From myths to memes

Transnational memory and Ukrainian social media

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Introduction: Myths, memes, and media

On March 27, 2014, a few days after the Russian Federation's annexation of Crimea, YouTube user adolfb1 published a video entitled "L'vovskij Pogrom 1941 Goda / Lvov Pogrom in 1941." The video shows a sequence of black-and-white photos taken in the Western Ukrainian city of L'viv, hours after it was captured by Nazis in June 1941. To the tune of a Yiddish soundtrack, the images show suffering people, being humiliated, beaten, and killed, by mostly civilian perpetrators, some of them allegedly belonging to the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN).[1]

The first comment appeared on April 27, 2014, a month after the video's publication. Left by user Kirill Vorotnikov, the comment calls for the remembrance of the guilt of Ukrainian collaborators of the Nazis, forever stained, in his words, by "the mark of Cain" (Vorotnikov, 2014). In the months that followed, dozens of new comments appeared, varying from expressions of sorrow and words of compassion to anti-Semitic insults and calls for the killing of Banderites (i.e. real or presumed supporters of Stepan Bandera, one of the Ukrainian nationalist leaders who cooperated with the Nazis). The most up-voted among these comments were ones which drew parallels between the suffering of 1941 and the contemporary, ongoing crisis sweeping Ukraine. One exemplary comment was left by user Anechka Sobol in 2015, who stated the following: "*oni sejchas tozhe samoe i na Donbasse s russkimi provernut' hoteli, tol'ko poluchili po rogam. Komu to eshhe neponjatno, chto proizoshlo v Odesse vtorogo maja?*" [they wanted to do the same with Russians on the Donbas, but their plans were screwed. Anyone still wondering what really happened in Odessa on May 2?][2] The number of views and comments of the pogrom video mushroomed: in less than two years since its publication, the video reached one hundred thousand hits; at the time of writing of this introduction, the video and its related comments had climbed firmly to the top of search queries regarding the L'viv pogrom of 1941.

The phenomenon of the pogrom video and its related comments fits a pattern of ambiguous transnational interactions – sometimes labeled as "memory wars" (Blacker & Etkind, 2013, p. 8) – which constitute a distinct feature of the multi-layered mnemonic landscape in post-socialist states. Defined as conflicts over contrasting interpretations of a contentious past, Eastern European memory wars usually focus on the traumatic experiences of the 20th century and revolve in particular around the

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[1]   For more information on the photos of the L'viv pogrom used in the production of the video, as well as the discussion on the perpetrators' identities, see works by Kruglov (2003), Himka (2011), Rossoliński-Liebe (2011; 2013), Ryabenko (2013), and Struve (2015).

[2]   The comment refers to another product of the interactions between war memories and digital culture in post-socialist states, namely the Khatyn of Odessa meme. The meme refers to the tragedy which took place in Odessa on May 2, 2014, when clashes between pro-Ukrainian and pro-Russian protesters left dozens of people dead and wounded. The majority of deaths occurred among pro-Russian protesters, who were caught in the burning House of Unions; a few hours later members of several pro-Russian social media communities started referring to the tragedy as a continuation of the genocidal politics of the Third Reich. In doing so they compared the events of Odessa to the mass murder in the Belarusian village of Khatyn during the Second World War, when dozens of villagers were burned alive by the Nazis.

region which Timothy Snyder (2010) has labeled the "bloodlands": that part of Europe caught between two totalitarian regimes – the Nazi and the Soviet. Among the numerous other historical traumas which have swept this landscape, the Second World War occupies a special place, standing out as an important factor of identity-building in the region and a source of recurrent historical controversies.

Unsurprisingly, thus, Second World War memories remain the subject of heated public debates both in Ukraine and its neighboring countries, particularly Russia and Poland. When it comes to the above-mentioned OUN, for instance, some historians (Kas'yanov, 2003; Kulchytsky, 2005; Organizatsiia, 2005) have praised the organization for its struggle for the liberation of Ukrainian lands from Soviet and Polish rule and for the restoration of an independent Ukrainian state; others (Altman, 2002; Duykov, 2010; Rossoliński-Liebe, 2011) have criticized the OUN for its engagement in anti-Semitic and anti-Polish retaliations, as well as for its collaboration with Nazi Germany. These dichotomies continue to fuel academic and political debates both within and beyond Ukraine; however, while a number of studies examine the role of the OUN in the Second World War, along with other contentious memories of the conflict in Ukrainian memory politics (Hrynevych, 2005; Marples 2007; Portnov, 2010; Rudling, 2006, 2011; Rossoliński-Liebe, 2014), the matter of the interaction between these memories and digital technology remains, to this day, understudied.

The central question of the current work is thus as follows: what happens with Second World War memories – such as the ones of the L'viv pogrom – in post-socialist countries, with the advent of digitization? To answer this question, the study looks into various instances of digital remembrance – such as the above mentioned YouTube video produced by adolfb1 – and draws upon existing memory and media scholarship to investigate how contentious war memories are performed in post-socialist digital spaces. While doing so, the study also aims to investigate how different social media platforms such as YouTube or VKontakte (commonly abbreviated as VK)[3] affect the ways in which Second World War memories are performed online, and how different communities of web users deal with historical controversies, particularly at a time of ongoing conflict in Ukraine.

1.1. Myths and memes

In contemporary Ukraine, Second World War memories such as the wartime role and activities of the OUN, including the organization's involvement in the Holocaust, constitute not only a controversial piece of cultural memory, but also an important element in digital culture. For instance, Lurkomor'e ("Banderovec," n.d.), an online encyclopedia of web folklore, lists Banderites – a common

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[3]   VKontakte is a SNS (social networking site) founded in 2007 by Pavel Durov. Modeled after Facebook, the platform attracted huge popularity in post-socialist countries and currently remains the most popular SNS in the region (for a visual representation of the most popular SNS in different parts of the world, see the World Social Network Map made by Vincenco Consenza (2016)).

denomination for OUN members – among the most influential and widespread internet memes in the Russophone segment of the internet (also known as Runet).

The concept of meme, originally introduced in the field of cultural studies by Richard Dawkins (1976), has risen significantly in popularity with the dissemination of Web 2.0 technology, becoming a popular term employed by internet users to describe an idea which spreads online as "a written text, image, or some other unit of cultural stuff" (Knobel & Lankshear, 2007, p. 202). While the majority of existing works on internet memes (Burgess, 2008; Bauckhage, 2011; Davidson, 2012) consider them predominantly from humor- and entertainment-centric perspectives, Limor Shifman, in a recent (2014) study, argues that these groupings of digital content units are actually used to communicate political and cultural identities; Shifman's argument is supported in several works which examine the use of internet memes in post-socialist digital spaces (Radchenko, 2013; Makhortykh, 2015).

According to Lurkomor'e, the Banderites meme refers to members of all anti-Soviet nationalistic movements from Ukraine, including ones established before 1939 (such as the OUN) and in the years of the Second World War (such as the Ukrainian Insurgent Army[4]). Following the established patterns of Soviet historiography of the Second World War (Rossoliński-Liebe, 2014, p. 378), the Banderites meme also serves as the epitome of the betrayal of the Soviet Motherland, which originated from a traditional Soviet view of the OUN and the UPA as allies of Nazi Germany against the Soviet Union. However, since the beginning, in 2013, of political and then military upheavals in Ukraine, collectively coming to be known as the Ukraine crisis, the term Banderites has acquired an additional meaning, generally describing people with pro-Ukrainian views. Together with a number of derivative memes – *zhydobanderovtsy* [Jewish Banderites] and *tsynitchnyi bandera* [a cynical Bandera], for instance – the Banderites meme was emphatically popularized in online spheres during the crisis. Circulating across social networking sites, this and other pieces of digital memory content found resonance both in current political agendas and Second World War mythology, in Ukraine as well as in other post-socialist countries.

This instance of the online remembrance of a specific Second World War entity thus demonstrates the complexities involved when transnational war memories interact with social media in the post-socialist space. The significant degree of politicization of the past and its frequent appropriation for political infighting define the highly contentious memory landscape in countries like Ukraine, Russia, and Belarus. Often, this appropriation of past is inextricably linked with the persistence of contradictory memory narratives both on the regional and national level – another defining characteristic of post-socialist 'memoryscapes.' Contrary to optimistic claims about the

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[4] A common abbreviation for the Ukrainian Insurgent Army is UPA, which refers to the formation's title in Ukrainian (*Ukrainska povstanska armiia*), Russian (*Ukrainskaja povstancheskaja armija*), and Polish (*Ukraińska Powstańcza Armia*).

extraterritoriality of digital space[5], political, cultural, and also mnemonic differences find their way into social media, often fostering violence, both online and offline (Kuntsman, 2010a; Kuntsman & Stein, 2015). Consequently, instead of serving as a de-nationalized ground for discussion, where contradictions of the past might be overcome through dialogue, digital media users from post-socialist countries usually turn these platforms into yet another battlefield for memory wars, where "alternative histories thrive and multifarious memories compete for hegemony" (Rutten & Zvereva, 2013, p. 1).

By exploring how Second World War memory and social media interact in Ukraine, this study aims to theorize the ways in which cultural memory and digital technology relate today. In the pages that follow, I pose a number of questions related to this interaction in the contentious context of the Ukrainian mnemonic landscape. Central among these questions are the following: In which ways do digital memory genres and Second World War memories shape each other in Ukraine? How do individuals interact with war memories on social media platforms, and are there any common patterns guiding these interactions? And, finally, how do war memories and digital media affect the ongoing conflict in Ukraine – and how are they, in turn, affected by it?

In order to delve into these questions, I build on and benefit from existing research in the ways which will be outlined further in this introduction. By relying on theoretical concepts pertaining both to memory studies (i.e. transnational and digital memory) and media studies (i.e. internet memes and flame wars), the study uses qualitative web content analysis (McMillan, 2000; Herring, 2010) to examine how Second World War memory is remediated, through a selection of three social media platforms: Wikipedia, YouTube, and VKontakte. Each of these platforms will be introduced in separate chapters, along with the specific methods of data collection and analysis used for extracting information about how digital media are used in the performance of Second World War memory in Ukraine.

1.2. Transnational vs. digital memory

Some are calling ours a "post-digital" age (Berry and Dieter, 2015) – pointing to a growing disenchantment with the digital information systems which have come to saturate everyday life to an unprecedented degree. It is in any case self-evident that the intensification of globalizing processes has led to profound changes in many different areas of human life. One of the areas which has experienced a significant impact from globalization has been the domain which we call cultural memory – that is, in the broad understanding of the term suggested by Astrid Erll (2008, p. 2), the amalgamation of different ways in which present and past interplay with each other in different socio-cultural contexts.[6]

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[5]   This cyber-utopian line of thought was particularly common at the beginning of the 2000s, when a number of authors proposed to draw a clear distinction between offline and online spaces. See, for instance, works by Spiegel (2000) and Baumann (2000).

[6]   Though I will refrain from reiterating existing scholarship on as popular a field of scholarly inquiry as memory studies, I

Growing global mobility and intensifying migratory movements (Assmann & Conrad, 2011, p. 2), the development of regional integration projects and the magnification of transnational capitalist relations (de Cesari & Rigney, 2014, p. 2), the increasing speed and decreasing costs of media production and circulation (Hoskins, 2009, p. 28) are just a few of the factors which influence the production and consumption of cultural memories in the world today. Together, these factors bring fundamental changes to the ways individuals and communities interact with their past. This change has everything to do with the ways in which the past is performed on a new global scale: unlike in earlier periods, when memory production unfolded mostly within the boundaries of national and/or cultural communities, today it is "impossible to understand trajectories of memory outside a global frame of reference" (Assmann & Conrad, 2011, p. 2).

The "global" shift influenced not only memories *per se*, but also the field of memory studies – and, in fact, the field of humanities in general, which has become increasingly permeated with what Ulrich Beck has called a "cosmopolitan outlook" (2006, p. 3). Since the beginning of the 2000s, the focus within memory studies has been gradually switching from the collective memory of nations to globalized memory narratives. The origins of this paradigmatic change can be traced back to the works of historians Daniel Levy and Natan Sznaider, who, in 2002, signaled the forming of a new, "cosmopolitan" memory. Using as example the memory of the Holocaust, Levy and Sznaider point to an ongoing transition from national to cosmopolitan memory cultures which transcend "national and ethnic boundaries" (2002, p. 88). In the years that followed, the concept of memory existing beyond national boundaries was further developed by cultural historians Aleida Assmann and Sebastian Conrad (2011). Assmann and Conrad point to the increasing affirmation of global memory narratives which cross national boundaries and exist beyond their frameworks. On a similar line of thought, cultural historian Astrid Erll discusses the formation of transcultural memories which unfold across and beyond cultures by circulating "among social, medial, and semantic dimension" (2011, p. 15). This idea of the circulation of memory was further developed in a work by Lucy Bond, Stef Craps, and Pieter Vermeulen, who identify four dimensions of memory mobility: transcultural, transgenerational, transmedial, and transdisciplinary (2016, p. 2).

This study certainly benefits from the insights Erll and others have provided, but it is especially indebted to the conceptual framework provided by de Cesari and Rigney and their study on

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must nevertheless point out the following works which are central to my understanding of the concept of cultural memory: Maurice Halbwachs (1992), Cathy Caruth (1995), Pierre Nora (1989; 2002), Marianne Hirsch (1997; 2012), Jan Assmann (1995; 2006), Aleida Assmann (2011; 2016), Astrid Erll (2008; 2011), Ronald Eyerman, Jeffrey Alexander, and Elizabeth Breese (2011), Jeffrey Alexander (2012). Furthermore, my take on the interconnection between memory and media also builds on works by the following scholars: Andreas Huyssen (2003), Jose van Dijck (2007), Astrid Erll and Ann Rigney (2009), Motti Neyger, Oren Meyers, and Eyal Zandberg (2011), Joanne Garde-Hansen (2011), Joanne Garde-Hansen, Andrew Hoskins, and Anna Reading (2009a).

transnational memory (2014). In contrast with the concepts of global and/or cosmopolitan memory, the idea of transnational memory is less teleological; furthermore, unlike the concept of transcultural memory, it does not revolve around the idea of fixed cultural boundaries, and does not presume an intrinsic tendency of culture to disseminate across these boundaries. Instead, de Cesari and Rigney argue that the concept of transnational memory differs from above mentioned concepts in light of its explicit recognition of "the dialectical role played by national borders" in memory practices (2014, p. 4), particularly relevant for Eastern Europe, with its long tradition of cross-border memory wars.[7] Furthermore, unlike the concept of cosmopolitan memory, which juxtaposes the limited and one-sided narratives of the pre-digital age with the pluralistic and extended narratives of the so-called Second Modernity (Beck, 2006) "based on the mutual recognition of the history of the 'Other'" (Levy and Sznaider, 2002, p. 103), transnational memory theory is more critical in its assessment of the current state of cultural memory as well as of the potential consequences of interactions between technology and memory.

Yet, despite a number of contradictions, all the above mentioned theories of memory agree on the necessity to acknowledge the growing impact of communication technology on the practice of remembrance. As John Sundholm (2011) points out in his essay on transnational memory, recognizing the increased mobility of mnemonic narratives across national borders through the development of communication technology is one of the core premises for understanding the ways in which individual and collective remembrance function today. De Cesari and Rigney argue that, today, the diffusion of online media ecologies opens up new possibilities for memory production and circulation, distinguished by low costs and high potential impact (2014, p. 12). Furthermore, as Garde-Hansen, Hoskins, and Reading note in their work on digital memories, the advent of communication technology challenges the passive approach to the passage of time and, instead, makes the production of past and present "active, subjective, organic, emotional, virtual and uncertain" (2009, p. 7). Digital technology does thus not only increase the rate of producing and sharing digital memorabilia – both by and for individuals and collectives – but also, presumably, renders the process of remembering more intense and multi-faceted by giving rise to new memory practices and discourses. The latter argument is particularly relevant for the current study, because it emphasizes the reciprocity between cultural memory and digital media, a feature which permeates the booming Ukrainian online landscape.

Yet, while it is hardly debatable that digitization has led to "a far greater intensive and extensive connectivity" (Hoskins, 2009, p. 40) between the forms, agents, and discourses of memory, the question of the impact of digital media on *transnational* remembrance is still a subject of fervid

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[7] For more information on Eastern European memory wars, see Blacker, Etkind, and Fedor (2013), Rutten, Fedor, and Zvereva (2013), Pakier and Wawrzyniak (2015).

discussion. The advent of social media serving as transnational platforms where adherents of different views of the past can meet and interact with one another, does, indeed, increase the mobility of memory narratives, as Sundholm notes (2011). However, the increased mobility of contentious memories does not necessarily imply an increased tolerance towards the Other narrative, nor does it lead to the inevitable formation of pluralist and mutually tolerant views of the past – which seems to be one of the core assumptions of the cosmopolitan memory theory (Levy & Sznaider, 2002; Trubina, 2010). Instead, as Rutten and Zvereva point out in their study of post-socialist digital memories, increased connectivity can lead not to transnational dialogue but rather to "discursive online combats" (2013, p. 1). These discursive confrontations are similar to the one which was briefly described at the start of this introduction: namely, the phenomenon of adherents of different narratives using digital technology for the aggressive propagation of selective mnemonic narratives. By testing these divergent perspectives against the empirical material of Ukrainian digital memory cultures, the study examines the relationship between transnational and digital memory in the context of Second World War memory, and questions the potential impact of technology on the future of war remembrance in the post-socialist space.

1.3. World War 2.0

In his study of the Crimean war of 1853–1856, Ulrich Keller (2001, p. 251) argues that since the middle of the 19th century wars and conflicts have been increasingly mediatized, their coverage becoming increasingly adapted for mass consumption. However, even though the mediatization of war is thus not a recent phenomenon, developments in communication technology have brought profound changes to the ways conflicts and wars are narrated, experienced and performed today – especially when compared to the pre-digital age (Kuntsman, 2010, p. 1). Andrew Hoskins and Ben O'Loughlin argue that the connectivity brought by digital media renders the latter "the key modulator of security and insecurity" (2010, p. 2) by increasing awareness of remote conflicts and articulating the presence of immediate threats in a variety of formats, from video clips to blog posts. The consequences of such an oversupply of digital data relating to war and conflict are many, varying from the increased ability to document war atrocities, to the burgeoning use of digital representations of a conflict for veritable information warfare; together, these result in the transformation of "modes of witnessing, feeling and remembering violent and traumatic events" (Kuntsman, 2010, p. 2).

While a number of studies (Berengrer, 2006; Matheson & Stuart, 2010; Hoskins & O'Loughlin, 2010) examine how this transformation affects the remembrance of contemporary conflicts, significantly less research has been done on the remediation of *old* wars in *new* media. While works on the use of digital media for the remembrance of past conflicts have appeared in recent years (Drinot,

2011; Luyt, 2011, 2015; Jensen, 2012; Benzaquen, 2014; Pfanzelter, 2015), their number remains limited. Furthermore, they share an additional shortcoming: as Ellen Rutten and Vera Zvereva note (2013, p. 4), the majority of these studies pay only marginal attention to developments outside "the West" and, in particular, to developments in post-socialist countries.[8] Academic assessments of the interactions between digital media and contentious war memories in Eastern Europe are as of yet limited in number, in spite of the fact that the extensive presence of the past – as well as unresolved past traumas (Etkind, 2013) – constitutes one of the quintessential features of the region's digital landscape.

Academic assessments of digital memories of the Second World War in post-socialist countries such as Ukraine and Russia are subject to the same limitations. While a number of works point to the special importance of Second World War memories for collective identities in these regions (Snyder, 2010; Blacker, Etkind, & Fedor, 2013; Rutten, Fedor, & Zvereva, 2013), as of yet there are no studies which provide a comprehensive overview of the interactions between these war memories and digital media. Instead, the majority of existing works examine the mediation of Second World War memory in the context of a single digital platform, such as, for instance, Facebook (de Bruyn, 2010), LiveJournal (Morenkova, 2012; Lastouski, 2013), or Lurkomor'e (Makhortykh, 2015). The few studies which do engage in cross-media analyses of the topic do so only in article-length studies and for isolated cases, such as, for instance, the memory of Stepan Bandera (Fredheim, Howanitz, & Makhortykh, 2014) or the celebration of Victory Day[9] (Nikiporets-Takigawa, 2013).

Furthermore, existing scholarship on digital memories in post-socialist countries tends to produce contrasting – and often contradictory – assessments of the interactions between digital technology and cultural memory. An example of what I would like to call a "feel-good" take on these interactions is offered by Elena Trubina (2010) in her study on Victory Day on the LiveJournal platform. Based on the analysis of a sample of Russian-language LiveJournal blogs, Trubina argues that digital media in post-socialist spaces facilitates the production of a cosmopolitan memory of the Second World War and challenges the one-sided mnemonic narratives of the Soviet era. In a similar study of Belarusian segments of LiveJournal, Aliaksey Lastouski concludes that "digital media there [in Belarus] is a realm of freedom" (2013, p. 170), where hegemonic strategies of Second World War commemoration can be challenged by alternative narratives. At the same time, Lastouski also points out that the latter narratives will not necessarily spread beyond the borders of a particular online

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[8]   For a few notable exceptions see works by Kuntsman (2010a), Rogers and Sendijarevic (2012), Rutten, Fedor, and Zvereva (2013).

[9]   Victory Day is a public holiday in many post-socialist countries, including Ukraine and Russia. As already mentioned in the text, it marks the capitulation of Nazi Germany to the Soviet Union in 1945 and is celebrated on May 9. After the Euromaidan revolution, however, the Ukrainian government decided to stop celebrating Victory Day and, instead, introduced a new public holiday on May 8, which is known as the Day of Remembrance and Reconciliation.

community.

A more gloomy picture is offered in a study undertaken by media scholar Galina Nikiporets-Takigawa (2013) on the use of digital media in the context of the Victory Day clashes in L'viv in May 2011. She argues that social media not only perpetuate the official memory tropes of the mainstream media, but they also ignite disagreements among proponents of different versions of Second World War history. My own studies on Second World War memes (2015) and audiovisual memories on YouTube (2017) similarly suggest that, instead of challenging official war narratives, digital media often tend to reproduce preexisting memory tropes and propagate dissent between contrasting views of the past. While it is hardly questionable thus that digital media provide a transnational ground for debating issues related to contentious pasts, and are for this particularly valuable to post-socialist countries, with their long history of memory wars and the persistence of hegemonic historical narratives, observations made by Nikiporets-Takigawa and the ones deriving from my own research indicate that, in the case of Second World War memory, these debates are not always developing in a peaceful manner, nor do they necessarily lead to the formation of new, pluralist narratives of the past. In the chapters that follow, I reconsider these divergent perspectives on digital memory of the Second World War in post-socialist countries by examining, through a selection of popular social media platforms, how web users interact with Second World War memory narratives pertaining to Ukraine.

1.4. Social media in Ukraine

According to Kaplan and Heinlein, social media are internet-based applications which "build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0" (2010, p. 61) and are used for the production and dissemination of user-generated content. Unlike Web 1.0, "the pioneering and highly elitist medium" (Gerbaudo, 2015, p. 73), Web 2.0[10] includes a number of functionalities (e.g. Adobe Flash, RSS, and AJAX) which allow an ordinary web user to generate online content without significant time or effort expenditure and/or profound technological knowledge. Different social media platforms give preference to different types of content, varying from quasi-academic texts (Wikipedia) to microblog posts (Twitter) to music videos (YouTube) and virtual alter egos (World of Tanks).

While offline media, in particular television, remain predominant in the Ukrainian media environment, in recent years digital media have overtaken radio and print and currently represent the second most popular source of information in the country (Gallup, 2014). The rate of internet penetration in Ukraine is slightly lower than in other European countries: different sources evaluate it at between 43.4% ("Internet Users," 2015) and 50.9% (Gallup, 2014); a number of studies, however,

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[10] It is worth noting that both the term and the division between Web 1.0 and Web 2.0 has recently attracted significant criticism (see, for instance, Anderson, 2006); the distinction, however, fits the purpose of research focused on user-generated content, especially in the post-socialist context.

point to a significant disproportion in the use of digital media among different age groups (Kulyk, 2013; Gallup, 2014). The digital divide in Ukrainian society thus remains significant: unlike senior-age Ukrainians, among whom only 12.1% use internet on a regular basis, 89% of Ukrainians aged between 15 and 24 are regular web users. While age remains the most influential factor in the digital divide, other factors, such as education level and individual income, also influence the dynamics of internet usage in the nation (Poushter, 2016). Furthermore, as Denis Zakharenko (2016) points out, the lack of financial incentives or support from the state discourages internet providers from offering their services to rural areas in Ukraine.

Social media thus constitute a powerful information outlet in Ukraine, although the audience of this outlet is rather skewed because of the digital divide I have just illustrated. Most internet – including social media – users in Ukraine tend to be young individuals who have attained comparatively high education and income levels; furthermore, the majority of them live in big cities, and not in rural areas. Consequently, one might choose to assume that the majority of users involved in the performance of Second World War memory in Ukrainian social media share rather similar profiles. Unfortunately, the format of the current study does not allow for an in-depth investigation of the variety of web users involved in online memory practices, but further research into the social profiles of individual users will be important for refining my findings.

According to a 2016 Alexa.com[11] rating ("Top Sites in Ukraine," n.d.), social media platforms, in particular VKontakte and YouTube, constitute the most popular web resources among Ukrainian users, along with search engines such as Google and Yandex. One important rationale for the increased use of such web resources, and in particular social media, among the younger groups of the Ukrainian population is the relative lack of state control over these platforms, as well as the limited scope of formal and informal censorship, especially when compared with traditional Ukrainian media outlets (Kulyk, 2013, p. 74). These factors not only allow internet users to investigate and discuss topics of interest, including contemporary politics to or war history, but they also contribute to pluralization in the public sphere. It is hardly debatable that the use of social media as a public space in Ukraine is subjected to similar limitations as in other parts of the world. This is significantly true in regards to what Jose van Dijck and Thomas Poell (2016) point out in their recent study on social media activism: the frequent misuse of digital technology by state authorities as well as the commercial orientation of the various platforms' architecture and user policies. However, despite those limitations, social media outlets such as VKontakte or YouTube still provide Ukrainians with opportunities to challenge

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[11] Alexa Internet is a subsidiary company of Amazon, and provides data and analytics of web traffic. Besides a number of commercial services, Alexa offers free access to data about the most visited internet sites, both on a global and individual country basis; consequently, Alexa data is often employed in academic studies which deal with web traffic - see, for instance, works by Adams and McCorkindale (2013), Sugimoto et al. (2013), Britt (2015), Messner and DiStaso (2015).

dominant discourses concerning past and present developments alike. Unsurprisingly, social media played an important role in recent protest campaigns in Ukraine, including the Orange Revolution (Kyj, 2006; Prytula, 2006; Lysenko & Desouza, 2010) and the Euromaidan protests (Szostek, 2014; Tucket et al., 2014; Onuch, 2015). The use of social media by activists during the Euromaidan protests led to the rapid growth of a Ukrainian audience for a number of social media outlets,[12] as these platforms became associated with regime change and civil empowerment.

However, as the Ukraine crisis continued to deteriorate after the overthrow of President Yanukovych and the installation of a new, pro-Western government, social media became increasingly associated not only with civil society and grassroots change, but also with information warfare and aggressive propaganda. Already in the course of the Euromaidan protests, Ukrainian social media were turned into contestation grounds, where pro- and anti-Maidan[13] advocates propagated their visions of the ongoing events. With the escalation of the crisis, social media, both in Ukraine and in Russia, morphed into a veritable battlefields, as both state-affiliated and independent groups pursued their own interpretations of the crisis, usually demonizing and dehumanizing the opposing side.[14] These social media subversions frequently involved manipulative uses of cultural memory, such as the above mentioned story of the Khatyn of Odessa, or the equalization of the annexation of Crimea and the Austrian Anschluss, further blurring the difference between "the presumed and the known" (Monaghan, 2015, p. 1) in the context of the crisis.

Because of these factors, social media in Ukraine remains "a crucial arena of the politics of national identity and historical memory" (Kulyk, 2013, p. 69). Yet, while interactions between social media and cultural memory in Ukraine play a significant role, these relations are not necessarily homogeneous. Instead, current scholarship on the Ukrainian social media landscape suggests that the latter is composed of different digital genres, characterized by complex dynamics of creation and consumption of media products, including ones related to war remembrance. Thus, in order to provide a comprehensive analysis of the ways in which Second World War memory and social media shape each other in Ukraine, the study explores how war memories interact with a selection of digital memory genres, which I will briefly discuss below.

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[12]   One of the most illustrative examples is Twitter, where, according to Yandex (2014) data, almost 55,000 new users from Ukraine registered in January 2014 alone, whereas before November 2013 the average number of monthly registrations was 6-7,000.

[13]   Up to now the majority of studies of social media use during the Euromaidan protests have focused on Maidan activists and sympathizers. For more information specifically on the online activity of anti-Maidan groups, see works by Kozachenko (2014), Tucket et al (2014), Gruzd and Tsyganova (2015).

[14]   For more information on the use of social media in the context of information warfare and propaganda during the Ukraine crisis, see works by Freeman (2014), Dougherty (2015), Makhortykh and Lyebyedyev (2015), Gaufman (2015), Makhortykh and Sydorova (2017).

1.5. Methodology

The theoretical insights discussed earlier serve as methodological cues, providing the study with the precise terminology and framework to analyze the interrelations between cultural memory and social media in Ukraine. Apart from these cues, the study relies on empirical data collected from the social media platforms most popular among Ukrainian internet users. The study combines those empirical data with transnational/digital memory theory to examine how Second World War memory interacts with a selection of popular digital genres.

According to Santini, Mehler and Sharoff (2010), the development of digital technology, in particular the formation of the Web 2.0 environment, which has dramatically facilitated the creation and dissemination of digital content, gave rise to novel textual forms known as "digital" or "web" genres. Although computer-mediated communication expert Susan Herring (2013) has rightly adopted a critical stance towards the usage of the term "digital genre," arguing that the type of content produced online is more dependent on the platform's architecture than on genre specificity, it nevertheless remains a useful concept, especially when used in the context of digital narratives studies. A number of scholars suggest that web genres are characterized by their volatility and "chameleon-like properties" (Giltrow & Stein, 2009, p. 9); however, as Katherine Hayles (2004, p. 68) points out, the medium has significant impact on the narratives produced online, as the latter are shaped by medium-specific constraints and opportunities alike. A similar claim is made by Dirk Uffelmann in the context of digital literature and digital remembrance: according to Uffelmann, despite their apparent fluidity, digital memory genres are distinguished by "technical conditions as well as rhetorical rules and cultural particularities" (2014, p. 17), thus allowing to identify and classify different kinds of mnemonic narratives which emerge online.

Borrowing from the insights of Hayles (2004) and Uffelmann (2014) on the medium specificity of digital genres, the current study focuses on three digital memory genres, each of which is closely associated with a particular social media platform: the digital encyclopedia (Wikipedia), the audiovisual tribute (YouTube), and the SNS (social networking site) post (VKontakte). There are a number of reasons for this choice: firstly, each of these genres is not only popular among Ukrainian web users, but also widely recognized as being influential in the context of existing digital memory scholarship.[15] Secondly, all above mentioned digital platforms provide a number of options for data collection which make their use for research both reliable and reproducible. Thirdly, the social media outlets listed also publish data about their users' interactions with their materials, which allows not only to examine

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[15] On Wikipedia see, for instance, the following works: Pentzold (2009), Ferron and Massa (2011; 2014), Luyt (2011), Jensen (2012), Dounaevsky (2013), Makhortykh (2015a). On YouTube see the following studies: Hilderbrand (2007), Drinot (2011), Jones and Gibson (2012), Knudsen and Stage (2013), Benzaquen (2014), Danilova (2014). On VKontakte: Zvereva (2011), Denisov (2013; 2015), Kulyk (2013).

mnemonic narratives produced in the context of a particular digital memory genre, but also to assess how influential these narratives are and/or in which ways users interact with them.

For the analysis of the representation of Second World War memory and users' interactions with mnemonic narratives online, the thesis relies primarily on qualitative content analysis, which until now remains the major methodological approach in the field of memory studies for the humanities and social sciences (Keightley, 2010; Keightley & Pickering, 2013). At the same time, the growing amount of digital tools which facilitate the collection and analysis of large volumes of textual and visual data opens new possibilities for the field, particularly in the assessment of user interaction with memory products. By combining descriptive statistics with some of these tools, particularly the ones provided by the Digital Methods initiative[16] at the University of Amsterdam – where the bulk of this analysis was crafted – the thesis attempts to quantify digital memory processes both in order to increase the reproducibility of the research, and to gain new insights in the way Second World War memory functions online.

Because of the significant differences between the digital genres and corresponding social media platforms chosen for examination, as well as the different modes of representation they allow for, each of the following chapters will include a section on the respective methodology of data collection and their analysis. Also, while some platforms (e.g. Wikipedia) allow for detailed chronological analysis and comparison, others (e.g. VKontakte) provide limited opportunities for collecting data from earlier periods; these and other limitations of the different social media platforms will be discussed in more detail in their respective chapters. Similarly, each chapter includes brief description of methodology used to analyze data, which is again related to differences in the way memory narratives are presented and interacted in the context of each platform.

It is worth noting here that the study builds mainly upon observations dating from September 2012 to March 2016, when the author implemented the research at the University of Amsterdam. The period of study also corresponds to the beginning of the political and cultural upheavals in Ukraine, which started in November 2013 and continue to this day. Not only have those upheavals affected the discourses which I am tracking in this study,[17] but they have also had a strong influence on social media practices in Ukraine; in the latter case, the changes varied from the rapid growth of audiences of those social media outlets which were involved in the mass protests in Ukraine (Yandex, 2014), to the development of new forms of activity and memes, such as the ones related to the Russian-Ukrainian

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[16] For more information, as well as a list of available tools, see the website of the Digital Methods initiative: https://wiki.digitalmethods.net/Dmi/DmiAbout

[17] For more information on changes in memory politics in Ukraine as well as other countries of the region since the beginning of the Ukraine crisis, and in particular with regards to Second World War memory, see works by Siddi (2016), Sweet (2016), Cohen (2016), van der Laarse (2016).

conflict (Wiggings, 2016).

1.6. Case studies: The seizure of L'viv and the Battle of Kyiv

In order to understand Ukrainian online memory discourse, it is important to examine the relations between the historical events and the myths which have risen around them, on the one hand, and digital narratives and internet memes on the other. For this purpose, in my analysis I zoom in on two episodes of the Second World War which not only continue to spawn memory events across the Ukrainian mnemonic landscape, but are also extensively remediated in Ukrainian social media. Because of the complex nature of both historical episodes, which has led to numerous controversies in regards to their interpretation in Ukraine and the neighboring regions, the study does not aim to provide a deep discussion of the historical background, settling instead for a brief historical introduction to aid the reader, which is presented below.

On June 30, 1941, eight days after the start of the German-Soviet war, German troops entered L'viv, the largest city of Western Ukraine, which had belonged to the Republic of Poland before it was occupied by the Soviet Union in 1939. One of the first German units to enter the city was the Nachtigall [Nightingale] battalion, composed of soldiers of ethnic Ukrainian origins. Nachtigall was founded in the spring of 1941, along with the Roland battalion: both were the result of cooperation between the OUN and the Wehrmacht and Abwehr (Rossoliński-Liebe, 2011, p. 91–92). Upon entering L'viv, the Nachtigall battalion established control over several strategic elements of the city's infrastructure, including the local radio station and the prisons. In the prisons, Nachtigall soldiers discovered mutilated corpses of political prisoners – mostly Ukrainians, but also Poles and Jews (Rossoliński-Liebe, 2013, p. 221) – murdered by the NKVD, the Soviet law enforcement agency, in the first days following the outbreak of the war.[18]

The discovery of the corpses in the L'viv prisons incited a wave of violent actions against local Jews, encouraged by the Germans and the OUN[19] (Rossoliński-Liebe, 2011, p. 101). The first anti-Jewish actions started already on June 30; however, as Kai Struve (2015, p. 304) notes, these were mostly isolated acts of violence. Jews began to be taken from their homes and sent to the city prisons, where they were forced to exhume and clean the bodies of the NKVD's victims. Many of them were beaten, and some even killed during these acts of violence. The Ukrainian militia, established on the morning of June 30 itself, was responsible for the majority of these anti-Jewish actions; however, some acts of violence also involved German soldiers and local policemen, as well as the occasional civilians

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[18]   For more information on the NKVD mass killings in the L'viv prisons see works by Bogdan Musial (2000) and Kai Struve (2015).

[19]   According to a number of authors (Dyukov, 2010; Lower, 2011), the anti-Jewish stance of the OUN can be explained by several factors, including the conflation of Jews with the Soviet crimes in Ukraine, uneven socio-economic relations between different ethnic groups, and prewar anti-semitic prejudices.

(Struve, 2015, p. 306).

The most violent phase of the pogrom began on the morning of July 1, when the violence took on "a more ritualized form" (Himka, 2011, p. 212), adopting the typical form of other anti-Jewish actions perpetrated in other parts of Nazi-occupied Europe. Jews were forced to clean streets and prison yards, being abused and beaten by the crowd as they worked. Men and women alike underwent maltreatment and humiliation; in addition, many women were stripped naked and exposed and, in some cases, raped. In a number of cases Jews were also forced to participate in anti-Communist spectacles, which included mock marches and mock praises to Stalin (Himka, 2011, p. 214–215). As on the previous day, members of the Ukrainian militia actively participated in the pogrom, along with Ukrainian and Polish civilians (Himka, 2011, p. 235–236). According to Struve (2015, p. 354–366), a number of German units were also involved in the pogrom, including members of the Nachtigall battalion and Einsatzgruppe C.

The worst acts of violence, however, occurred in the prison courtyards, where Jews were forced to exhume bodies of NKVD victims. Most of the forced workers were brutally beaten by German soldiers and Ukrainian militiamen, and some of them were stabbed to death or shot while working (Struve, 2015, p. 307–137). The majority of deaths occurred at the Brygidki prison, where several dozens of people were killed. Similar events also took place in two other L'viv prisons, on the Lontskoho and Zamarstyniv streets, though the death tolls there were lower than at Brygidki (Struve, 2015, p. 323). It is hard to assess the total number of victims, but existing estimates vary from 4.000 to 7.000 killed (Mick, 2003); Struve (2015, p. 377), however, argues that these high numbers result from the summing of both the mass killings on July 5 and of another pogrom on July 25–26; in reality, the actual number of victims of the pogrom on June 30–July 1 was lower, not exceeding perhaps a few hundred killed.

Against the backdrop of anti-Jewish retaliations, Nachtigall soldiers, together with a group of OUN members led by Yaroslav Stetsko, proclaimed the restoration of the Ukrainian independent state, which allied itself with Germany in the war against the Soviet Union. The ceremony was attended by Iosyf Slipyi, who represented the Greek Catholic church, and two German officers, Wilhelm Ernst zu Eikern and Hans Koch (Rossoliński-Liebe, 2011, pp. 96–97). The proclamation of the Act of Restoration of the Ukrainian state took place on the evening of June 30, 1941, thus the legislative document also came to be known as the Act of June the 30th. Later on the same day, the restoration of the Ukrainian state was announced from the L'viv radio station which had been occupied by the Nachtigall battalion (Rossoliński-Liebe, 2011, p. 97).

The proclamation was followed by the establishment of the State Administration of Ukraine, the OUN government led by Stetsko. Within a few days, the State Administration began to coordinate

relations with Germany and its allies; contemporarily, as Rossoliński-Liebe (2011, p. 100) has noted, Stetsko's government was actively discussing plans for the annihilation of the non-Ukrainian population in the nation. The Germans, however, did not welcome the idea of Ukrainian statehood, thus Stetsko's government turned out to be rather short-lived: within a few days the Germans disbanded the State Administration and arrested the leaders of OUN, Stetsko and Bandera. Both were released in the second half of July, but then arrested again in the autumn of 1941, and thereafter sent to German concentration camps along with other members of the OUN (Rossoliński-Liebe, 2011, p. 106).

Two and a half years later, Soviet troops approached Kyiv – the former capital of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic (USSR) – during the Chernigov–Poltava Strategic Offensive Operation which took place between August 26 and September 30, 1943. This operation served as prelude to the massive military campaign of the Red Army in the autumn of 1943, known as the Battle for the Dnieper; the main goal of the campaign was to breach the Panther–Wotan defensive line of the German army on the territory of Ukraine by crossing the river Dnieper. One of the intentions of the Soviet high command was also to re-capture Kyiv: the restoration of Soviet control over the Ukrainian capital was particularly important for strengthening Stalin's positions in the negotiations with the Allies in the upcoming Tehran conference (Gorelov & Grutsyk, 2013, p. 20).

On September 29 the task to capture the city was assigned to the armies of the Voronezh front – re-named the 1st Ukrainian front on October 20 – led by Nikolai Vatutin. In the beginning of October 1943, Soviet units managed to capture a number of bridgeheads on the German-controlled right bank of the Dnieper near Kyiv; the largest of those bridgeheads were the Lyutezh and the Dymer bridgeheads, north of the city, and the Bukrin bridgehead to the south. In the weeks that followed, Soviet units attempted several offensive operations aimed at seizing the city. Two major operations took place at the Bukrin bridgehead on October 12–15 and October 21–23; another took place at the Lyutezh and Dymer bridgeheads on October 11–17 (Gorelov & Grutsyk, 2013, p. 20). However, none of those operations were successful, due to heavy resistance from the German troops and the difficult landscape, which impeded the use of tanks; Soviet losses were particularly high at the Bukrin bridgehead, originally envisioned as a primary bridgehead for capturing Kyiv.

The unsuccessful October operations led the Soviet High Command to reject the initial plan of taking Kyiv from the Bukrin bridgehead. Instead, Vatutin ordered to relocate the 3rd Guards Tank Army, commanded by Pavel Rybalko, to the Lyutezh bridgehead. The successful relocation of Soviet forces allowed the Red Army to covertly amass a large force to the north of Kyiv; the subsequent offensive began from there on November 3. This operation was preceded by another attack from the Bukrin bridgehead on November 1–2, aimed at concealing the movements of the Soviet forces and convincing the German command that the Red Army still expected to capture the city from the south;

according to Korol (2003), this distracting maneuver orchestrated by Vatutin once again resulted in huge losses among Soviet ranks.

The rapid advancement of Soviet troops from the Lyutezh bridgehead proved to be unexpected for the German command. With the aid of strong artillery and aerial support, the Red Army was able to breach German defenses to the north of Kyiv and quickly advance into the suburbs of the city. On November 4, the first Soviet units entered the Svyatoshyn district of Kyiv; on the following day, Soviet troops, including the 1ˢᵗ Czechoslovak Independent Brigade led by Ludvik Svoboda, started advancing into the center of Kyiv. On the morning of November 6 – the anniversary of the October Revolution and the most important state holiday in the Soviet Union – Soviet tanks reached the center of Kyiv and recaptured the Ukrainian capital.

The successful actions of the Red Army during the Battle for the Dnieper had profound consequences on the further course of the war on the Eastern Front. The liberation of Kyiv, in particular, had great symbolic and ideological significance, and was used to the fullest by Soviet propaganda. The propaganda, however, omitted the high losses suffered by the Red Army, estimations of which vary from 133 thousand (Gorelov & Grutsyk, 2013, p. 31) to 270 thousand (Levitas, 2012), or even 380 thousand (Ginda, 2010) dead and wounded. These numbers, as well as the reasons behind them, were ignored by the official historiography during the Soviet period (Lysenko, 2013). Today, however, a number of Ukrainian scholars argue that the high death toll was a consequence of the Soviet High Command's intent to liberate Kyiv for the anniversary date of the October Revolution (Korol, 2005, p. 22), which spurred the massive mobilization of Ukrainian men who were often sent to battle unprepared and – according to a few testimonies – insufficiently armed (Koval, 1999, p. 95–96).

These two episodes of the Second World War have a number of things in common, despite being two years apart. Both of them figure as prominent milestones in the conflict, exerting a profound influence on the course of the war in Ukraine; and both remain a source of controversy both in Ukraine and in other post-socialist countries. The Germans' negative reaction to the Act of Restoration of the Ukrainian state and the forced disbandment of Stetsko's government resulted in the activation of underground activities in Ukraine and subsequent anti-German military actions by the UIA (Gogun, 2004). The capture of Kyiv by the Red Army not only had considerable ideological meaning, but it also marked the destabilization of the German front which allowed for the rapid Soviet advancement in 1944 and ensuing retreat of German troops from Ukraine.[20]

The capture of Kyiv and the seizing of L'viv thus not only share the status of important episodes in the history of the war: both also relate ambiguously to the schemata of liberation and occupation

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[20] This point of view was shared by both Soviet and German commanders – among them Konev (1972), Zhukov (2002) and Manstein (1999).

which underpin classical Soviet mythology about the war. In the frame of this myth, the events of June 30, 1941 were interpreted as the beginning of the Nazi occupation of L'viv, while November 6, 1943 was celebrated as the Day of the Liberation of Kyiv. This black-and-white narrative of the past avoided any nuances[21] in order to align itself with the myth of the Great Patriotic War, which would later be instrumental in the creation of a common public identity in the Soviet Union and Ukraine (Hrynevych, 2005).

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the memory of both events was to be once again instrumentalized in national and regional identity politics. In L'viv, the re-assessment of Second World War memory played a considerable role in the process of the de-Sovietization of the city and of Western Ukraine (Portnov & Portnova, 2010); conversely, in the capital, the annual Soviet-style commemoration of the Day of Liberation of Kyiv continued to support the myth of the Great Patriotic War. On the national level, a blend of Soviet and nationalistic war narratives was regularly employed in political rhetoric; different liberation-and-occupation schemes were foregrounded, depending on the current political situation (Zaitsev, 2010).

In all cases, processes of remembering were complemented by strategies of forgetting. In the case of L'viv, the democratization of memory implied restoring the suppressed memory of opponents of the Soviet regime – whose own controversial activities, however, were often whitewashed (Himka, 2011a; Rudling, 2011). In the case of Kyiv, the survival of Soviet-style memory traditions interfered with the integration of less than positive memories about the liberation into the pool of Ukrainian collective memory (Korol, 2003).

Both episodes, then, share several features, and figure as prominent subjects in the discussions about the past which have been taking place on an international level and especially in the post-Soviet space. The Battle of Kyiv is one of several problematic issues in Ukrainian-Russian memory relations: in particular, references to the cruel mobilization of the Ukrainian population to fight in the Battle have been proliferating in Ukrainian media (Ginda, 2010; Patryliak, 2013; Solodko, 2013). The accusations against the Soviet command and its cynical intent to take the city on the anniversary of the October Revolution, untroubled by the certainty of the heavy losses this would entail (Losev, 2013), have been fiercely dismissed, most clamorously in the latest book of the current Russian Minister of Culture, as anti-Russian fantasies (Medinskiy, 2011, p. 401–402). The same has been true for the narrative of the capture of L'viv and related controversies: in particular, the above mentioned anti-Jewish actions

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[21] The historical narrative is, naturally, more layered than this black-and-white image suggests: in 1941 many people in Western Ukraine viewed Germans as liberators, and the Act of Restoration of the Ukrainian state addressed the German army as an ally in ending the Moscow occupation. Similarly, modern Ukrainian media sometimes treat November 6, 1943 as the date of the restoration of Soviet occupation - see, for instance, Borovik (2013) and Losev (2013). This lack of a consistent interpretation illustrates the tragedy of a population caught between two totalitarian regimes, neither of which could hardly be considered a liberator.

(Himka, 2011; Ryabenko, 2013) and the mass killings of the Polish intelligentsia after the seizure of the city (Albert, 2004; Kuliński, 2011; Kipriani, 2011; Bolyanovskiy, 2011), perpetrated also by Ukrainian nationalists – the same independence fighters who had proclaimed the restoration of the Ukrainian state on June 30, 1941.

All these factors have contributed to my decision to select these two episodes for my research. The historical significance of the capture of Kyiv and the seizure of L'viv implies that digital content related to both episodes of the Second World War would maintain a strong presence across the social media platforms selected for this study. The intense instrumentalization of such war memories in building national and regional identities in Ukraine and other post-socialist countries allowed me to trace how changes in the dynamics of war remembrance in Ukraine's public sphere are reflected in the virtual space. Last but not least, the numerous controversies surrounding both episodes present their own sets of challenges to the different digital media platforms' policies, whether it be the neutrality policy of Wikipedia, YouTube's community guidelines, or user policies in VKontakte.

1.7. In conclusion

In this introduction I have briefly outlined the theoretical background of my research, which combines insights from the field of memory studies and of media studies. I have also aimed to demonstrate the role of this study in filling a lacuna in existing scholarship, both in terms of the under-investigated impact of digitization on memories of old conflicts, and of the complex interplay between social media and cultural memory in post-socialist states. In order to achieve the aims of this research, I will use web content analysis to examine how the memory of the two episodes of the Second World War are remediated on three major social media platforms in Ukraine.

In the first chapter of this study, I will explore how the Second World War is represented in Wikipedia, currently the world's largest online encyclopedia. For this purpose, I will scrutinize how the articles in the Ukrainian, Russian, and English versions of Wikipedia represent the two events – the declaration of the Act of Restoration of the Ukrainian state in 1941 and the Battle of Kyiv of 1943. I will subsequently examine how representations of both episodes have been received by Wikipedia users; in doing so, I will explore both non-verbal (views and edits) and verbal (comments) types of user interactions with the Wikipedia articles.

In the second chapter, I will examine audiovisual representations of the Battle of Kyiv and of the L'viv pogrom on YouTube. By investigating different audiovisual genres used for remembering both episodes of the Second World War, I will question how digital technology is used for producing video tributes to contentious episodes in Ukrainian history. I will then investigate different forms of feedback (i.e. likes, dislikes, views, and comments) which YouTube users have provided, exploring thus how

Ukrainophone and Russophone users interact, respectively, with these audiovisual representations of the Second World War and how YouTube's aggressive comment culture interacts with war remembrance.

In the third chapter, I will discuss the phenomenon of so-called "social network memory" (Garde-Hansen, Hoskins, and Reading, 2009, p. 6) and the ways it interacts with cultural memory of the Second World War in Ukraine. For this purpose, I will investigate how memories of the Battle of Kyiv and of the L'viv pogrom are remediated in two different VKontakte communities. The first of these communities – "*Slava OUN-UPA i Vsim Borcjam za Volju Ukrajiny!*" [Glory to the OUN-UPA and All Fighters for the Freedom of Ukraine!] – unites apologists of the nationalistic version of Ukrainian history, whereas the other – "*Protiv OUN-UPA i Prochih Posobnikov Fashizma!*" [Against the OUN-UPA and Other Fascist Collaborators!] – is popular among users with pro-Soviet views on the past. Besides examining how both historical episodes are represented in these two communities, respectively, I will also scrutinize the opportunities social networking sites provide for interacting with contentions of the past and how these interactions differ from the ones found on Wikipedia and YouTube.

Based on observations made in these three chapters, the conclusions section will discuss the ways in which contentious episodes of the Ukrainian past are represented and interacted with on these transnational online platforms. In so doing, I will put to the test existing assumptions about the interplay between digital media and war memories, and raise questions about the future of Second World War memory in post-socialist countries in the context of the growing digitization of personal and public spheres.