

HISTORICAL SCIENCES

DIGITAL MEMORY LANDSCAPES: THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN CONTEMPORARY MEMORY POLITICS

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Abstract

The proliferation of digital media has fundamentally transformed how historical events and ideological narratives are constructed, contested, and transmitted across societies. This article examines the role of social media platforms in contemporary memory politics, with a particular focus on how state and non-state actors utilize digital communication tools to shape collective memory and historical consciousness. Through analysis of the Russo-Ukrainian War since 2014 and its broader implications for European democracy, this study demonstrates how social media has become a critical battleground for memory wars that extend far beyond national borders, and how digital platforms have become key battlegrounds in hybrid warfare. The research acknowledges computational methods as valuable tools for future studies, particularly in examining how algorithmic systems may amplify certain historical narratives while suppressing others, potentially altering the traditional landscape of memory politics. The findings suggest that digital platforms have created new forms of “connective memory” that challenge established institutional frameworks for historical transmission, requiring urgent attention from policymakers and scholars concerned with democratic resilience and information integrity.

Keywords: digital memory, social media, memory politics, disinformation, collective memory, algorithmic amplification

1. Introduction: The Digital Transformation of Memory Politics

The relationship between memory and politics has undergone a profound transformation in the digital age. Traditional sites of memory – museums, monuments, and official historical narratives – have been supplemented and sometimes challenged by dynamic, participatory digital memory landscapes where historical narratives are continuously constructed, contested, and reconstructed [38]. Social media platforms have emerged as critical spaces where collective memory is negotiated, not through institutional gatekeepers, but through algorithmic systems that prioritize engagement, virality, and user interaction over historical accuracy or democratic discourse.

This transformation is particularly evident in the context of geopolitical conflicts, where digital platforms become theaters for what can be termed “memory wars” – systematic attempts to control historical narratives to legitimize political actions and shape public opinion. The politics of memory has entered a new phase in the digital age, where social media platforms serve as primary arenas for contesting the past.

These platforms not only democratize memory production but also enable its manipulation at an unprecedented scale. The Russian-Ukrainian conflict, which escalated dramatically in 2014 with the annexation of Crimea and reached unprecedented intensity with the full-scale invasion of February 2022, provides a paradigmatic case study for understanding how social media reshapes the politics of memory in the contemporary era.

The stakes of these digital memory wars extend far beyond the immediate participants. As the European Parliament noted in its 2025 resolution condemning Russian disinformation tactics, the manipulation of historical narratives through digital platforms poses direct threats to democratic institutions, social cohesion, and international stability [11]. Understanding how social media platforms facilitate the weaponization of memory is therefore not merely an academic exercise but an urgent practical concern for maintaining democratic resilience in an interconnected world.

2. Theoretical Framework: From Collective Memory to Connective Memory

The study of memory politics has evolved significantly since Maurice Halbwachs first introduced the

concept of collective memory in the early twentieth century. Halbwachs argued that memory is inherently social, constructed through group interactions and sustained by collective frameworks of meaning [13]. This foundational insight established memory studies as a field concerned with how societies remember and forget, and how these processes serve political and social functions.

Pierre Nora's concept of "lieux de mémoire" (sites of memory) further developed this understanding by identifying specific locations, objects, and practices through which collective memory is institutionalized and transmitted across generations [32]. Traditional memory politics operated primarily through these institutionalized sites – national museums, commemorative ceremonies, educational curricula, and official historical narratives that were carefully curated by state institutions and cultural elites.

However, the digital revolution has fundamentally disrupted these traditional frameworks. Andrew Hoskins introduces the concept of "connective memory" to describe how digital media creates new forms of memory that are more immediate, participatory, and volatile than traditional collective memory [14]. Unlike collective memory, which operates through stable social frameworks and institutional mediation, connective memory emerges through networked interactions that can rapidly shift, adapt, and transform in response to real-time events and algorithmic amplification.

José van Dijck's analysis of "platformized memory" reveals how social media platforms shape what societies remember and forget through their underlying technological architectures [37]. Platform algorithms determine which content gains visibility, how long it remains accessible, and which audiences encounter it. This technological mediation introduces new forms of power relations into memory politics, where platform companies and algorithm designers acquire unprecedented influence over collective historical consciousness.

The challenge is twofold: countering malicious historical revisionism while fostering inclusive narratives that promote reconciliation. This requires what Olick (2007) terms "the politics of regret" – a process of acknowledging past traumas, including those inflicted by the current aggression, while actively building forward-looking collective identities [33]. This involves facilitating national dialogues, supporting diverse historical research, and integrating multiple regional perspectives into a shared, yet nuanced, understanding of Ukrainian history that can sustain democratic institutions and peaceful coexistence.

The implications of this shift are profound. Traditional memory politics was characterized by relatively stable power structures where cultural and political elites controlled the production and dissemination of historical narratives. Digital memory politics, by contrast, is characterized by constant flux, where state actors, non-state organizations, and individual users compete for attention and influence within algorithmic systems that operate according to commercial rather than democratic logic.

3. Social Media as Infrastructure for Memory Wars

Social media platforms function as more than neutral conduits for information; they constitute the fundamental infrastructure through which contemporary memory wars are conducted. Understanding their role requires examining both their technological affordances and their integration into broader strategies of political communication and influence.

3.1 Algorithmic Amplification and Historical Narratives

The algorithmic systems that govern social media platforms prioritize content based on engagement metrics – likes, shares, comments, and time spent viewing – rather than accuracy, context, or democratic value. This creates what can be termed "viral memory," where historical narratives that provoke strong emotional responses gain disproportionate visibility and influence [34]. Controversial, emotionally charged, or simplified historical claims often outcompete nuanced, contextual accounts in the competition for algorithmic attention.

This dynamic has profound implications for how historical events are remembered and understood. Research on disinformation networks reveals that false or misleading historical narratives often spread faster and wider than accurate information because they are specifically designed to trigger emotional responses that drive engagement [15]. The result is a memory landscape where provocative falsehoods can achieve greater reach and impact than careful historical scholarship.

The Russo-Ukrainian War provides numerous examples of this phenomenon. Russian narratives portraying Ukraine's government as "fascist" or "Nazi" – drawing on selective and distorted interpretations of World War II history – have achieved viral spread precisely because they evoke strong emotional responses and connect to existing cultural memories [35]. These narratives gain algorithmic amplification not because of their historical accuracy, but because they generate the kind of engagement that platform algorithms are designed to promote.

3.2 Platform Diversity and Audience Segmentation

Different social media platforms create distinct environments for memory politics, each with its own technological affordances, user demographics, and cultural norms. Understanding the role of social media in memory politics requires recognizing this platform diversity and its implications for how historical narratives circulate and evolve.

Facebook and Twitter (now X) function as primary spaces for political discourse and news consumption, where historical narratives are embedded within broader political conversations. These platforms facilitate rapid real-time discussion but also enable the spread of misinformation through their emphasis on immediate sharing and response. YouTube provides space for longer-form content, including documentary-style videos that can present complex historical narratives with greater apparent credibility. Instagram and TikTok prioritize visual and video content, creating new forms of historical communication through

memes, short videos, and visual storytelling that can powerfully shape emotional connections to historical events.

Regional platform preferences add another layer of complexity. Telegram and Instagram have greater prevalence in Eastern European countries, while Twitter and Facebook dominate in Western Europe [6]. This geographic segmentation means that memory wars must adapt to different technological environments and cultural contexts, creating opportunities for targeted influence campaigns that exploit platform-specific vulnerabilities.

3.3 State and Non-State Actors in Digital Memory Contests

The democratization of content creation enabled by social media platforms has transformed the landscape of actors involved in memory politics. Traditional memory politics was dominated by state institutions, educational systems, and cultural organizations with the resources and authority to shape official historical narratives. Digital memory politics involves a much more diverse ecosystem of actors, including state-sponsored media organizations, civil society groups, activist networks, and individual users who can all potentially influence collective memory through their online activities.

State actors have adapted to this new environment by developing sophisticated digital communication strategies that combine traditional propaganda techniques with platform-specific approaches designed to maximize algorithmic reach. The Russian state's use of RT (Russia Today) and Sputnik as digital media outlets exemplifies this approach, combining professional production values with content specifically designed for viral spread across social media platforms. These outlets produce historical content that appears journalistic while advancing specific ideological interpretations of events.

Non-state actors play equally important roles in digital memory contests. Civil society organizations, activist groups, and individual content creators can challenge official narratives and provide alternative perspectives on historical events. Ukrainian civil society has demonstrated distinctive creativity in using social media to document war crimes, preserve cultural heritage, and counter Russian disinformation through citizen journalism and grassroots organizing efforts [36].

However, the participatory nature of digital platforms also creates opportunities for malicious actors to manipulate memory through coordinated inauthentic behavior. Bot networks, sock puppet accounts, and coordinated influence campaigns can artificially amplify certain historical narratives while suppressing others, creating false impressions of public opinion and historical consensus.

4. The Case of Ukraine and Russia: Digital Memory Wars in Practice

The war of Russia against Ukraine since 2014 provides a comprehensive contemporary example of how social media platforms are used to conduct memory wars with geopolitical consequences. This conflict demonstrates how digital platforms can be weaponized

to reshape historical consciousness in service of political objectives, with implications that extend far beyond the immediate participants.

4.1 Historical Foundations and Digital Adaptations

The Russian-Ukrainian memory conflict builds on long-standing disputes about Ukrainian identity, the Soviet legacy, and interpretations of World War II. Nowhere are these contestations more visible than in Donbas – a region which, as shown in Balykin's study, was systematically integrated into the Soviet ideological framework through language policies, the suppression of non-Russian identities, and selective memorialization of wartime events [2]. These Soviet memory infrastructures have been co-opted and reanimated by contemporary Russian disinformation campaigns targeting the region. These historical disagreements have existed for decades, but social media platforms have provided new mechanisms for their expression and contestation that fundamentally alter their political significance.

Russian digital narratives consistently frame Ukraine as an artificial state created by external forces, drawing on imperial Russian and Soviet historical interpretations that deny Ukrainian political legitimacy. These narratives portray Ukrainian independence as a historical aberration and current Ukrainian leadership as illegitimate heirs to Nazi collaborators during World War II. The power of these narratives lies not in their historical accuracy – they involve significant distortions and selective omissions – but in their emotional resonance and their strategic deployment across multiple digital platforms.

Ukrainian counter-narratives emphasize historical continuity of Ukrainian national identity, the legitimacy of Ukrainian state institutions, and the characterization of Russian actions as imperial aggression that echoes historical patterns of Russian domination. Ukrainian digital communications have particularly emphasized the documentation of Russian war crimes and the preservation of Ukrainian cultural heritage as it comes under attack [36].

The digital environment allows both sides to present these competing narratives to global audiences in ways that were previously impossible. Historical arguments that might once have remained within academic or policy circles can now reach millions of people worldwide through viral social media content, fundamentally altering the geopolitical stakes of memory politics.

4.2 Techniques and Strategies in Digital Memory Manipulation

Analysis of Russian-Ukrainian digital memory contests reveal sophisticated strategies that combine historical manipulation with platform-specific techniques designed to maximize reach and impact. These strategies reflect techniques categorized by NATO StratCom COE as “reflexive control” operations and information influence tactics, which aim to anticipate and manipulate the adversary's reactions by controlling information framing and timing [16; 18].

These strategies represent innovations in political communication that have implications beyond this specific conflict.

Selective historical citation involves extracting specific events, quotes, or images from their historical context and presenting them in ways that support contemporary political arguments. Russian social media content frequently uses images from World War II, Stalin-era Soviet history, and early post-Soviet transition to create emotional connections between historical events and current politics. Ukrainian content similarly draws on historical images of resistance, cultural achievements, and previous Russian invasions to frame current events within longer historical patterns.

Emotional amplification techniques leverage the psychological impact of historical imagery and narrative to create strong emotional responses that drive engagement and sharing. Content that combines historical references with contemporary imagery – such as comparing current Ukrainian leadership to historical independence fighters or current Russian actions to historical invasions – achieves viral spread because it connects abstract political events to emotionally powerful historical memories.

Multimedia integration allows complex historical narratives to be presented through combinations of text, images, video, and interactive content that can convey more information and create stronger emotional impacts than traditional forms of political communication.

TikTok videos that combine historical footage with contemporary commentary, Instagram posts that juxtapose historical and contemporary images, and YouTube documentaries that present lengthy historical arguments in accessible formats all represent innovations in how historical narratives can be communicated through digital platforms.

Cross-platform coordination enables the same historical narratives to be adapted for different technological environments and audience preferences. A single historical argument might be presented as a detailed YouTube video, summarized in Twitter threads, visualized through Instagram graphics, and simplified into TikTok content, allowing it to reach diverse audiences across multiple platforms while maintaining narrative consistency.

The comprehensive body of work from the NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence offers unparalleled insights into the complexities of contemporary information warfare, disinformation, and strategic communication. Integrating these findings into an analysis of the War in Donbas or Russian influence operations significantly elevates the understanding of the informational dimension of modern conflict.

Table 1

Key Manipulative Techniques and Information Warfare Tactics (Derived from NATO StratCom COE)

Technique/ Tactic	Description	Strategic Objective	Relevant NATO StratCom COE Publications
Firehose of Falsehoods	Rapid, continuous, and overwhelming dissemination of a high volume of contradictory or false information across multiple channels.	Overwhelm the information space, create confusion, erode trust in objective reality, and prevent effective counter-narratives.	[21]
Narrative Weaponization	Exploiting existing grievances, societal divisions, or historical narratives to sow discord, polarize populations, and justify aggressive actions.	Undermine social cohesion, weaken internal resilience, and create a permissive environment for external interference.	[20; 25]
Robotrolling/ Bot Networks	Automated or semi-automated accounts (bots, trolls) used to amplify specific messages, create artificial consensus, or harass dissenting voices.	Manipulate public opinion, distort perception of support, silence opposition, and create a false sense of legitimacy.	[24; 28]
Deepfakes/ Synthetic Media	Use of AI to generate highly realistic but fabricated audio, video, or images to create convincing disinformation.	Deceive audiences, discredit individuals/institutions, create plausible deniability, and blur the lines between truth and falsehood.	[27; 28]
Proxy Media Networks	Utilizing ostensibly independent or local media outlets, often with hidden ties, to disseminate state-sponsored narratives.	Achieve plausible deniability, bypass direct censorship, and appear to be organic or independent sources of information.	[29; 30]
Exploitation of Cognitive Bi- ases	Tailoring messages to leverage inherent human tendencies like confirmation bias, availability heuristic, or tribalism.	Enhance message resonance, reinforce existing beliefs, and make disinformation more difficult to challenge rationally.	[17]
Attribution De- nial/ Obfuscation	Employing techniques (e.g., false flags, third-party actors, cyber anonymity) to obscure the origin of malicious information operations.	Avoid accountability, reduce deterrence, and enable continuous operations without direct consequence.	[23]

Russian Information Warfare Tactics

Early analyses of Russian information warfare, as documented by the NATO StratCom COE, often described overt propaganda and disinformation campaigns aimed at creating false narratives and discrediting opponents [21]. However, subsequent reports reveal a significant evolution in these tactics. Russia has moved beyond simple propaganda to sophisticated, multi-platform, and often covert influence operations. This includes the strategic deployment of techniques such as the “firehose of falsehoods,” which overwhelms the information space with a high volume of contradictory or false information, making it difficult for audiences to discern truth from fiction [21].

More recent publications highlight increasingly advanced methods, such as the use of AI-generated content, deepfakes, and the establishment of elaborate proxy media networks [24; 29; 30]. For instance, “The Doppelgänger Case: Assessment of Platform Regulation on the EU Disinformation Environment” specifically details the creation of fake websites meticulously designed to mimic legitimate news outlets, a tactic that represents a shift towards mimicry and infiltration rather than just overt messaging [29]. This evolution signifies a fundamental shift in the context of information warfare: from a focus on mere message dissemination to a more insidious goal of cognitive manipulation and narrative capture. It implies that traditional counter-propaganda efforts, such as simple fact-checking, are increasingly insufficient. Effective defense against these evolving threats requires a proactive, multi-layered approach that integrates digital forensics, platform-level interventions, and comprehensive strategies to build societal resilience against sophisticated psychological operations. This underscores the urgent need for adaptive strategic communication frameworks that can anticipate and counter emerging threats, rather than merely reacting to past ones.

The strategic exploitation of societal divisions and cognitive biases forms another cornerstone of Russia’s information campaigns. Publications like “The manipulative techniques of the Russian information campaign against Ukraine” (2015) [17] identify specific psychological tactics employed in these operations. These techniques are not randomly applied; they are strategically deployed to exploit pre-existing societal divisions, grievances, and inherent cognitive biases, such as confirmation bias or the availability heuristic [17]. The “Kremlin Communication Strategy for Russian Audiences Before and After the Full-Scale Invasion of Ukraine” (2023) [25] further elaborates on how Russian narratives are meticulously tailored to resonate with specific vulnerable groups or to amplify existing fault lines within target societies. This is a deliberate effort to polarize and destabilize, rather than merely persuade. The implication is that information warfare is not just about spreading falsehoods, but about weaponizing societal vulnerabilities. Countering this requires not only debunking lies but also addressing the underlying societal issues that make populations susceptible. This necessitates a whole-of-society approach to strategic communications, focusing on fostering critical

thinking, media literacy, and social cohesion as core defensive measures against targeted influence operations. This shifts the focus from external threat to internal resilience, recognizing that a fragmented society is inherently more vulnerable to malicious influence.

4.3 Impact Beyond Ukraine and Russia

The Russian-Ukrainian digital memory war has implications that extend far beyond the immediate participants, demonstrating how social media-mediated memory politics can influence international relations, domestic politics in third countries, and global conversations about democracy and authoritarianism.

European Union responses to the conflict have been significantly shaped by digital narratives about historical precedents and contemporary parallels. Russian attempts to frame the conflict as a continuation of World War II anti-fascist struggle have found some resonance in European countries with complex relationships to their own World War II histories. Conversely, Ukrainian narratives emphasizing parallels between Russian actions and historical patterns of imperial aggression have strengthened European support for sanctions and military assistance.

The conflict has also influenced domestic political debates within European Union member states. Far-right and far-left political movements have amplified certain Russian historical narratives to support their opposition to European Union policies on sanctions, military aid, and refugee assistance. This demonstrates how digital memory wars can create opportunities for foreign influence on domestic political processes through the strategic deployment of historical arguments that resonate with existing political divisions.

5. Technological Infrastructure and Algorithmic Mediation

Understanding the role of social media in memory politics requires examining the technological systems that govern how historical content is created, distributed, and encountered by audiences. The infrastructure of digital platforms is not neutral; it embeds particular assumptions about communication, community, and knowledge that fundamentally shape how memory politics operates in digital environments.

5.1 Algorithmic Curation and Historical Consciousness

Social media algorithms function as invisible mediators that determine which historical narratives gain visibility and which remain obscure. These algorithmic systems operate according to engagement-driven logic that prioritizes content likely to generate user interaction – likes, shares, comments, and extended viewing time – over content that might be more accurate, nuanced, or democratically valuable.

This algorithmic logic creates systematic biases in how historical narratives circulate through digital spaces. Content that provokes strong emotional responses, confirms existing beliefs, or simplifies complex historical events consistently outperforms content that presents nuanced analysis, acknowledges uncertainty, or challenges popular misconceptions. The result is what can be termed “algorithmic memory,”

where the technological systems that govern information distribution become powerful shapers of collective historical consciousness.

Research on artificial intelligence and social media reveals that these algorithmic systems are increasingly sophisticated in their ability to identify and amplify content that generates engagement [8]. Machine learning systems can identify historical narratives that are likely to provoke responses from specific audience segments and prioritize their distribution accordingly. This creates feedback loops where successful historical manipulations become templates for future influence campaigns.

The implications extend beyond individual platform algorithms to the broader ecosystem of digital memory. Search engine algorithms determine which historical sources appear in response to specific queries. Recommendation systems shape which historical content users encounter through suggested videos, related articles, and targeted advertising. Content moderation systems decide which historical claims are acceptable and which violate platform policies. Each of these technological systems embeds particular assumptions about historical truth, democratic discourse, and legitimate political expression.

5.2 Artificial Intelligence and Synthetic Historical Content

The integration of artificial intelligence technologies into social media platforms has created new possibilities for memory manipulation that represent qualitative advances beyond traditional propaganda techniques. Generative artificial intelligence can create realistic images, videos, and audio content that appears to document historical events but is entirely fabricated.

So-called “deepfake” technologies enable the creation of synthetic historical footage that can show historical figures saying or doing things they never actually said or did. More subtly, AI-generated content can create seemingly authentic historical documents, photographs, or testimonials that support particular political narratives. The sophistication of these technologies means that distinguishing authentic historical evidence from synthetic content requires specialized technical knowledge that a comprehensive social media user does not possess.

The Russo-Ukrainian War has witnessed numerous examples of synthetic historical content designed to support political arguments. Fabricated historical documents claiming to show Ukrainian collaboration with Nazi forces, altered photographs that remove or add historical details, and synthetic audio recordings attributed to historical figures have all circulated through social media platforms with significant impact on public perceptions of historical events.

Beyond outright fabrication, artificial intelligence technologies enable more sophisticated forms of historical manipulation through selective editing, contextual manipulation, and synthetic amplification. AI systems can identify historical footage or images that support particular narratives and automatically generate commentary, context, or supplementary content that frames them in politically useful ways. They can also identify and amplify user-generated content that aligns with

strategic objectives while suppressing content that challenges preferred narratives.

Social media platforms have become a primary battleground for influence operations, evolving rapidly from simple message amplification to a complex, industrialized domain of manipulation. Early reports, such as “The Black Market for Social Media Manipulation” (2019) [22], highlighted the nascent existence of services for social media manipulation. Subsequent publications, including “Social Media Manipulation 2022-2023” [26] and “Social Media Manipulation for Sale: Experiment on Platform Capabilities to Detect and Counter Inauthentic Social Media Engagement” (2024) [28], demonstrate that this is no longer an isolated phenomenon but an industrialized, commodified sector. There is a discernible market for bots, fake accounts, coordinated inauthentic behavior, and even AI-driven content generation [28]. This suggests that influence operations are no longer solely state-sponsored but can be outsourced, making attribution more difficult and significantly lowering the barrier to entry for a wider array of malicious actors.

This commodification implies a democratization of disinformation capabilities. It means that a broader range of actors, beyond traditional state-level entities, can now engage in sophisticated influence operations. This poses a significant challenge to national security and democratic processes, as it dramatically increases the volume, velocity, and variety of disinformation circulating within the public sphere. It necessitates a shift from purely state-centric counter-disinformation strategies to multi-stakeholder approaches involving tech companies, civil society organizations, and robust international cooperation to disrupt these black markets and build platform resilience.

The integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) into information operations represents another critical development. The “AI in Precision Persuasion. Unveiling Tactics and Risks on Social Media” (2024) [27] report explicitly discusses AI’s transformative role. AI is not merely a tool for automation; it acts as a powerful amplifier of disinformation, enabling hyper-personalized messaging, rapid content generation (including deepfakes and other synthetic media), and sophisticated targeting at an unprecedented scale [27]. This dramatically increases the speed and reach of malicious narratives while making them more convincing and harder to detect. Furthermore, AI-generated content and automated networks significantly complicate traditional attribution methods, as detailed in [23]. The integration of AI into information operations creates an asymmetry of capability, where malicious actors can generate persuasive content at a speed and scale that human analysts cannot match. This necessitates substantial investment in AI-driven counter-disinformation tools, the development of robust digital forensics capabilities, and the urgent establishment of international norms around the malicious use of AI. The core implication is that the information environment is becoming increasingly opaque and difficult to manage, demanding innovative technological and policy responses to preserve trust and factual integrity within public discourse.

Strategic Communications Principles and Counter-Disinformation

Effective strategic communications in the current complex information environment extend far beyond reactive debunking; they demand a proactive, values-based approach. Publications like “Mapping of Strat-Com practices in NATO countries” (2016) [19] outline the foundational components of strategic communications, while “Redefining Euro-Atlantic values and Russia’s strategic communication in the Euro-Atlantic space. Executive Summary” (2016) [20] and “War on All Fronts: How the Kremlin’s Media Ecosystem Broadcasts the War in Ukraine” (2024) [31] implicitly argue that successful strategic communications require a proactive articulation and defense of core values. This necessitates a holistic approach that integrates diplomatic, military, economic, and informational tools. This represents a significant shift from merely reacting to false narratives to proactively shaping narratives and building societal resilience, emphasizing that values are not just ethical considerations but critical strategic assets [20]. The effectiveness of strategic communications is deeply intertwined with the credibility and perceived legitimacy of the actor. If an analysis focuses solely on countering disinformation, it misses the larger point that successful strategic communication is about building trust and offering compelling alternative narratives rooted in shared values. The “war on all fronts” [31] is fundamentally a battle of narratives and values, where consistency and authenticity are paramount.

A critical and persistent challenge in this domain is the attribution of malicious information influence operations. “Attributing Information Influence Operations: Identifying those Responsible for Malicious Behaviour Online” directly addresses the inherent difficulty in identifying the perpetrators of these campaigns. The report highlights that attribution is complex due to the sophisticated use of proxies, false flags, and the globalized, often anonymous, nature of the internet [23]. Without clear attribution, accountability is impossible, and effective countermeasures are significantly hampered. The persistent challenge of attribution creates a permissive environment for malicious actors. If states or non-state actors can operate with impunity in the information space, the deterrent effect is diminished, encouraging further malign activity. This calls for a concerted international effort to develop and standardize attribution methodologies, enhance intelligence sharing, and potentially establish international legal frameworks to hold perpetrators accountable. The implication is that the current lack of robust, globally accepted attribution mechanisms represents a critical vulnerability in the global information environment, enabling continuous and escalating information warfare. Addressing this gap is crucial for fostering a more stable and predictable information landscape.

5.3 Platform Responses and Regulatory Challenges

Social media platforms have struggled to develop effective responses to the use of their systems for historical manipulation and memory warfare. Traditional content moderation approaches, which focus on identifying explicitly false factual claims, are poorly suited

to addressing historical narratives that involve interpretation, selective emphasis, and contextual manipulation rather than outright falsehood.

The European Union’s Digital Services Act represents the comprehensive attempt to regulate how digital platforms handle manipulated historical content and coordinated influence campaigns [11]. The legislation requires large platforms to implement systems for identifying and addressing inauthentic behavior, provide transparency about algorithmic systems, and cooperate with researchers studying digital manipulation. However, implementation of these requirements has proven challenging, particularly when dealing with historical content that involves legitimate disagreement among scholars and communities.

Content moderation at scale requires platforms to make thousands of decisions daily about which historical claims are acceptable and which violate community standards. These decisions inevitably involve subjective judgments about historical interpretation that platform employees – who are typically not trained historians – are poorly equipped to make. The result is inconsistent enforcement that can inadvertently suppress legitimate historical debate while allowing sophisticated manipulation to continue.

6. Implications for European Democracy and Global Governance

The transformation of memory politics through social media platforms has implications that extend far beyond academic debates about historical interpretation. Digital memory wars represent a form of hybrid warfare that can destabilize democratic institutions, undermine social cohesion, and alter the international balance of power without conventional military engagement.

6.1 Challenges to Democratic Discourse and Social Cohesion

Democratic societies depend on shared foundations of historical understanding that enable productive political debate and social cooperation. When these foundations are systematically undermined through digital manipulation, the result can be what scholars term “epistemic chaos” – the breakdown of common frameworks for evaluating truth claims and making collective decisions.

Social media-mediated memory wars contribute to political polarization by creating separate information ecosystems where different groups encounter fundamentally incompatible versions of historical events. This polarization extends beyond disagreement about policy preferences to disagreement about basic facts regarding what has happened in the past and what is happening in the present. Under these conditions, democratic deliberation becomes increasingly difficult because participants lack shared foundations for productive debate.

The impact on social cohesion is particularly pronounced in societies with complex or contested historical narratives. Digital memory wars can reopen historical wounds, intensify ethnic or religious divisions, and undermine efforts at reconciliation and peaceful coexistence. European societies with histories of occupation, collaboration, resistance, and liberation during

World War II have proven particularly vulnerable to memory-based manipulation that exploits these historical sensitivities.

Understanding memory as a social construct, following Assmann's (2011) framework of cultural memory, Ukraine's reconstruction must intentionally address how communities remember and interpret their past. The recent European Parliament resolution condemning Russia's use of disinformation to justify its war in Ukraine [11] highlights the continuing relevance of memory politics in the digital sphere and underscores the need for proactive memory work in reconstruction efforts.

6.2 International Relations and Hybrid Warfare

Digital memory wars represent a form of hybrid warfare that combines information operations with cultural and psychological manipulation to achieve strategic objectives without conventional military engagement. This concept aligns with NATO StratCom COE's conclusion that digital history manipulation is not a peripheral activity but a central operational pillar in hybrid warfare. The systematic reframing of WWII and Soviet-era memory was identified as foundational for legitimizing kinetic operations such as Crimea's annexation and the militarization of Donbas [16; 18].

By reshaping how foreign audiences understand historical events and contemporary politics, state actors can influence international opinion, undermine alliance structures, and create conditions favorable to their geopolitical objectives.

The Russo-Ukrainian War demonstrates how memory-based information operations can complement conventional military action to achieve strategic effects. Russian efforts to frame the conflict through historical narratives about de-nazification and protection of Russian speakers were designed not only for domestic consumption but also to complicate international responses by making the conflict appear as a complex historical dispute rather than clear-cut aggression.

These techniques have been adapted and applied beyond the immediate conflict zone. Russian historical narratives about World War II, the Cold War, and post-Soviet transitions have been deployed through social media platforms to influence political debates in European Union member states, NATO allies, and other countries whose support is crucial for Ukrainian resistance and post-conflict reconstruction.

The success of these operations has inspired other state actors to develop similar capabilities. The techniques introduced in the Russian-Ukrainian context are being adapted for other conflicts and political contexts, creating a global ecosystem of memory-based information warfare that challenges traditional frameworks for international law and diplomatic engagement.

6.3 Policy Responses and Regulatory Innovation

Addressing the challenges posed by social media-mediated memory wars requires policy innovations that balance protection of democratic discourse with preservation of fundamental rights to free expression and historical inquiry. The European Union has emerged as a leader in developing regulatory approaches that attempt

to address these challenges while maintaining democratic principles.

The establishment of the Social Observatory for Disinformation and Social Media Analysis (SOMA) and the European Digital Media Observatory (EDMO) represent institutional innovation designed to combine academic research, fact-checking, and policy development to address digital manipulation [7]. These institutions facilitate collaboration between researchers, journalists, and policymakers to develop evidence-based responses to emerging forms of digital manipulation.

However, regulatory approaches face fundamental challenges when applied to historical content. Unlike factual claims about contemporary events, historical narratives involve interpretation, emphasis, and perspective in ways that make simple fact-checking approaches inadequate. Effective responses require more sophisticated approaches that can address manipulation techniques while preserving space for legitimate historical debate and scholarly disagreement.

International cooperation has become increasingly important as digital memory wars transcend national boundaries. NATO's Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence has developed frameworks for understanding and responding to information operations that target alliance members. The European Union has implemented sanctions on Russian state media outlets and developed diplomatic initiatives to counter Russian historical narratives in international forums.

Ukraine has developed a multi-level response to the manipulation of memory in digital spaces. Among its institutional innovations is the Center for Countering Disinformation (CPD), established in 2021 under the National Security and Defense Council. The CPD monitors disinformation, issues public rebuttals, and conducts trainings for officials and media, working alongside civil society actors like StopFake. Its mandate spans memory-related propaganda and efforts to distort Ukraine's historical narratives. However, its 2022 publication of a list labeling certain Western commentators as spreading pro-Russian propaganda sparked criticism over transparency and press freedom. Compared to NATO's StratCom COE, which provides multinational research and strategic frameworks, the CPD operates as a tactical and domestic frontline actor in memory security. Together, they illustrate the complementarity of international coordination and national resilience in defending historical truth [4; 26].

7. Methodological Innovations in Digital Memory Studies

The study of social media's role in memory politics requires methodological innovations that combine traditional qualitative approaches with computational methods capable of analyzing large-scale digital datasets. This methodological development represents a significant advancement in memory studies and provides tools for understanding digital manipulation at unprecedented scale and precision.

7.1 Computational Approaches to Historical Narrative Analysis

Natural Language Processing (NLP) technologies enable researchers to analyze millions of social media

posts to identify patterns in historical narrative construction and evolution. These computational approaches align with manipulation typologies defined by StratCom COE, which include inorganic trending, messaging-laundersing via proxies, synthetic content diffusion, and temporal-spike manipulations. Mapping these activities reveals how algorithmic systems are co-opted to simulate grassroots consensus on revisionist historical narratives [26]. Topic modeling algorithms can identify recurring themes in historical discourse, track how these themes change over time, and reveal connections between different narrative elements that might not be apparent through manual analysis.

Sentiment analysis using advanced models like BERT (Bidirectional Encoder Representations from Transformers) can quantify the emotional content of historical narratives and track how emotional framing evolves in response to political events. This enables researchers to understand how memory wars deploy emotional manipulation and how audiences respond to different forms of historical framing. These computational approaches align with manipulation typologies defined by StratCom COE [26], which include inorganic trending, messaging-laundersing via proxies, synthetic content diffusion, and temporal-spike manipulations. Mapping these activities reveals how algorithmic systems are co-opted to simulate grassroots consensus on revisionist historical narratives.

Network analysis tools like Gephi and NodeXL enable mapping of how historical narratives spread through social media networks, identifying key influencers, bot networks, and coordination patterns that reveal organized influence campaigns. These tools can distinguish between organic grassroots discussion and artificially amplified content, providing crucial insights into the infrastructure of digital memory manipulation.

7.2 Comparative and Longitudinal Analysis

The digital nature of social media platforms enables longitudinal analysis that tracks how historical narratives evolve over extended periods in response to changing political circumstances. By analyzing social media content from 2014 to the present, researchers can identify how memory wars adapt to new events, technologies, and political contexts.

Comparative analysis between different linguistic communities, national contexts, and platform environments reveals how the same historical events are framed differently for different audiences. This comparative approach exposes the strategic nature of memory manipulation and reveals how historical narratives are tailored for specific political objectives and cultural contexts.

Cross-platform analysis examines how historical narratives are adapted for different technological environments, revealing how platform-specific affordances shape memory politics. Understanding these adaptations is crucial for developing effective responses to memory-based manipulation.

7.3 Ethical Considerations and Research Integrity

Research on digital memory wars raises important ethical questions about privacy, consent, and the poten-

tial for research findings to be misused for political purposes. Studying social media content involves analyzing communications that users may have assumed would remain private or limited to specific audiences. Researchers must develop frameworks that balance scientific inquiry with respect for user privacy and digital rights.

The political sensitivity of memory wars creates additional ethical challenges. Research findings about historical manipulation techniques could potentially be misused by malicious actors to improve their manipulation capabilities. Conversely, failure to study these phenomena could leave democratic societies vulnerable to manipulation they do not understand. Navigating these tensions requires careful consideration of research design, publication strategies, and collaboration with policymakers and civil society organizations.

8. Future Directions and Emerging Challenges

The landscape of digital memory politics continues to evolve rapidly as new technologies, platform features, and political contexts create novel opportunities and challenges for memory manipulation and democratic discourse. Understanding these emerging trends is crucial for developing effective responses to future threats to historical integrity and democratic communication.

8.1 Emerging Technologies and Memory Manipulation

Virtual and augmented reality technologies create new possibilities for immersive historical experiences that could have powerful impacts on memory formation and historical consciousness. VR experiences that simulate historical events can create strong emotional connections and vivid memories that feel more real than traditional forms of historical communication. However, these same technologies can be used to create fabricated historical experiences that manipulate memory through sensory immersion rather than rational argument.

Blockchain technologies are being explored as potential solutions to problems of historical authenticity and evidence verification. Immutable ledgers could theoretically preserve authentic historical documents and evidence in ways that prevent subsequent manipulation. However, these technologies also face significant technical and practical challenges, and their deployment for historical preservation raises questions about who controls the blockchain networks and how historical authenticity is initially verified.

Advanced artificial intelligence systems are becoming increasingly sophisticated in their ability to generate synthetic historical content that is indistinguishable from authentic materials. Large language models can generate historically plausible narratives, documents, and testimonials that combine factual elements with fabricated details in ways that are extremely difficult to detect. These capabilities represent a qualitative escalation in the potential for memory manipulation.

8.2 Platform Evolution and Regulatory Adaptation

Social media platforms continue to evolve their features, algorithms, and business models in ways that

affect how historical content is created and distributed. The rise of short-form video content, ephemeral messaging, and audio-based social platforms creates new environments for memory politics that may be less amenable to traditional content moderation and fact-checking approaches.

Regulatory frameworks are struggling to keep pace with technological change and the increasing sophistication of memory manipulation techniques. The European Union's Digital Services Act represents a significant step forward, but implementation challenges and the rapid pace of technological development suggest that regulatory approaches will need to be continuously updated and refined.

International coordination on digital governance issues remains limited, creating opportunities for forum shopping and regulatory arbitrage that malicious actors can exploit. Developing effective responses to global digital memory wars will require unprecedented levels of international cooperation and coordination among democratic societies.

8.3 Resilience Building and Democratic Innovation

Building societal resilience to digital memory manipulation requires approaches that go beyond regulatory responses to include education, technology design, and cultural change. Digital literacy programs must evolve to help citizens critically evaluate historical claims encountered through social media and understand how algorithmic systems shape their information environments.

Technology design approaches that prioritize democratic values and historical integrity could help create digital environments that are more resistant to manipulation while still enabling productive historical discourse and debate. This might include algorithmic systems that prioritize authoritative sources, user interface designs that encourage critical thinking, and technical features that make manipulation techniques more visible to users.

Civil society organizations, academic institutions, and journalism organizations will play crucial roles in developing the expertise, infrastructure, and cultural norms necessary for maintaining historical integrity in digital environments. Supporting these institutions and fostering collaboration among them will be essential for preserving democratic discourse and collective memory in the digital age.

Developing curricula that teach historical thinking skills rather than simply transmitting official narratives. Students should learn to analyze primary sources, understand multiple perspectives, and recognize how historical narratives serve contemporary political purposes. This approach, informed by research on memory studies [9], would help build immunity to historical manipulation while fostering an appreciation for Ukraine's complex and diverse heritage. This critical pedagogy necessitates extensive teacher training and ongoing professional development, equipping educators with the skills and resources to facilitate nuanced discussions on sensitive historical topics and to navigate diverse student perspectives safely and constructively.

Ukraine's education system must serve as a cornerstone of reconciliation by fostering critical thinking, democratic values, and inclusive historical understanding. The European Union's Digital Services Act and broader regulatory framework provide important tools for creating a healthier information environment [10], but education remains the primary long-term strategy for building resilience against disinformation and extremism.

9. Conclusion: Memory, Technology, and Democratic Futures

The transformation of memory politics through social media platforms represents one of the significant challenges facing democratic societies in the twenty-first century. The ability to rapidly reshape collective historical consciousness through digital manipulation threatens the shared foundations of truth and meaning that democratic discourse requires. Understanding and responding to these challenges requires unprecedented collaboration among scholars, policymakers, technologists, and civil society organizations.

The Russo-Ukrainian War provides a paradigmatic example of how social media platforms can be weaponized to conduct memory wars with global consequences. The techniques and strategies developed in this context are being adapted and applied to other conflicts and political contexts, creating a global ecosystem of memory-based information warfare that challenges traditional frameworks for maintaining democratic discourse and international stability.

However, the digital transformation of memory politics also creates new opportunities for preserving and sharing historical knowledge, enabling more diverse voices to participate in historical discourse, and fostering international understanding through cross-cultural communication. Realizing these positive possibilities while mitigating the risks requires thoughtful policy development, technological innovation, and cultural change that prioritizes democratic values and historical integrity.

The future of memory politics in digital environments will depend on choices made today about platform regulation, technology design, education systems, and international cooperation. By understanding how social media platforms shape collective memory and developing effective responses to memory-based manipulation, democratic societies can work to ensure that technological change serves human flourishing rather than undermining the foundations of democratic life.

The stakes of this work extend far beyond academic debates about historical interpretation. The integrity of collective memory is fundamental to the possibility of democratic governance, social cooperation, and peaceful coexistence in an interconnected world. Preserving this integrity in the face of digital manipulation is one of the most important challenges of our time.

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