

Digital Memory Practices and Platform Narratives

How TikTok Remembers the Srebrenica Genocide

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Abstract

This thesis investigates how historical narratives of the Srebrenica genocide are portrayed and remembered on TikTok. As the worst massacre in Europe since the Holocaust, and with its 30th anniversary in 2025, Srebrenica remains a crucial site of memory. Using Kuckartz's qualitative content analysis, 20 TikTok videos and captions were studied. The sample was built through a serial analysis: 80 videos were first gathered by keyword searches, then reduced to 20 by selecting one per defined thematic container. Four key themes emerged: dominant narratives, counter narratives, platformisation of digital memory, and memory gaps. Common motives include the roles of women, the graveyard and Srebrenica flower, and slogans such as "Never forget Srebrenica". Survivor testimonials and emotional and aesthetical portrayals amplify victim narratives, while genocide denial in the sample is marginal. The findings highlight how digital spaces shape and negotiate collective memory of Srebrenica.

Keywords: *Srebrenica, digital remembrance, participatory memory, TikTok, social media, collective memory, genocide remembrance*

2025 marks the 30th anniversary of the Srebrenica genocide, the largest massacre in Europe since the Second World War. More than 8000 Bosniak men and boys were killed by Bosnian Serb forces, after the UN safe zone had fallen (Duijzings, 2017). Anniversaries serve as moments to renegotiate, remember, and reframe narratives and memory, both offline and online. This article investigates the following research question: How are historical narratives about the Srebrenica genocide communicated and remembered within the TikTok community? Little is known about how Srebrenica is remembered on TikTok, a platform with a predominantly young user audience (TikTok - Nutzer nach Altersgruppen und Geschlecht weltweit 2024, n.d.-a). While Holocaust remembrance online has been widely studied (Berg, 2024; Berg & Lorenz, 2023; Henig & Ebbrecht-Hartmann, 2022; Neiger et al., 2023; Pfanzelt, 2015, 2017; Turkowska, 2017), research on digital remembrance of the Srebrenica genocide remain scarce, focusing mostly on hashtags on platforms like X or Instagram (Jaugaitė, 2024; Luitjens & Schoorel, 2022; Vico, 2022, 2024). This article's main theoretical framework is built on memory studies and historical communication. As this study is one of the first to investigate narratives and memory on TikTok, it aims to answer the research question through a qualitative content analysis (Kuckartz, 2016; Kuckartz & Rädiker, 2024).

The structure of the article is as follows: After the introduction, the second chapter covers the historical context of the genocide to contextualise Srebrenica and its aftermath (Adib, 2012; Kuka & Grabovica, 2022; Luitjens & Schoorel, 2022; Nettelfield & Wagner, 2014; Simic, 2024). The third chapter illustrates the theoretical foundation, covering concepts of collective memory (Asboth, 2025; Assmann, 1988, 2002; Erll, 2017; Halbwachs, 1980), and explaining how the holocaust and Srebrenica are remembered online. Due to the research gap in Srebrenica research, it is appropriate to use Holocaust

remembrance literature to bridge the empirical findings of this article with related scholarly work. In the fourth chapter, the methodological approach is explained, which consists of a serial analysis of TikTok videos, which were then analysed following the content analysis by Kuckartz and visualised on MaxQDA. It also shows the category system and how it helped to answer the research question. Following this, the results and discussion section categorises the videos in four concepts: Dominant narratives, counter narratives, platformisation of digital memory, and memory gaps. Finally, the conclusion summarises the findings, illustrates the limitations, and offers suggestions for future research in this field.

Historical context on the Srebrenica genocide

During the Bosnian War (1992-1995), numerous crimes have been reported and committed against Bosniaks (Kuka & Grabovica, 2022). Essentially, the socioeconomic and political fall of Yugoslavia was the underlying event that led to the systematic killing of civilians, with the destructive tendencies targeting especially the Bosnian community (Adib, 2012). On 11 July 1995, the war escalated when Bosnian Serb army forces under Ratko Mladić killed over 8000 Bosniak men and boys in the Srebrenica Genocide (Luitjens & Schoorel, 2022). The genocide was conducted under the military operation *Directive 7*, in which Bosniaks were forcibly displaced against their will, resulting in 15000 men and boys fleeing through the forests to safety. However, most of them were captured and brought to mass execution sites (Kuka & Grabovica, 2022). The genocide was the final operation of the Bosnian Serb army to banish the Bosniak community from Eastern Bosnia (Adib, 2012). With the genocide also came the fall of the UN safe area in Srebrenica, where Dutch blue helmet soldiers were stationed (Kuka & Grabovica, 2022; Nettelfield & Wagner, 2014).

Together with the over 8000 victims, the survivors - mainly women - face the psychological pain of the genocide. To this day, not all victims who have been scattered in mass graves throughout Eastern Bosnia have been found and identified (Jaugaité, 2024). The responsible political and military figures, Ratko Mladić, Slobodan Milošević, and Radovan Karadžić have been convicted as war criminals for the atrocities and the genocide committed in Bosnia and Herzegovina, as they stood before the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) (Adib, 2012; *MLADIĆ, Ratko (MICT-13-56) | UNITED NATIONS | International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals*, n.d.).

Genocide denial and ethnic tensions remain contemporary issues in the region (Luitjens & Schoorel, 2022). Due to false narratives shared by media, education, and political figures, genocide denial is normalised and war criminals are celebrated in some parts of the Serbian community (Kuka & Grabovica, 2022; Simic, 2024). Additionally, family members who have lived through and survived the war share their traumatic experiences and war memories to the next generation. Amid these developments, genocide denial has become common among some parts of the Serbian and Bosnian Serb youth (Simic, 2024). To combat these movements, several institutions have emerged to address war crimes committed during the Bosnian War, for example the ICTY, and the International Commission on Missing Persons (ICMP) (Nettelfield & Wagner, 2014).

Concepts of Memory and Digital Remembrance

Collective memory and communicative vs. cultural memory

The concept of collective memory has its foundation in Halbwach's perception of collective memory as something historical, extending beyond singular experiences into a societal archive, which is preserved through media accessible to wide audiences (Halbwachs, 1980). Astrid Erll, by contrast, frames collective memory as an umbrella term encompassing biological and social events across past, present, and future, increasingly shaped by digital mass media. For instance, social networking sites provide an insight into memories of various social groups, but also change the way in which memories are portrayed and shared by users (Erll, 2017). In this context, Halbwachs notes that mediated memory is a product of present media being used to link history and memory (Berg, 2024). Media are essential for establishing collective memory, as they preserve and recall narratives, enabling shared societal memory. In this sense, media connect individual experiences to the collective (Erll, 2017). Furthermore, historical narratives are part of the collective memory and help to shape a community's identity, while also serving to distinguish their own stories from those of others (Asboth, 2025).

Building on Halbwachs, Jan and Aleida Assmann distinguish between communicative and cultural

memory. Communicative memory, loosely structured and rooted in daily interactions, functions as a bridge between individuals and society (Assmann, 1988, 2002). It emerges through conversations, marked by disorganisation, spontaneity, flexibility, and shifting roles between communicator and listener (Erll, 2017). With this it is constantly constructed and deconstructed within a community, but it persists in core values like belonging and spans about 80 years or three generations. It also carries political dimensions, where memories of victims and perpetrators are negotiated through slogans, symbols, memorials, and commemorations (Assmann, 2002). By contrast, cultural memory connects remembrance culture, group identity, and political legitimisation (Erll, 2017). Set in historical events, it transcends time through monuments, rituals, and traditions, following a top-down timeline. Jan Assmann identifies six characteristics of cultural memory:

- group affiliation
- rebuilding memory based on the present situation
- turning memory into objects such as art, rituals and texts
- organisation
- normative connections to symbols
- and reflexivity (Assmann, 1988, 2002).

This article uses the concept of communicative memory, which is crucial for understanding how TikTok users portray and remember memories of Srebrenica. The immediacy and dynamic nature of communicative memory will be connected to the empirical analysis later on.

Social networking sites and digital memory of the Holocaust

Research concerning the digital memory of the Holocaust have shown over the past decade that social networking sites impact and change the remembrance culture and communication, becoming increasingly international (Berg, 2024; Berg & Lorenz, 2023; Henig & Ebbrecht-Hartmann, 2022; Neiger et al., 2023; Pfanzelter, 2015, 2017; Turkowska, 2017). "Doing history" on social networking sites in this sense is more participatory and international than ever, and with an emphasis on visual history, these platforms help to reinterpret collective narratives and portray history and memory in an aesthetic manner (Berg, 2024; Berg & Lorenz, 2023; Henig & Ebbrecht-Hartmann, 2022). The fast-paced dynamics of social networking sites reshape remembrance culture, as every user can interact and produce content. Furthermore, digitalised memory is decoupled from time and space, as online content is available anywhere at all times, as shown by the YouTube video "I will survive" about the life of Holocaust survivor Adolek Kohn (Pfanzelter, 2017). Another example of mediated memory is the case of so-called Eva Stories emerging on Instagram. Utilising the "stories" function on Instagram, users portrayed a potential Instagram story from the perspective of a Holocaust victim (Henig & Ebbrecht-

Hartmann, 2022). These studies show that platforms can be used in an innovative way to blend authentic testimonies with digital storytelling. Similarly, Turkowska explains that the multimodality of social networking sites enrich the presentation of historical events and people with new audiovisual features, as seen in the example of generated video footage of Anne Frank for museum visitors (Turkowska, 2017). Berg identifies a clear shift in communication and portrayal of video content on Instagram, as seen on the accounts @ichbinsophiescholl and @auschwitzmemorial, which put emphasis on sharing the Holocaust in digital spaces. Additionally, the prodsumer (consumer and producer) state of users causes the collective memory of a social group to be separated into multiple split memories (Berg, 2024). In the case of X (formerly known as Twitter), Neiger et. al. reflect on the ways in which Holocaust-related terms such as “ ‘and their collaborators’ (ATC)” are remembered, pointing out that it can either take place through deliberate remembrance, or an unconscious remembrance practice. In their analysis, they conclude an ambiguity in sharing memories, with social networking sites creating a space for both sharing personal and societal memory (Neiger et al., 2023).

Memory and remembrance of war crimes and Srebrenica

Compared to the field of Holocaust-memory in digital spaces, there is no big research tradition focusing on Srebrenica and digital memory. However, in recent years, scholars have begun to investigate how war crimes during the Bosnian war and the Srebrenica genocide are negotiated, preserved and communicated both in physical and digital spheres. Remembrance in this case does not only show the active process of creating a collective memory, but also shows the resilience against genocide denial (Jaugaité, 2024; Ljubojevic, 2022; Luitjens & Schoorel, 2022; Simic, 2024; Vico, 2022, 2024).

The Peace March (Marš Mira in Bosnian/ Serbian/ Croatian) is an annual mnemonic practice dedicated to remembering the victims of the Srebrenica genocide. The walk replicates the journey victims took on trying to escape from the military troops targeting them. Every year it starts in Nežuk and ends in Potočari, where the visitors gather with relatives and survivors of the genocide in the Srebrenica-Potočari memorial and graveyard (Ljubojevic, 2022). Drawing on Halbwachs' concept of collective memory (Halbwachs, 1980), Luitjens and Schoorel interpret the Peace March as a commemorative practice for Bosniaks to demonstrate resilience against genocide denial. The march is a socially embedded group activity (Luitjens & Schoorel, 2022). The Peace March is a contemporary approach to recreate the fates of the people during the genocide and reconnect with their ethnic identity, with people also from abroad and diaspora joining in the march (Ljubojevic, 2022). Alongside the march itself, the phrase “Never forget Srebrenica” is common among the marching participants, but also the online community, where it is used as a hashtag to

highlight content about Srebrenica. During the march, the Bosnian history and identity is connected to Srebrenica, with people bringing flags and other symbols to mark their presence in Republika Srpska (Luitjens & Schoorel, 2022). In online spaces, Sanja Vico investigated the hashtag and initiative #sedamhiljada (seven thousand, referring to the number of genocide victims identified at that time) on X in regards to war crimes committed during the Bosnian war in the 1990s. Initially, this hashtag was created to raise awareness and motivate Serbian people to show solidarity (Vico, 2024). She concludes in her study that Serbian people are more open to recognise the war crimes when the topic is addressed on social networking sites, rather than when talking about it in person. In a prior survey she also analysed the same #sedamhiljada initiative, focussing on cognitive dissonance. The author found that Serbian people struggle and experience cognitive dissonance when addressing the initiative in person, while the language used in social networking sites was harsher than in person (Vico, 2022). Vico concludes that the visibility of #sedamhiljada depends on three aspects: the technical aspects of a social networking platform, the socio-political context of topics and societies involved, and the know-how of people in using these platforms (Vico, 2024). Another Twitter (now X) study analysing #Štotenema (translation: Why are you not here?) is one of the few examples where a content analysis has been conducted on a Srebrenica related hashtag. 271 tweets have been analysed according to the method of Kuckartz, where results shown that other than the #sedamhiljada, following hashtags are a part of the online discourse: “Srebrenica25”, “Srebrenica”, “SrebrenicaGenocide”, “AidaSehovic”, and “bosniangenocide” (Jaugaité, 2024). The content analysis revealed that most people posting with #Štotenema are not directly affected by the genocide. The hashtag was used mostly by journalists, activists, and researchers, with only some posts using the hashtag while not being related to the genocide directly (Jaugaité, 2024). In total, these studies illustrate how memory about the Srebrenica genocide is remembered and communicated through rituals and memorial sites on one hand, and digital participation and online discourses on the other hand. While Holocaust-related research helps with understanding the dynamics and technical aspects of a personalised, affective memory, the findings demonstrate a significant research gap regarding digital remembrance of the Srebrenica genocide, especially on platforms like TikTok with a younger audience (*TikTok - Nutzer nach Altersgruppen und Geschlecht weltweit* 2024, n.d.-b).

Methodology

Research design

Given the research gap on Srebrenica's digital remembrance, an inductive content analysis (Kuckartz, 2016; Meyen et al., 2019) was chosen, allowing categories to emerge directly from the data rather than from existing literature. A key feature of this TikTok analysis is to adapt

the method to the multimodality of audiovisual content. To minimise algorithmic bias, a new TikTok account was created on April 7 2025. The account was active for one week, during which videos were gathered from the For-You-Page. Every day, the same search prompts were looked up and videos were gathered accordingly. The sampling process lasted from April 7 until April 13 2025, using following search prompts: *srebrenica*, *srebrenica genocide*, *bosna rat*, *bosnia*, *bosnia genocide*, *srebrenica30* (referring to “srebrenica25” (Jaugaité, 2024)), *never forget srebrenica*, *8372*, *srebrenica resolution*. These phrases were selected to represent multiple layers of one topic, such as the UN resolution from 2024, the number of victims, and the Bosnian war. During this week, 80 videos were collected and documented in a video diary, until a theoretical saturation was reached. This has been defined by recurring topics in videos, and in some cases other users uploading the same exact videos. It should be noted that while the sampling was completed in Bosnian, German, and English, the TikTok account was created in Austria, resulting in potential algorithmic bias due to the IP-address and location. Once the final sample was chosen (more details below), each video was turned into a multimedia transcript, which includes sequences of each video, information on uploader, visual and textual aspects of the videos. This also contains audios, hashtags, and emojis both in the videos and in the captions. These transcripts were used in MaxQDA to implement systematic and transparent coding (Kuckartz & Rädiker, 2024). Since Kuckartz’s approach on the content analysis is not exactly linear, it allows for more flexibility and intuition in the coding. Although inductive research is inherently interpretive, it should remain transparent and traceable (Kuckartz, 2016). This was also relevant in this analysis, since the method and research question have been slightly modified after the initial screening was completed. The various different kinds of categories defined by Kuckartz have provided useful tools for wide ranging categorisation and the usage of MaxQDA enhanced the content analysis due to the multi-textual analysis and visualisation tools (Kuckartz & Rädiker, 2024), as was also implemented in this work. Figure 1 shows a dense summary of the original category system. The system is built on two analytical dimensions, directly derived from the research question: narratives about Srebrenica, and remembrance communication. The narrative dimension contains recurring fragments of stories and symbols, which illustrate the topics of Srebrenica that are (not) addressed (Asboth, 2025; Assmann, 2002; Welzer, 2010; Welzer et al., 2002). Contrarily, the second dimension analyses with which platform tools users communicate their remembrance of Srebrenica. The usage practices reflect the dynamic nature of communicative memory (Assmann, 2002). Thus, the dimension “remembrance communication” is a direct example of “doing history” (Berg & Lorenz, 2023) on TikTok. The category system operationalises Assmann’s communicative memory through indicators of immediacy, affective exchange, and symbolic mediation, such as emojis, music, or captions. While the notion

of platformisation was reflected through TikTok’s affordances like sound reuse, anniversary posting, and participatory comment culture. These theoretical lenses directly guided the two analytical dimensions “narratives about Srebrenica” and “remembrance communication”.

Category dimension	Subcategories
Narratives on Srebrenica	Women and children of Srebrenica
	Never forget Srebrenica
	Srebrenica flower
	Genocide denial and victims
	Bosnian nationality
	War
Remembrance communication	Emojis
	Upload date
	Emotions
	Audio
	Languages

Fig. 1: Dense summary of category system (author’s own image, 2025)

Sample

As mentioned earlier, the initial data screening from April 7th until April 13th was archived in a video diary consisting of 80 videos. The video diary includes daily entries of videos, screenshots, account information of the users, video captions, hashtags, emojis, and audio. In order to narrow down the final sample without losing its thematic diversity, the 80 videos were screened again during the serial analysis to determine key themes of the videos. In total, 20 “thematic containers” were identified in the videos. The content analysis focuses only on the videos and captions, since the focus lies on narratives constructed through audiovisual content. Comments were excluded to maintain a focused analytical scope on video narratives; however, they remain central for understanding how memory is negotiated among users. Including comments would have required a separate analytical framework and exceeded the feasible scope of this analysis, but future research could address this. The focus lies in the content users create, leaving out the discourse within the community. Figure 2 illustrates all TikTok videos that have been sorted by theme, with the themes colourised in a circle diagram. From each theme container, the most liked video was selected, resulting in a final sample of 20 videos. Selecting the most-liked video from each thematic container ensured that the analysed examples reached the widest audiences and thus best represented collective visibility. Although coding was conducted by a single researcher, reliability was strengthened through iterative recoding and analytic memoing in MaxQDA. The aim was to gather a sample,

which best illustrates narratives reaching wider audiences. The sample contains videos in German, English, and Bosnian/ Serbian/ Croatian, meaning both the local and international community is included in this sample. Only some videos were assigned two themes. This sampling technique produced a manageable yet diverse sample of videos that had reached a wider audience. With this final sample, each corresponding multimedia transcript was uploaded onto MaxQDA, where the first round of coding the material led to the category system (see Fig. 1). These categories later on have been analysed and visualised into a comprehensive and broad discussion and results section.

All TikTok videos sorted by theme

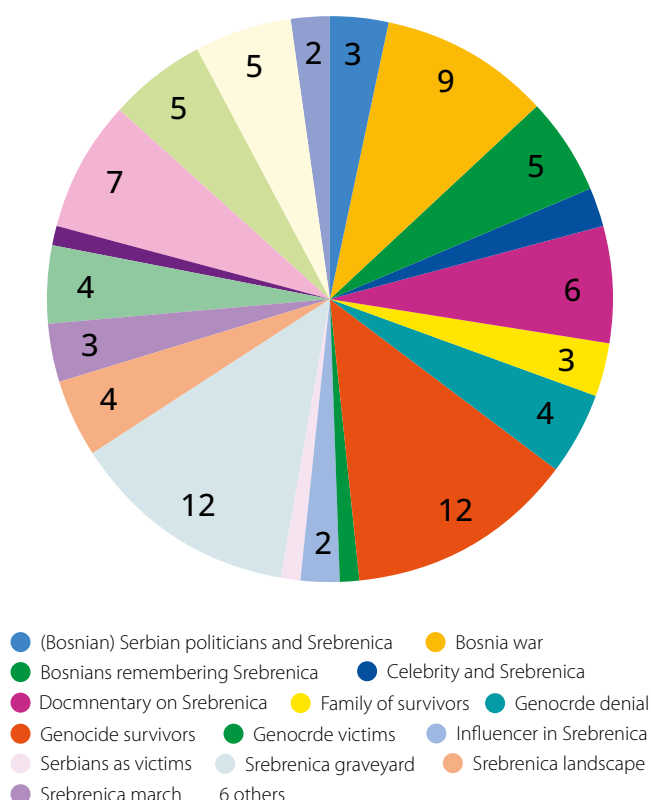


Fig. 2: All TikTok videos sorted by their themes (author's own image, 2025)

While this methodological approach provided a rich set of data to be analysed, this method also includes some limitations. As with most inductive qualitative research, full replication of all empirical steps is not realistic, meaning other researchers would not be able to recreate this category system (Kuckartz, 2016). Furthermore, ethical implications also need to be taken into account. Data safety and anonymity are crucial if video material is shared and disclosed (Kuckartz & Rädiker, 2024). In addition to this, algorithmic biases can preselect videos, meaning that a fully transparent sample reflecting all content is impossible. Moreover, posts on social networking sites are not stored permanently, meaning researchers run risk of losing data (Berg, 2024). Since this study only addresses TikTok, it should be noted that

a cross-platform analysis of the same topic could offer a more diverse representation of commemorative practices (Neiger et al., 2023).

Results and Discussion

The following section combines the results of the content analysis of 20 videos, excluding comments, in light of the theoretical background and current state of research. The results have been structured into four key themes: dominant narratives, counter-narratives, platformisation of memory, and memory gaps. The findings below reflect the structure of the category system, exploring the historical narratives about Srebrenica, and the remembrance communication on TikTok.

Dominant narratives

In the 20 videos, the most common codes were “Women of Srebrenica” (61% of all coded segments), “Graveyard” (61%, referring to the graveyard next to the memorial center), and “Never forget Srebrenica” (56%). Women appear to be a theme that is often integrated in videos in various ways. Oftentimes women are shown in the videos with children, in other examples they are mentioned in the context of rape, and frequently portrayed as mourning women. The code “Women of Srebrenica” is the most common and versatile code, as it depicts the various roles women take on in Srebrenica. The women in Srebrenica are mothers, wives, widows, and daughters of the genocide victims. While they are not included in the 8372 (Brunborg et al., 2002), they are also victims left to deal with the aftermath. The category “Never forget Srebrenica”, a similar version of this is also used in the Holocaust-sphere, is addressed in half of the videos in text-in-video and/or captions. The phrase is frequently combined with the code “8372” in videos that show the graveyard and memorial center Srebrenica-Potočari. Also the Srebrenica flower, as a symbol of remembrance, appears often in videos. Most uploaders have private accounts, meaning people who post from their own personal accounts. Building on the concept of historical narratives (Asboth, 2025) and Welzer’s concept of a social memory (Welzer et al., 2002), it becomes evident how TikTok users create their own narratives and re-narrations (Welzer, 2010) about Srebrenica. The Bosnian war and genocide are also often linked with Bosnian identity in the videos, with Bosnian flags, lilies, or religious themes portrayed in the context of war. These symbols, phrases, and visual elements create a sense of visibility and recognition factor, and are common practical examples of communicative memory (Assmann, 2002). The link depicts the hardship of war as a part of Bosnian history and identity. It offers more context and depth to the Bosnian community, instead of narrating the genocide disconnected from the Bosnian war.

Many TikTok videos also contain victim-centered

narratives, which focus on genocide victims as the emotional visual center of digital remembrance. The details revealed in some videos are graphic, which is why the codes “genocide victims”, “violence”, and “children of Srebrenica” are often coded together in one video. Personal testimonies of victims posted online show direct personal fates people faced in Srebrenica. Similarly to that, Turkowska illustrated in her study that multimedia content of Anne Frank increases the empathy viewers feel for genocide victims (Turkowska, 2017). An example of these victim-centered narratives is one video in which a man shares his experience as a child being tortured by Bosnian Serb soldiers. In this video the man describes his experience as follows: “[...] They started beating me with a buckle of a belt. The army buckle of a belt. Then they took a knife and they made crosses here, which is still a little bit, you can see here.” (meq bei TikTok, n.d.-a). This quote reveals another dominant narrative, that is the combination of victim-centered narratives and affective resonance through emotions, emojis, and song choices. Figure 3 illustrates a graph created on MaxQDA, depicting the course of codes assigned in the multimedia transcript.

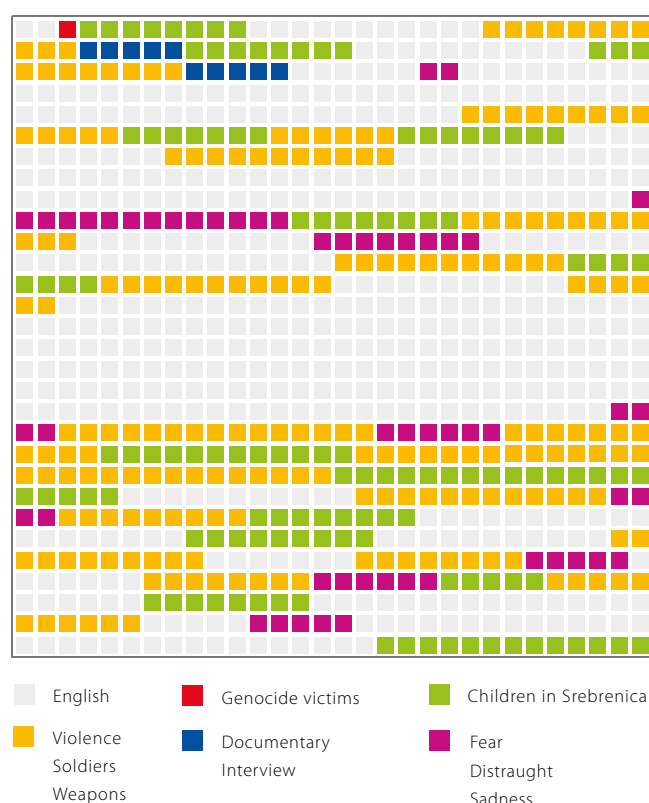


Fig. 3: Document portrait of TikTok video about genocide victim (author's own image, 2025)

Not only are violent topics described, the code “genocide victim” is connected to emotions such as fear and sadness, with the man crying in the video while retelling his past. Out of all codes about emotions, “Sadness” is the most common one and appears in eleven out of twenty videos. That emotion is often linked with the

wilted rose emoji or with specific songs used as TikTok audios. Most songs are in the local language and cover the genocide and war. Contrarily, the second most common emotion in the videos is “Solidarity”, which is often also expressed with a red heart emoji. An example of this would be a video of Angelina Jolie visiting the memorial center as part of her campaign against rape victims (meq bei TikTok, n.d.-b).

Counter narratives

Although genocide denial is not a very common narrative in the TikTok videos, it does function as a stark counter narrative to the dominant victim-centered narratives that emphasise identity and emotion. The code “genocide denial” appears in only three videos, but is often linked to the code “UN resolution”. For example, street interviews with Bosnian Serbs about the UN resolution in 2024 reveal that some locals deny the severity of the crime, with some even not recognising the massacre as a genocide. Most of the time these videos also contain codes for negative emotions, as Bosnian Serbs express their dissatisfaction with the resolution, stating: “[...] (Interviewer) Zašto? (Local) Pa, samo smo mi genocidan narod ispada tako, samo Srbi. A oni tamo nista. (Interviewer) Nije nidge navedeno da smo genocidan narod. (Local) A jeste, ispada tako.”¹ (BUKA bei TikTok, n.d.). The majority of people in Republika Srpska (Serbian entity in Bosnia and Herzegovina) fear for their image and that they will be perceived as genocidal people. Although it is not universal and omnipresent, genocide denial is spread in some parts of the Bosnian Serb community (Simic, 2024). The videos coded with “genocide denial” show a diverse group of people unaccepting of the resolution or genocide. Denial is an evident anti-narrative in this sample, however, it is not common in the general field. This could be due to the size of the sample, and should be investigated in future, bigger research projects.

Platformisation of digital memory

Taking a closer look at the temporal and aesthetic digital remembrance reveals important aspects of the platformisation of TikTok memory on Srebrenica. For instance, the analysed sample shows a clear annual uploading cycle. 60 percent of all videos were posted around the anniversary date. It becomes evident that especially the videos posted around 11 July show a higher count of Srebrenica related codes. Most videos contain codes such as “Women in Srebrenica”, “Graveyard”, and “Never forget”. Especially the symbol Srebrenica flower and the number 8372 experience a surge during the anniversary time. Alongside that, “Bosnian nationality” is highlighted in these videos as well. In

¹ Translation from Bosnian to English: “[...] (Interviewer) Why? (Local) Well, only we are shown as genocidal people, only Serbs. But the ones over there nothing. (Interviewer) It is nowhere written that we are genocidal people. (Local) It is, it looks like that.”

contrast, the videos posted throughout the year have a focus on general war experiences, such as “Violence”, “Weapons”, and “Soldiers”. These results suggest that the TikTok community seems to commemorate Srebrenica in specific timeframes more than others, and wish to spread awareness on the genocide around the anniversary. This is in line with findings in Holocaust researchers, where researchers find that the aesthetic presentation or “aestheticisation” of social media content is gaining relevance (Berg, 2024; Pfanzelter, 2017). Another aspect of the visual presentation of TikTok videos is video location and video format. Analysing these components reveals what is shared in the videos and how it is presented. The most common combination of format and location are videos which are filmed outdoors and uploaded as a private TikTok video. Other videos include stagings such as “Outdoors” and “News channel”, or “Indoors” and “Interview”. Furthermore, most users post videos with audios that amplify the emotions in the video, frequently utilising voice overs. The recurrent use of shared audios, captions, and emojis exemplifies Assmann’s communicative memory (Assmann, 2002), where users collectively reconstruct fragments of the past through affective and symbolic exchanges enabled by TikTok’s affordances.

Collective memory performance on Tiktok proves to be a hybrid form on TikTok. Users express their remembrance strategies through affective, symbolic, and aesthetical means. Online users can reach an international audience, sharing the collective memory of Srebrenica in an international sphere (Erll, 2017). Video content analysed in this study is in German, English, and Bosnian/ Serbian/ Croatian. 80 percent of the sampled videos are in Bosnian, with 50 percent of the videos using English in text and/ or audio. This illustrates that even though the genocide is especially locally impactful, the topic is internationally relevant. A reason for the language diversity could be that more than 30 percent of the population in Bosnia and Herzegovina is considered diaspora, as most have left their homes during the 90s war (Halilovich, 2012). Most personal accounts uploading videos do so either in Bosnian or English. Other frequent video formats that are in Bosnian are interviews and clips from news channels. Only three videos of the entire sample were in German.

The peace march provides not only an example for collective memory performance in the physical realm, but also shows how these remembrance strategies can transcend into digital spaces and vice versa. The annual peace march allows for the individual fates of genocide victims to be expanded to an international collective through the participants. Marching essentially becomes a collective form of remembrance (Ljubojevic, 2022; Luitjens & Schoorel, 2022). Marches for Srebrenica are also addressed on Tiktok. In four out of twenty videos the code “Marching for Srebrenica” has been assigned to both videos mentioning the peace march, but also demonstrations for Srebrenica happening abroad. The march also constitutes a digitally mediated

form of collective commemoration, as it is associated with the code “Bosnian nationality”. People are shown wearing flags, the Srebrenica flower etc. Similarly how Ljubojevic takes an ethnographic approach to showing and analyzing the peace march (Ljubojevic, 2022), TikTok users use videos to showcase aspects of the long hike (*envermakić1 bei TikTok*, n.d.). TikTok enables an international memory performance, especially because a big audience can view videos from all over the world. Other TikTok videos in the sample show people in Sarajevo having a minute of silence, or Croatian people remembering the genocide victims by throwing flowers into the sea. The sample exemplifies the hybrid nature of TikTok. The platform is collective in the sense that they address a collective community and also allow for common memory performance. On the other hand every video is personalised through captions, visuals etc., highlighting personal aspects of Srebrenica.

Memory gaps

While the sampled TikTok videos are diverse in topics, there are still some avoided or underrepresented narratives that need to be mentioned, in order to achieve a true full picture of the thematic range of the Srebrenica genocide. While the TikTok videos do show the aftermath and pain that comes with the genocide, they do not highlight the actual severity (Brunborg et al., 2002). It is not that the videos distort actual historical facts, but rather they amplify emotional topics, choosing how users want to remember the genocide. However, none of the 20 videos mention the military operation behind the genocide, and that it was a meticulously and systematically carried out plan (Kuka & Grabovica, 2022). It cannot be guaranteed that every user is aware of the scope of the crimes committed, since most videos focus on 11 July 1995. This fragmented portrayal of the historical context only gets reinforced by TikTok. While it is important to remember the genocide online, most videos only portray the tip of the iceberg of a multi-year-process. Keeping the length of TikTok videos in mind, it is understandable that users struggle to include everything in one video. In addition to that, the UN resolution is also an underrepresented narrative in the sample, being addressed in only one out of twenty videos. However, this may be due to the fact that this sample was taken before the anniversary date of the resolution. It is plausible to suggest that around the anniversary in May, the resolution receives more attention on TikTok. Another underrepresented topic is the one of unidentified victims. The code “Reburying remains” appears only in two videos. While the mass graves throughout the eastern part of Bosnia and Herzegovina and unidentified genocide victims are cited in scholarly works (Jaugaité, 2024; Kuka & Grabovica, 2022), it is rarely mentioned in TikTok videos. These missing narratives risk oversimplifying history, possibly creating a one-dimensional collective memory.

Conclusion and future implications

This article examines how memory of the Srebrenica genocide is presented and performed on TikTok through an inductive content analysis of 20 videos. The findings demonstrate that digital remembrance of Srebrenica is shaped by symbolic motives, affective strategies, and platform-specific dynamics. Four patterns stand out and offer an insight into the ways in which younger generations and international communities participate in the construction of digital genocide memory.

First, victim-centered and people-focused narratives dominate on this platform, with women, graveyards, and the collective imperative “Never forget Srebrenica” symbolising loss and resilience. Simultaneously, the study identifies rare but persistent counter-narratives, in this case genocide denial. This diversity underlines the competing historical narratives, representing the ethnic tensions in digital spheres. Second, commemorative practices are strongly tied to temporal and aesthetic features, clustering around the 11 July anniversary and employing music, captions, and visual effects to frame remembrance. Posts are personal and collective, national and transnational. Most videos are in Bosnian, but the use of English and German demonstrate the internationalisation of Srebrenica memory. Third, the memory gaps revealed that videos rarely address the systematic planning and military strategies behind the genocide. Topics like the UN resolution or the ongoing process of identifying victims remain underrepresented. Emphasising affective resonance and symbolic visibility risks simplifying or fragmenting the historical context. TikTok’s memory culture oscillates between affective, symbol-driven sub-narratives and context-heavy historical narration. While the former dominates through immediacy and emotion, the latter remains marginal, revealing how platform logic privileges engagement over contextual accuracy.

This article links Holocaust-memory research with the emerging field of Srebrenica memory online. While Holocaust studies have long shown how social media shape remembrance culture, similar work on Srebrenica is scarce. This study is among the first to examine portrayals of the Srebrenica genocide on the platform, highlighting both opportunities for participatory memory practices and challenges posed by algorithmic bias. It contributes to understanding how platformised remembrance can privilege emotional resonance over historical accuracy. The multilingual video analysis enables insights into both content and community.

However, several limitations arise: inductive methods reduce replicability, the TikTok-only focus leaves out a cross-platform perspective, and ethical issues of privacy, data storage, and filtering constrain reliability. Finally, excluding comments neglects how memory is negotiated within the community. Returning to Assmann (1988, 2002) and Halbwachs (1980), the findings suggest that digital collective memory increasingly unfolds through communicative immediacy rather than institutionalised cultural forms. The users’ short videos and recurring symbols, such as the Srebrenica flower and the phrase “Never forget”, exemplify Halbwachs’s idea that collective remembrance is sustained through everyday communication within social groups (Halbwachs, 1980). In contrast to institutional commemorations, TikTok enables horizontal, bottom-up memory practices where affective expression and shared audiovisual repertoires reproduce the past in a living, dynamic form. These findings also extend Assmann’s distinction between communicative and cultural memory (Assmann, 1988) by showing how platform modalities (hashtags, audios, algorithmic circulation) stabilise fleeting communicative action into semi-ritualised forms of remembrance. Digital practices blur the boundary between personal recollection and collective cultural memory, creating a new hybrid form of mediated remembrance. Future research should extend this through cross-platform triangulation to operationalise comparative insights of digital remembrance.

This article suggests several directions for future research: cross platform comparisons (e.g.: X, Instagram) to explore how technical features shape Srebrenica memory. Longitudinal studies can trace narrative shifts around anniversaries or political events. The analysis of users’ comments can capture discussions, and comparisons with other genocides can help to contextualise Srebrenica in broader digital memory studies. For educators, museums, and memory institutions, the results of this study highlight the need to translate emotionally resonant short-form storytelling into pedagogically grounded resources that safeguard historical complexity. Overall, TikTok emerges as a key site of digital remembrance, where global audiences construct, renarrate, and sustain collective memory. These dynamics highlight both affective resonance and fragmentation, underlining the need to preserve historical knowledge, counter genocide denial, and encourage international exchange.

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