From myths to memes

Transnational memory and Ukrainian social media

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Publication date
2017
Document Version
Other version
License
Other

[Link to publication](#)

Citation for published version (APA):
Makhortykh, M. (2017). *From myths to memes: Transnational memory and Ukrainian social media*.

Summary

From Myths to Memes: Transnational Memory and Ukrainian Social Media

The thesis examines what occurs with Second World War memories in post-socialist countries with the advent of digitization. For this purpose, it looks into various instances of digital remembrance associated with two episodes of the Second World War in Ukraine – the events surrounding the seizure of L'viv by Germans in 1941 and the capture of Kyiv by Soviets in 1943 – and draws upon existing memory and media scholarship to investigate how these contentious war memories are performed in post-socialist digital spaces. The study investigates how different social media platforms such as Wikipedia, YouTube, and VKontakte affect the ways 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.

In the introduction, the thesis briefly outlines the theoretical background of the research, which combines insights from the field of memory studies and of media studies. It also discusses its own role of 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 the post-socialist space. It then explains the methodology of the research, in particular the use of qualitative web content analysis for analyzing contentious memories online, and provides historical reference to the two episodes of the Second World War which constitute the case studies for the research.

In the first chapter, the thesis explores how the Second World War is represented in Wikipedia, currently the world's largest online encyclopedia. It scrutinizes 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. For this purpose, the thesis compares selected elements of the Wikipedia articles, such as those which provide a brief summary of the article's content (titles, images, references), clarify the structure of the article's narrative (table of contents), and reveal the article's position in the larger Wikipedia structure (categories and intra-Wikipedia links). It subsequently examines how representations of both episodes have been received by Wikipedia users; in doing so, the thesis explores both non-verbal (views and edits) and verbal (comments) types of user interactions with the Wikipedia articles.

In the second chapter, the thesis examines audiovisual representations of the Battle of Kyiv and of the L'viv pogrom on YouTube. By investigating different audiovisual genres (e.g. requiems, records, and amateur reports) used for remembering both episodes of the Second World War, it questions how

digital technology is used for producing video tributes to traumatic, contended episodes in Ukrainian history. It then investigates 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 and how an aggressive comment culture among some YouTube users' emerges in these practices of war remembrance.

In the third chapter, the thesis discusses the phenomenon of social network memory and the ways it interacts with contested memories of the Second World War in Ukraine. For this purpose, it investigates 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, the thesis also scrutinizes the potential 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.

Finally, in the conclusions section, the thesis reviews the ways contentious episodes of the Ukrainian past are represented and interacted with on transnational online platforms. In so doing, it summarizes the empirical findings of the study and discusses their theoretical implications, including the ways the thesis puts to the test existing assumptions about the interplay between digital media and war memories, and raises 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. Finally, it outlines the limitations of the current study and provides suggestions for further research in the field of digital remembrance in post-socialist countries.