served the nation’s greater good. This explains why PiS word-based sentiment was negative ( $Me = -0.19$ ) while the tweet-based sentiment was positive ( $Me = 0.5$ ).

We observed not only the transformation of the “pedagogy of shame” into a “heroic



pedagogy”, but also an appropriation of the Holocaust itself. PiS took over the subject of the Holocaust to legitimise its rule by providing a positive narrative about Polish moral superiority. This historical policy was coherent with the primary political message of PiS. The narrative attitude of the ruling party towards the memory war on Jewish issues was aimed at their own voters rather than against Israel. Thus, “Jews” were used as a tool in their own political propaganda in order to build positive sentiment in their political communication.

In contrast to the above, the main opposition party did not have an autonomous message. It criticised, the legislative and diplomatic activities of PiS, such as the IPN bill amendment and its international impact. Negative PO sentiment was also based upon the criticism of antisemitism in Poland and its political relationship with the government agents.

In the narrative of PiS, Jewish citizens of the interwar Second Polish Republic were presented as a part of the Polish nation, thus suggesting equality between being Jewish and Polish. In this way, PiS explicitly dodged a debate with PO and, by extension, criticism from Israel. Therefore, PiS was focused on positive values connected with history and historical knowledge (bravery of Poles, the importance of the historical truth, etc.) while PO stressed the consequences of actions taken by PiS, specifically that they were harmful for Poland and its international position regarding mainly Israel and the USA. PO had no vision of history and was dependent on the activities of PiS that it negated.

The analysed memory war and the difference in attitudes of both parties towards historical policy were highlighted in our previous findings (Gralik, Trzoss, and Werner 2021). In Poland, we proved that right-wing and conservative parties and organisations tend to be more focused on historical narratives than left-wing and opposition. Thus, our possibilities for the analysis of PO Tweets are limited as they do not have their own clear historical policy strategy. Thus, the polarisation between PiS and PO seems to be more visible. Moreover, to underline differences between both parties, it is worth mentioning that PO did not notice the change of PiS strategy towards “positive antisemitism” allowing PiS to become a frontrunner in new political communication in historical policy in Poland. A similar narrative phenomenon was observed in two-party systems, e.g. in USA (Lakoff 2014). While on some occasions (“Polish death camps” controversy) PO agrees with PiS (both parties roots are from the political centre and anticommunism), it does not mean adapting the historical policy of the ruling party.

Most of the Tweets were published on the four following occasions:

- 27th January – IPN bill amendment announcement (PiS – 42; PO – 40 Tweets)
- 27th June – IPN bill amendment revision and final vote (PiS – 5; PO – 15 Tweets)
- 14th June – National Day of the Remembrance of the Victims of German Nazi Concentration and Death Camps (PiS – 16; PO – 0 Tweets)
- 27th January – Auschwitz Liberation Anniversary; it is also the International Day of Commemoration in Memory of the Victims of the Holocaust (PiS – 14; PO – 10 Tweets)

In total, 142 Tweets (seventy-seven from PiS and sixty-five from PO) were published which means that 59% of Tweets included narratives inspired (or rather triggered) by media events. Thus, historical narratives should be perceived not as a linear perspective (as a long-term strategy) but as a set of points on a timeline (event-based). This conclusion strengthens the argument of the Holocaust debate as an internal political communication. Considering the above, we conclude that the Polish memory war in

question was indeed powered by media events in addition to being consequently built as a long-term strategy immersed in the PiS language framework.

The sentiment of the Tweets was also influenced by their origin. The amendment to the IPN bill created a more positive sentiment. The same happened in two other cases: the liberation of Auschwitz and the remembrance of the Polish victims who sacrificed themselves for the greater good. Moreover, sentiment intensity, polarisation, and further hermeneutical analysis indicated that historical narratives were not used to present facts, but were already interpreted with a prefigurative system of values, especially for the PiS Tweets concerning the Holocaust. The narratives serving contemporary political goals were brought by political media events and burdened with presentism (Kwiatkowska-Moskalewicz 2021).

The 2018 Amendment to the Institute of National Remembrance Act brought protests from Tel Aviv. The most important ally of Poland, the USA, decided to back Israel and condemned Polish government actions (also limiting official meetings with the heads of the Polish state). This was observed by the United States Commission On International Religious Freedom in its report on antisemitism in Europe (Srulovitch and Weinberg 2021) which stated that 85% of Polish Jews feel antisemitism in Poland is a “fairly big” or “very big” problem.

A practical manifestation of the historical policy pursued by the ruling party is the project “Called by Name” (“Zawołani po imieniu”), which also contains some elements of the practice of positive antisemitism as well as forms of Holocaust distortion and competitive victimhood. The Pilecki Institute in Poland, established by the ruling party and conceived as the “Polish Yad Vashem”, creates a strong and bold narrative of Poles saving Jews during World War II. The following fragment describes the essence of its already mentioned “apparent conciliation”.

“The ‘Called by Name’ project aims to do justice to the heroic acts of Poles who consciously risked their own lives and the lives of their loved ones to help Jewish friends, neighbours, and sometimes strangers, and paid the highest price.”

This narrative ignores important research findings of Polish-Jewish and Holocaust Studies in Poland<sup>6</sup>. It is historically unreliable to publicise the story of Poles rescuing Jews without mentioning that they were afraid of being denounced by their Polish neighbours. Many rescuers were also afraid to publicly admit this for the fear of retaliation from their local community.

The activities of the Pilecki Institute were named “the new wave of Holocaust Revisionism” (Grabowski 2022). The immediate cause of the political-academic dispute was the unveiling of a monument in the village of Treblinka, near one of the largest death camps, a memorial to the Polish martyrdom of Jan Maletka, a 21-year-old Polish railroad worker. The story of a Pole murdered by the Germans for giving water to Jews is based primarily on the so-called “late source”, an account by a colleague given forty-one years after the tragic event. The Treblinka ceremony held in November 2021 has drawn criticism from leading Jewish Studies scholars. The director of the Pilecki Institute, former deputy minister of culture and national heritage, Magdalena Gawin, reacted sharply to criticism via Twitter and Facebook. Scholars and journalists who criticised the November ceremony were subjected to personal insults. In 2021, Eliyana Adler, a

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<sup>6</sup>The phrase “Holocaust in Poland” is generally taken to refer to the set of individual or group decisions, actions, and processes that catalysed or contributed to the deaths of nearly three million of the approximately 3.5 million Jewish citizens of the Second Polish Republic between the years 1939 and 1945. By extension, it is also employed to refer to a similar set of decisions, actions, and processes that contributed to the survival of the remainder. In the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, the government of Poland protested the use of the phrase, objecting to what it considers the implication that Poles were primarily responsible for the Jewish deaths. It has preferred to speak of the “Holocaust in Nazi-occupied Poland”.

professor of history and Jewish studies at Pennsylvania State University, declined to accept the award of the Pilecki Institute.

Antisemitism may thus manifest itself in an instrumental usage of positive sentiment by political actors fighting their memory wars, and serves the goal of emphasising the virtues of the population. This phenomenon meets the definition of a Holocaust distortion (Grabowski 2022). Such activities include state-sponsored manipulation of Holocaust history to spread conflict, trivialisation of the complicity of individuals or organisations in the crimes of the Holocaust, and the use of Holocaust-related imagery for ideological purposes unrelated to the story (IHRA 2022). The positive sentiment of PiS towards Jews captured on Twitter is an example of the implementation of a clearly defined historical policy aimed at highlighting Polish assistance to the victims of the Holocaust. In such a positive Antisemitic perspective, Jews are presented as recipients of Polish kindness, aid and hospitality.

The Polish memory war on Polish-Jewish affairs is biased by the use of sentiment, strongly emotional words and phrases, and simultaneously polarised with the clear division along party lines. Although we proved our initial concept, detailed analyses of Tweets' context and meanings (metaphorical and symbolical) pointed out that historical discourse on Polish Twitter regarding the political memory war on the Jewish issue was characterised by two main factors – political power struggle marked by the change of course in historical policy of the newly elected government, and media events associated with political and historical anniversaries regarding Polish-Jewish history. Taking these factors into consideration, we aimed to explain discourse rhetoric, sentiment meaning and its reception. Three major narrative categories were presented:

- (1) Holocaust generalisation towards Poles
- (2) A heroic and triumphalist system of values that was responsible for positive sentiment
- (3) A historical narrative as a way of communication with voters

Our findings correlate with the latest research by Jan Grabowski and Shira Klein on Wikipedia's historical narratives on the Holocaust (Grabowski and Klein 2023). As stated in the introduction, historical memory has become a vital aspect of political life regardless of its internal or international direction. A combined sentiment analysis and detailed hermeneutical criticism proved to be a useful approach. Further research is required to analyse the narration flow between single political entities, their Israeli counterparts and Twitter followers. Such analysis should consider our findings on the possible symbolic violence of positive sentiment regarding the Jews and the specificity of the Polish memory war on the Holocaust as powered by events in the ongoing political-historical debate.

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