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Holocaust Memory on Instagram and TikTok

Abstract: The chapter examines the state of research on Holocaust memory on Instagram and TikTok. Both platforms are focused on visual content that is particularly relevant for Holocaust remembrance due to visuals' affective potential and their relevance for communicating (traumatic) experiences associated with the past. By exploring the types of Holocaust-related content and methodological approaches used by existing studies on Instagram and TikTok, the chapter aims to address the following research questions: How does existing scholarship evaluate the role of Instagram and TikTok in the context of Holocaust remembrance? What methodological approaches are used to implement such evaluations, and what components of memory ecosystems do these approaches focus on? And what are the possible gaps in scholarship that will be important to address in the future? The chapter concludes that the current research on Holocaust memory on Instagram and TikTok is characterised by the adoption of a more nuanced stance towards the role of digital platforms and their affordances in the context of remembrance. Due to limited data access and ethical considerations, most existing studies adopt qualitative approaches to studying Holocaust memory on the two platforms despite the potential of quantitative methods for generating new insights regarding digital Holocaust remembrance. Finally, the chapter discusses several important directions for future research, in particular, the importance of understanding the motivation of individuals engaging with Holocaust memory on TikTok and Instagram and the potential implications of algorithmic content curation.

1 Introduction

The rise of social media platforms has had a profound impact on how the past is remembered and interacted with around the world. Social media enables the unprecedented connectivity between producers and consumers of history-related information¹ that blends individual and collective forms of remembrance, resulting in new organisational forms of memories (e.g. memory of the multitude²).

1 Andrew Hoskins, 7/7 and Connective Memory: Interactional Trajectories of Remembering in Post-Scarcity Culture, in: *Memory Studies* 4/3 (2011), p. 269–280.

2 Andrew Hoskins, The End of Collective Memory, in: Andrew Hoskins (ed.), *Digital Memory Studies: Media Pasts in Transition*, New York 2018, p. 85–110.

Together with the ease of generating different forms of digital content dealing with the past,³ these transformations accelerate the growth in the volume of mnemonic content online.⁴ In the resulting post-scarcity⁵ memory ecosystem, characterised by the abundance of memory-related content together with “the decreasing capacity of anyone to consume it”,⁶ social media becomes an alternative space for memory-making. In this space, established forms of remembrance can be challenged, and new memory practices shaped both by online communities and platform affordances (including algorithmic systems of content curation⁷) are formed.

While the changes in the memory ecosystem affect different forms of remembrance, they are of particular importance for memories of mass atrocities and genocides. Social media can help fulfil ethical and moral obligations regarding preserving these memories, protecting victims’ dignity and enabling new possibilities for post-atrocity societies to process the traumatic past.⁸ At the same time, social media also increases the risk of challenging or undermining the mission of memorial institutions devoted to preserving memories of past atrocities.⁹ While such undermining can potentially democratise atrocity remembrance and counter

3 Roberta Bartoletti, *Memory and Social Media: New Forms of Remembering and Forgetting*, in: Bianca Maria Pirani (ed.), *Learning from Memory: Body, Memory and Technology in a Globalizing World*, Newcastle upon Tyne 2011, p. 82–111.

4 Daniel Gomes, *The Era of Information Abundance and Memory Scarcity*, in: Daniel Gomes et al. (ed.), *The Past Web: Exploring Web Archives*, Cham 2021, p. 1–3.

5 For more information on the concept of post-scarcity in the context of memory, see Hoskins, 7/7 and Hoskins, *Connective Memory*. The concept captures the profound transformation in the human capacity for capturing and preserving information about the past. It is a direct consequence of the technological advancements that facilitate the production of digital evidence of the past (ranging from personal memorabilia to collective narratives of the past) and their long-term storage.

6 Hoskins, 7/7 and *Connective Memory*, p. 269.

7 Robert Prey/Rik Smit, *From Personal to Personalized Memory: Social Media as Mnemotechnology*, in: Zizi Papacharissi (ed.), *A Networked Self and Birth, Life, Death*, London 2018, p. 209–223.

8 For examples, see Liat Steir-Livny, *Is it OK to Laugh About it Yet?*, in: *The European Journal of Humour Research* 4/4 (2016), p. 105–121; Anna Menyhért, *Digital Trauma Processing in Social Media Groups: Transgenerational Holocaust Trauma on Facebook*, in: *The Hungarian Historical Review: New Series of Acta Historica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 6/2 (2017), p. 355–376.

9 See, for instance: Daria Khlevnyuk, *Narrowcasting Collective Memory Online: ‘Liking’ Stalin in Russian Social Media*, in: *Media, Culture & Society* 41/3 (2019), p. 317–331.

systemic injustices associated with it,¹⁰ it can also amplify the instrumentalisation of the past¹¹ and its outright denialism.¹²

The case of the Holocaust is particularly illustrative in terms of possibilities and risks associated with the platform-based atrocity memory ecosystem. Due to being one of the most well-documented genocides in history and the one happening relatively recently in the Global North, the Holocaust and associated memory practices became a template against which memories of other mass atrocities are often put.¹³ The same reasons also contributed to the Holocaust becoming an instance of genocide, which is particularly strongly affected by the post-scarcity memory ecosystem. Besides the active digitisation of Holocaust-related historical materials by heritage institutions, there is a rapid growth of digital-born content about the Holocaust, including both genuine efforts to preserve and reflect on the memories of the atrocity and malicious attempts to distort or erase them.

To account for the diversity of digital Holocaust memory practices enabled by social media, existing research has looked at a broad range of platforms: from X (formerly Twitter)¹⁴ to Facebook¹⁵ to YouTube¹⁶ to Telegram.¹⁷ Many of these studies showcase opportunities enabled by social media for Holocaust remembrance, in particular, regarding the increasing integration of platforms into the communica-

10 For example, see Rose Barrowcliffe, *Closing the Narrative Gap: Social Media as a Tool to Reconcile Institutional Archival Narratives with Indigenous Counter-Narratives*, in: *Archives and Manuscripts* 49/3 (2021), p. 151–166; Seth Seet/Edson C. Tandoc Jr., *Re-meme-bering Tiananmen? From Collective Memory to Meta-Memory on TikTok*, in: *Media, Culture & Society* (2023), doi.org/10.1177/01634437231191413.

11 Mykola Makhortykh, *#NoKievNazi: Social Media, Historical Memory and Securitization in the Ukraine Crisis*, in: Victor Apryshchenko/Vlad Strukov (ed.), *Memory and Securitization in Contemporary Europe*, London 2018, p. 219–247.

12 UNESCO, *History Under Attack: Holocaust Denial and Distortion on Social Media*, Paris 2022.

13 Lea David, *Against Standardization of Memory*, in: *Human Rights Quarterly* 39/2 (2017), p. 296–319.

14 Stefania Manca, *Holocaust Memorialisation and Social Media. Investigating how memorials of former concentration camps use Facebook and Twitter*, in: Wybe Popma/Stuart Francis (ed.), *Proceedings of the 6th European Conference on Social Media*, Reading 2019, p. 189–198; Motti Neiger et al., *Tweeting the Holocaust: Social Media Discourse between Reverence, Exploitation, and Simulacra*, in: *Journal of Communication* 73/3 (2023), p. 222–234.

15 Dieter De Bruyn, *World War 2.0: Commemorating War and Holocaust in Poland through Facebook*, in: *Digital Icons* 4 (2010), p. 45–62; Eva Pfanzelter, *At the Crossroads with Public History: Mediating the Holocaust on the Internet*, in: *Holocaust Studies* 21/4 (2015), p. 250–271.

16 Mykola Makhortykh, *Nurturing the Pain: Audiovisual Tributes to the Holocaust on YouTube*, in: *Holocaust Studies* 25/4 (2019), p. 441–466; Tomasz Łysak, *Vlogging Auschwitz: New Players in Holocaust Commemoration*, in: *Holocaust Studies* 28/3 (2022), p. 377–402.

17 UNESCO, *History Under Attack*; Hendrik Gunz/Isa Schaller, *Antisemitic Narratives on YouTube and Telegram as Part of Conspiracy Beliefs about COVID-19*, in: Monika Hübscher/Sabine von Merling (ed.), *Antisemitism on Social Media*, London/New York 2022, p. 129–150.

tion and educational strategies of Holocaust heritage institutions.¹⁸ Such integration has many benefits, which range from increased content accessibility to the possibilities for reaching new audiences and enabling more participatory experiences.¹⁹ Besides institutions, social media also provides possibilities for individuals to engage with Holocaust memory and reflect on it in many creative ways.²⁰

These possibilities are contrasted by the growing amount of evidence of social media being intensively used for denying the Holocaust and spreading antisemitism. The exact forms of such activities vary from the celebration of the Holocaust and mocking its trauma to the promotion of false claims made by well-established Holocaust deniers to the propagation of antisemitic conspiracy theories.²¹ In addition to the apparent abuses of technology for undermining Holocaust memory, some social media practices can be viewed as controversial due to them being perceived as inappropriate in the context of the Holocaust. These practices range from the Holocaust being invoked in the context of modern conflicts by social media users²² to platforms being used to disseminate content such as selfies made in concentration camps.²³

This chapter aims to advance the current understanding of the relationship between social media and Holocaust memory by scrutinising existing research on Holocaust-related content hosted by two platforms: Instagram and TikTok. Unlike other social media platforms, Instagram and TikTok are distinguished by “high levels of visibility”²⁴ that is reflected both in the content hosted by the two platforms and the communication practices arising around them. The platforms’ focus on visibility makes them particularly relevant in the context of Holocaust remembrance due to the affective potential of visual content being used to communicate traumatic experiences associated with the past.

¹⁸ Stefania Manca, *Digital Holocaust Memory on Social Media: How Italian Holocaust Museums and Memorials Use Digital Ecosystems for Educational and Remembrance Practice*, in: *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 28/10 (2022), p. 1152–1179.

¹⁹ Victoria Grace Walden et al., *Recommendations for Using Social Media for Holocaust Memory and Education*, Sussex 2023, p. 16.

²⁰ Paige L. Gibson/Steve Jones, *Remediation and Remembrance: ‘Dancing Auschwitz’ Collective Memory and New Media*, in: *Journal for Communication Studies* 5/10 (2012), p. 107–131; Liat Steir-Livny, *Is it OK to Laugh About it Yet?*

²¹ UNESCO, *History Under Attack*.

²² Makhortykh, *Nurturing the Pain*.

²³ Craig Wight/Phiona Stanley, *Holocaust Heritage Digilantism on Instagram*, in: *Tourism Recreation Research* (2022), doi.org/10.1080/02508281.2022.2153994.

²⁴ Jaana Davidjants/Katrin Tiidenberg, *Activist Memory Narration on Social Media: Armenian Genocide on Instagram*, in: *New Media & Society* 24/10 (2022), p. 2194.

By focusing on these social media platforms with similar affordances,²⁵ the chapter investigates whether their infrastructural similarities result in the homogenous assessment of these platforms' impact on Holocaust remembrance. While doing so, the chapter aims to address the following research questions: How does existing scholarship evaluate the role of Instagram and TikTok in the context of Holocaust remembrance? What methodological approaches are used to implement such evaluations, and what components of memory ecosystems do these approaches focus on? And what are the possible gaps in scholarship that will be important to address in the future?

2 Holocaust Memory on Instagram

Instagram is one of the social media platforms where Holocaust heritage institutions sustain a substantial presence, together with X and Facebook.²⁶ The analysis of social media activity of Italian Holocaust heritage institutions by Manca²⁷ in 2020–2021 suggests that Instagram is the second most-used platform after Facebook regarding content produced by such institutions and user engagement with it. The exact uses of Instagram by Holocaust institutions range from hashtag campaigns²⁸ to virtual tours live-streamed through Instagram's Live feature.²⁹

The affordances of Instagram enable many possibilities for Holocaust memory. Heritage institutions used the platform to disseminate visual (e.g. photos) and audiovisual materials (e.g. testimonies) and engage with Holocaust site visitors

²⁵ The concept of platform affordance is often used in media studies, where it denotes the range of individual and collection activities enabled by material artefacts, such as certain mechanisms implemented within the platform. The exact forms of platform affordances range broadly. They can include both frontend (e.g. possibilities for users to share or upload content) and backend mechanisms (e.g. algorithmic systems selecting or ranking content for individual users). For a more detailed discussion of the concept of affordances, see Taina Bucher/Anne Helmond, *The Affordances of Social Media Platforms*, in: Jean Burgess et al. (ed.), *The SAGE Handbook of Social Media*, Thousand Oaks 2018, p. 233–253.

²⁶ Manca, *Digital Holocaust Memory on Social Media*.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Stefania Manca et al., *Exploring Tensions in Holocaust Museums' Modes of Commemoration and Interaction on Social Media*, in: *Technology in Society* 68 (2022), www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0160791X22000306

²⁹ Tobias Ebbrecht-Hartmann, *Commemorating from a Distance: The Digital Transformation of Holocaust Memory in Times of COVID-19*, in: *Media, Culture & Society* 43/6 (2021), p. 1095–1112.

posting geotagged content regarding these sites.³⁰ Besides, Instagram is frequently utilised by non-institutional users for emotional reflection on the Holocaust, often by posting infamous iconic images of the Holocaust (e.g. of gas chambers or piles of victims' belongings from Holocaust museums) together with sympathetic hashtags such as #tragic or #sadness.³¹

Instagram has also been accommodating more innovative memory formats. A particularly well-research example is *@eva.stories*, a project initiated by an Israeli media entrepreneur, Mati Kochavi, in 2019.³² *@eva.stories* constituted a digital adaptation of the diary of the Hungarian Jew Éva Heyman, who died in Auschwitz. The adaptation followed an increasingly popular approach for digital historical storytelling on social media with the content being narrated by the historical personality, Éva, and from her perspective. The diary was transformed into a set of Instagram stories, which were then published via the platform. Henig and Ebbrecht-Hartmann³³ argue that *@eva.stories* enabled different modes of media witnessing, ranging from journalistic to social media to atrocity witnessing. By doing so, the project created a new responsive space for engagement with the traumatic memory.

User selfies from Holocaust memorials constitute a distinct format of memory-related content on Instagram. While some of the selfies are used to express respect and humility regarding past suffering, in some cases, the selfies result in non-empathic statements that can be viewed as insensitive to the importance of the Holocaust.³⁴ Often, Holocaust selfies result in a backlash from other users. This

30 Maria Zalewska, Selfies from Auschwitz: Rethinking the Relationship Between Spaces of Memory and Places of Commemoration in the Digital Age, in: *Digital Icons* 18/1 (2017), p. 95–116.

31 Gemma Commane/Rebekah Potton, Instagram and Auschwitz: A Critical Assessment of the Impact Social Media has on Holocaust Representation, in: *Holocaust Studies* 25/1–2 (2019), p. 163.

32 For some studies, see Ayelet Kohn/Rachel Weissbrod, What if a Girl in the Holocaust had Instagram? Éva's Story as a Case of Indirect Translation, in: *Journal of Adaptation in Film & Performance* 13/3 (2020), p. 285–303; Liat Steir-Livny, *eva.stories*: Disrespect or a Successful Change in Holocaust Memory?, in: *Jewish Film & New Media: An International Journal* 8/2 (2020), p. 129–152; Noam Tirosch, Understanding *@eva.stories*: Holocaust Memory in the Instagram Era, in: *Jewish Film & New Media: An International Journal* 8/2 (2020), p. 217–225; Lital Henig/Tobias Ebbrecht-Hartmann, Witnessing Eva Stories: Media Witnessing and Self-Inscription in Social Media Memory, in: *New Media & Society* 24/1 (2022), p. 202–226.

33 Henig/Ebbrecht-Hartmann, Witnessing Eva Stories, p. 202–226.

34 Commane/Potton, Instagram and Auschwitz.

form of digital vigilantism³⁵ particularly often targets younger and female users and those users who post captions to selfies in languages other than English.³⁶

In terms of methodological approaches, the majority of studies investigating the relationship between Instagram and Holocaust memory tend to rely on a qualitative examination of relatively small samples of Instagram data.³⁷ Usually, the selection is made based on a hashtag (e.g. #Auschwitz³⁸), sometimes supplemented with geotag information,³⁹ the user account, for instance, of a heritage institution (or a selection of them⁴⁰) or a commemorative project (e.g. the aforementioned *@eva.stories*⁴¹). The specific analytical approaches vary from netnography⁴² to interviews⁴³ to visual and multimodal analysis.⁴⁴

3 Holocaust Memory on TikTok

In contrast to Instagram, adopting TikTok can be viewed as “one of the latest frontiers of Holocaust remembrance on social media”.⁴⁵ Its distinct features relate to the possibility of reaching younger groups of users.⁴⁶ Several heritage institutions have started integrating TikTok, in particular, in what Ebbrecht-Hartmann and Divon⁴⁷ refer to as educational (i.e. videos reiterating institutionalised educational frameworks) and visit (i.e. videos featuring personal encounters with Holocaust sites) modes. In some cases, TikTok collaborated with influencers and institutions

35 The concept refers to different forms of online vigilante activities, which can range from public shaming and trolling to crowdsourced assistance in police investigations. For an overview, see Frauke Reichl, *From Vigilantism to Digilantism?*, in: Babak Akhgar et al. (ed.), *Social Media Strategy in Policing: From Cultural Intelligence to Community Policing*, Cham 2019, p. 117–138.

36 Wight/Stanley, *Holocaust Heritage Digilantism on Instagram*.

37 For some exceptions, see UNESCO, *History Under Attack* and Wight/Stanley, *Holocaust Heritage Digilantism on Instagram*.

38 Commane/Potton, *Instagram and Auschwitz*.

39 Wight/Stanley, *Holocaust Heritage Digilantism on Instagram*.

40 Manca, *Digital Holocaust Memory on Social Media*.

41 Henig/Ebbrecht-Hartmann, *Witnessing Eva Stories*, p. 202–226.

42 Wight/Stanley, *Holocaust Heritage Digilantism on Instagram*.

43 Zalewska, *Selfies from Auschwitz*; Manca, *Digital Holocaust Memory on Social Media*.

44 Henig/Ebbrecht-Hartmann, *Witnessing Eva Stories*, p. 202–226.

45 Manca, *Digital Holocaust Memory on Social Media*, p. 1153.

46 Walden et al., *Recommendations for Using Social Media*, p. 11.

47 Tobias Ebbrecht-Hartmann/Tom Divon, *Serious TikTok: Can You Learn About the Holocaust in 60 seconds?*, in: *Digital Holocaust Memory* (blog), 24.3.2022, reframe.sussex.ac.uk/digitalholocaust-memory/2022/03/24/can-you-learn-about-the-holocaust-in-60-seconds-on-tiktok/

dealing with Holocaust-related information,⁴⁸ particularly around Holocaust anniversaries.⁴⁹ Some specific examples of such collaboration include, for instance, the addition of banners to direct users searching for Holocaust-related information to authoritative information sources (e.g. aboutholocaust.org⁵⁰) and the inclusion of links to such sources in the description of videos with Holocaust-related hashtags.

Individual influencers involved in Holocaust remembrance have been rather successful on TikTok. Their use of the platform is characterised by impressive diversity: Besides the memory modalities noted above, it also includes explanatory (focusing on presenting historical facts and evidence), responsive (focusing on countering references to the past viewed as inappropriate), testimony (focusing on Holocaust survivors sharing their experiences), and commemorative (focusing on raising awareness of the implications of the Holocaust as a historical event) modes.⁵¹

At the same time, the potential of adopting TikTok for Holocaust remembrance and education is threatened by the frequent use of the platform for promoting anti-semitic content and threatening Jewish content creators.⁵² The exact forms vary from denialist comments in response to Holocaust-related videos to antisemitic account names⁵³ to more sophisticated strategies, including the integration of anti-semitic caricatures in viral videos, using duet functions to link debunking videos with offensive references to the mass murders⁵⁴ and other forms of history-related hate speech.⁵⁵ There are also concerns about the virality of such content being amplified by the TikTok algorithms as well as the risks of automated moderation mechanisms undermining the efforts of creators in debunking the denialist claims due to them referring to such claims in their videos.⁵⁶

Besides promoting antisemitic content, some Holocaust-related memory practices on TikTok raise controversy. An example of such practices is the #POVHolo-

48 TikTok, Gegen das Vergessen: TikTok Shoah-Gedenk- und Bildungsinitiative kommt in Berlin zusammen, in: Newsroom TikTok (blog), 9.11.2021, newsroom.tiktok.com/de-de/gegen-das-vergessen-tiktok-shoah-gedenk-und-bildungsinitiative-kommt-in-berlin-zusammen

49 Eric Ebenstein/Elizabeth Kanter, Commemorating Holocaust Remembrance Day, in: Newsroom TikTok (blog), 27.1.2022, newsroom.tiktok.com/en-us/commemorating-holocaust-remembrance-day

50 Ibid.

51 Ebbrecht-Hartmann/Divon, *Serious TikTok*.

52 Walden et al., *Recommendations for Using Social Media*, p. 14.

53 Gabriel Weimann/Natalie Masri, *TikTok's Spiral of Antisemitism*, *Journalism and Media* 2/4 (2021), p. 702.

54 Tom Divon/Tobias Ebbrecht-Hartmann, *#JewishTikTok: The JewToks' Fight against Antisemitism*, in: Trevor Boffone (ed.), *TikTok Cultures in the United States*, New York 2022, p. 47–58, p. 49.

55 Also see the article from Andrea Lorenz in this anthology.

56 Divon/Ebbrecht-Hartmann, *#JewishTikTok*, p. 50.

caustChallenge, which involved content creators reenacting “fictionalized memories of Holocaust victims”.⁵⁷ For this aim, creators dressed up as Holocaust victims, used make-up to imitate wounds and retold the stories of their deaths in the Nazi camps.⁵⁸ This practice attracted substantial criticism, with assessments ranging from “trauma porn”⁵⁹ to the trivialisation of Holocaust memory.⁶⁰ At the same time, interviews with the TikTok creators involved in the practice highlighted the diverse motivations behind such practices: despite the above-mentioned criticism, a number of creators noted that they did not intend to disrespect Holocaust victims and, instead, wanted to be involved in Holocaust remembrance and discussion.⁶¹

The methodological approaches for studying Holocaust memory on TikTok share many similarities with related research on Instagram. Qualitative content analysis approaches are prevalent, often focusing on the content associated with a specific hashtag (e.g. #POVHolocaustChallenge⁶²) or investigating Holocaust-related videos published by a selection of heritage institutions.⁶³ In some cases, qualitative studies go beyond content analysis and employ interviews or questionnaires to inquire about the motivations and strategies of content creators.⁶⁴

A few exceptions from the predominantly qualitative scholarship on Holocaust memory and TikTok are constituted by studies⁶⁵ aiming to systematically collect data based on a selection of keywords, including the ones related to antisemitic claims (e.g. some terms related to the Holocaust such as “six million”⁶⁶) or to history education (e.g. “#HistoryTikTok”⁶⁷). While not focusing exclusively on Holocaust memory and, instead, investigating the broader societal phenomena, these more systematic studies provide important insights regarding, for instance, the increas-

57 Tom Divon/Tobias Ebbrecht-Hartmann, *Performing Death and Trauma? Participatory Mem(e)ory and the Holocaust in TikTok #PovChallenges*, AoIR Selected Papers of Internet Research (2022), p. 1, doi.org/10.5210/spirv2022i0.12995.

58 Robbert-Jan Adriaansen, *Historical Analogies and Historical Consciousness: User-Generated History Lessons on TikTok*, in: Mario Carretero et al. (ed.), *History Education in the Digital Age*, Cham 2022, p. 43.

59 Divon/Ebbrecht-Hartmann, *Performing Death and Trauma?*, p. 1.

60 Adriaansen, *Historical Analogies and Historical Consciousness*, p. 43.

61 Tobias Ebbrecht-Hartmann/Tom Divon, *Shoah Commemoration and Education on TikTok*, American Jewish Committee Berlin, Berlin 2024, p. 22.

62 Divon/Ebbrecht-Hartmann, *Performing Death and Trauma?*

63 Ebbrecht-Hartmann/Divon, *Shoah Commemoration and Education on TikTok*.

64 For examples, see Divon/Ebbrecht-Hartmann, *#JewishTikTok*; Ebbrecht-Hartmann/Divon, *Shoah Commemoration and Education on TikTok*.

65 For instance, Weimann/Masri, *TikTok's Spiral of Antisemitism*; Adriaansen, *Historical Analogies and Historical Consciousness*.

66 Weimann/Masri, *TikTok's Spiral of Antisemitism*.

67 Adriaansen, *Historical Analogies and Historical Consciousness*.

ing presence of antisemitic content over time and the inability of ByteDance to eradicate it from the platform.⁶⁸

4 Conclusions

The chapter demonstrates that the current research regarding digital Holocaust memory on TikTok and Instagram tends to adopt a nuanced understanding of the role of social media platforms in the context of atrocity remembrance. In contrast to earlier tendencies to adopt more extreme interpretations of the role of technology in relation to Holocaust memory – usually leaning either towards techno-optimism or fear-mongering – the present state of research highlights that social media hosts diverse memory practices which have different implications for how the Holocaust is remembered. These practices range from the digitisation of educational content by institutions⁶⁹ to activist resistance to Holocaust denial and antisemitism⁷⁰ to the production of comments spreading hate and denying the Holocaust.⁷¹

Under these circumstances, the question of nurturing social media practices which are beneficial for Holocaust remembrance becomes of paramount importance. A recommendation here would be to facilitate the documentation and exchange of Holocaust-related educational tools and programs emerging on social media platforms.⁷² A related question regards the long-term preservation of digital memory practices, particularly considering the possibility of them disappearing due to the changes in platform ownership, which can result in the transformation of moderation or data preservation policies, or external threats, including the risks of malicious attacks against memorial projects that can potentially result in their destruction. The prevention of such destruction, for instance, by developing an online archive of digital atrocity memorialisation,⁷³ is integral both for advancing the understanding of how digital Holocaust memory practices evolve over time and for realising their societal functions.

68 Weimann/Masri, TikTok's Spiral of Antisemitism.

69 Manca et al., Exploring Tensions.

70 Divon/Ebbrecht-Hartmann, #JewishTikTok.

71 Weimann/Masri, TikTok's Spiral of Antisemitism.

72 Walden et al., Recommendations for Using Social Media, p. 8.

73 For the discussion of the potential implementation and challenges of such an archive, see: Daniel Bultmann et al., Digital Archive of Memorialization of Mass Atrocities (DAMMA) Workshop Whitepaper, New Haven 2022; Eve M. Zucker et al., AI and Archives: How can Technology Help Preserve Holocaust Heritage Under the Risk of Disappearance?, in: *Eastern European Holocaust Studies* 1/2 (2023), p. 357–363.

Different qualitative techniques primarily constitute the methodological approaches used to study Holocaust-related content on Instagram and TikTok. These techniques range from close reading of static and dynamic platform content to interviews with the content creators. The application of quantitative methods remains relatively rare, albeit a few recent studies applied quantitative content analysis and topic modelling, particularly regarding TikTok.⁷⁴ Such a methodological skewness can be attributed to the traditional reliance of memory studies research on more qualitative approaches originating in the humanities⁷⁵ and to the difficulties with large-scale processing of multimedia content. In the case of Instagram, the use of quantitative approaches is further complicated by the difficulties with retrieving large volumes of data. Following several major scandals (e.g. Cambridge Analytica) regarding the non-ethical use of user data, Meta has limited the amount of data that can be retrieved via its application programming interface (API) and academic community-oriented services (e.g. CrowdTangle⁷⁶). For instance, the current version of the Instagram API⁷⁷ provides access only to data from certain types of user accounts (e.g. Business accounts) and a rather limited number of hashtag searches while data scraping from the platform is prohibited.

In the case of TikTok, with its more accessible API, there is more potential for large-scale memory-related research, in particular, considering the recent advancements in computer vision. The combination of these methodological advancements and data accessibility can offer important insights regarding the consistency of observations about Holocaust representation and niche forms of Holocaust-related content on TikTok, which may otherwise be omitted due to the limited scaling of qualitative approaches. At the same time, it is important to consider the ethical and legal aspects of using large volumes of social media data, in particular, regarding

74 Weimann/Masri, *TikTok's Spiral of Antisemitism*; Adriaansen, *Historical Analogies and Historical Consciousness*.

75 It is worth noting that a growing number of studies examine perspectives of integrating quantitative approaches in the memory studies toolkit. For examples, see: Ildikó Barna/Árpád Knap, *Analysis of the Thematic Structure and Discursive Framing in Articles about Trianon and the Holocaust in the Online Hungarian Press Using LDA Topic Modelling*, in: *Nationalities Papers* 51/3 (2023), p. 603–621; Helle Strandgaard Jensen et al., *Digital Methods in Memory Studies: A Beginner's Guide to Scalable Reading of Twitter Data*, in: *Memory Studies* (2023), doi.org/10.1177/17506980231197126; Mykola Makhortykh et al., *Past Is Another Resource: Remembering the 70th Anniversary of the Victory Day on LiveJournal*, in: *Nationalities Papers* 49/2 (2021), p. 375–388.

76 The access via CrowdTangle was finally shut down in August 2024, Rebecca Bellan, *Meta axed CrowdTangle, a tool for tracking disinformation. Critics claim its replacement has just '1% of the features'*, in: *TechCrunch*, 15.8.2024, techcrunch.com/2024/08/15/meta-shut-down-crowdtangle-a-tool-for-tracking-disinformation-heres-how-its-replacement-compares/

77 In February 2024.

the necessity to ensure that such large-scale information retrieval and processing is compatible with national and EU regulations and is conducted ethically.

In terms of gaps in the current state of scholarship, there are several important directions which future research on Holocaust remembrance on TikTok and Instagram can benefit from pursuing. Despite the growing awareness about diverse forms of Holocaust-related content available via social media platforms, currently there is relatively little understanding of how individuals actually engage with such content and of their motivation to do so. Only a few recent studies⁷⁸ look into this issue and highlight the interest in historical details, empathy for victims, and desire to prevent the repetition of atrocities as important factors of Holocaust memory engagement online. To a certain degree, the same limitations are applied to the research on Holocaust-related content creators, albeit more studies have been conducted on this topic; however, with a few exceptions,⁷⁹ most of these studies focus on institutional actors.

Another important direction for future research relates to the current lack of understanding of the role of algorithmic platform affordances in the context of Holocaust remembrance. Present research tends to focus on affordances used for content generation and modification, while the role of algorithmic mechanisms used to distribute and moderate platform content remains under-studied.⁸⁰ However, the latter mechanisms are crucial for understanding what information about the Holocaust gains more visibility via platforms and what content platform users are exposed to.

Investigating algorithmic curation can be challenging due to its opacity and complexity. For instance, the TikTok algorithm considers multiple signals regarding user engagement with the platform content (e.g. viewing time, liking, and sharing) as well as information about content generally trending across the platform.⁸¹ Under these circumstances, the selection of content for individual users can vary broadly and is constantly changing over time, thus making it difficult to determine which Holocaust-related content is prioritised by the platform algorithms for

78 For instance: Stefania Manca/Marcello Passarelli, *Social Media as Lieux for the Convergence of Collective Trajectories of Holocaust Memory – A Study of Online Users in Germany and Italy*, in: *Heritage* 6/9 (2023), p. 6377–6396.

79 For example, Divon/Ebbrecht-Hartmann, #JewishTikTok.

80 For a few exceptions, see: Jennifer Krueckeberg, *Youth and Algorithmic Memory: Co-producing Personal Memory on Instagram*, in: Matthias Rauterberg (ed.), *Culture and computing. Interactive culture heritage and arts: 9th International Conference, HCII 2021, proceedings, part I*, Cham 2021, p. 253–264, [dx.doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-77431-8_16](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-77431-8_16); Divon/Ebbrecht-Hartmann, #JewishTikTok.

81 Daniel Klug et al., *Trick and Please. A Mixed-Method Study on User Assumptions about the TikTok Algorithm*, in: *Proceedings of the 13th ACM Web Science Conference 2021*, New York 2021, p. 84–92.

specific users. This obscurity is of particular concern regarding the possibility of platform algorithms exposing users to a skewed representation of the Holocaust without them being fully aware of it, especially if such exposure results in the consistent prioritisation of antisemitic or denialist content.

There are several approaches which can facilitate understanding of the impact of algorithmic platform curation on Holocaust memory. One approach regards the adoption of algorithm auditing, a research methodology on the functionality of algorithmic systems. This approach has been applied to study the functionality of algorithmic curation in the context of Holocaust-related information for different platforms and online services ranging from search engines⁸² to chatbots.⁸³ Examples of auditing techniques include the simulation of user engagement with the platform's algorithms via automated agents deployed in a controlled environment⁸⁴ or the manual generation of algorithmic inputs under controlled conditions.⁸⁵

Expanded access to information about the functionality of algorithmic curation systems and, potentially, the user engagement with these systems can also help researchers understand how platform algorithms interact with information about the Holocaust. In the case of the European Union, for instance, the introduction of the Digital Services Act pursues, among other goals, the increased transparency of algorithmic systems used by large platforms and expanded access to platform data for researchers. While it is still too early to determine whether the Act's provision will be sufficient to enable a better understanding of the impact of algorithmic curation on Holocaust memory, it is an important development that can facilitate research on digital Holocaust remembrance and ensure that platform algorithms will support and not undermine the individual and institutional efforts for preserving Holocaust memory.

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82 Mykola Makhortykh et al., Can an Algorithm Remember the Holocaust? Comparative Algorithm Audit of Holocaust-Related Information on Search Engines, in: Iris Groschek/Habbo Knoch (ed.), Digital Memory: Neue Perspektiven für die Erinnerungsarbeit, Göttingen 2023, p. 79–93.

83 Elizaveta Kuznetsova et al., In Generative AI we Trust: Can Chatbots Effectively Verify Political Information?, in: arXiv preprint (20.12.2023), arxiv.org/abs/2312.13096

84 Makhortykh et al., Can an Algorithm Remember the Holocaust?

85 Kuznetsova et al., In Generative AI we Trust. For the use of manual algorithmic inputs, see also the contribution in this volume investigating the influence of Instagram's and TikTok's algorithm on the distribution of Holocaust content.

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