

“Ghosts in the Machine”: Digital Memory, Loss and Algorithmic Oblivion

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Abstract. This article revisits the Frankfurt School’s reflections on trauma and memory to theorise Holocaust commemoration in the age of the ‘platform society’. Drawing on Adorno and Horkheimer’s critique of the culture industry, Benjamin’s notion of redemption, and Marcuse’s account of art and fantasy as preserving ‘the unconscious memory of a failed liberation, of a betrayed promise’, it conceptualises algorithmic oblivion as a structural tendency through which mnemonic traces proliferate while critical engagement weakens, as memory increasingly circulates as spectacle rather than symbolic elaboration. Methodologically, the study combines critical theory with a netnographic interpretative analysis of 300 posts published between January and August 2025 on Instagram, Facebook, and X, sampled through ten Holocaust-related hashtags. The posts were coded in MAXQDA according to six analytical axes –standardised memorial tropes, aestheticisation/spectacularisation, algorithmic grammars, politicisation/semantic conflict, counter-memory, and critical/self-critical memory –organised into three categories: ritual, conflict, and critique. The findings point to platform-specific grammars of grief: Instagram foregrounds curated solemnity and aestheticised spectacle; Facebook privileges institutional framing and pedagogical ritualisation; X politicises remembrance through real-time, conflictual discourse. Across platforms, however, counter-memorial practices emerge that resist algorithmic flux, restore historical framing, and reopen the space of mourning. The article proposes a theoretical and empirical framework to distinguish between memory as spectacle and memory as critique, arguing that digital infrastructures not only shape what is remembered, but also condition the very possibilities of remembrance.

Keywords: Digital memory; Algorithmic oblivion; Holocaust; Frankfurt School; Netnography; Social media; Counter-memory.

Riassunto. Questo articolo riprende le riflessioni della Scuola di Francoforte su trauma e memoria per teorizzare la commemorazione della Shoah nell’era della “platform society”. Muovendo dalla critica dell’industria culturale di Adorno e Horkheimer, dalla nozione benjaminiana di redenzione e dalla concezione marcusiana dell’arte e della fantasia come custodi della «memoria inconscia di una liberazione mancata, di una promessa tradita», l’articolo concettualizza l’*oblio algoritmico* come una tendenza strutturale attraverso cui le tracce mnestiche proliferano mentre l’impegno critico si attenua, poiché la memoria circola sempre più come spettacolo piuttosto che come elaborazione simbolica. Dal punto di vista metodologico, lo studio combina la teoria critica con un’analisi interpretativa etnografica di 300 post pubblicati tra gennaio e agosto 2025 su Instagram, Facebook e X, selezionati attraverso dieci hashtag legati alla Shoah. I post sono stati codificati in MAXQDA secondo sei assi analitici–tropi memoriali standardizzati, estetizzazione/spettacularizzazione, grammatiche algoritmiche, politicizzazione/confitto semantico, contro-memoria e memoria critica/autocritica–organizzati in tre macro-categorie: rituale, conflitto e critica. I risultati evidenziano grammatiche del lutto specifiche per piattaforma: Instagram privilegia una solennità curata e una spettacolarizzazione estetizzata; Facebook favorisce cornici istituzionali e ritualità pedagogiche; X politicizza la memoria attraverso un discorso conflittuale in tempo reale. Tuttavia, su tutte le piattaforme emergono anche pratiche contro-memoriali che resistono al flusso algoritmico, reintroducono il contesto storico ed espandono le possibilità del lutto. L’articolo propone un quadro teorico ed empirico per distinguere tra memoria come spettacolo e memoria come critica, sostenendo che le infrastrutture digitali non solo plasmano ciò che viene ricordato, ma condizionano anche le stesse possibilità del ricordare.

Parole chiave: Memoria digitale; Oblio algoritmico; Shoah; Scuola di Francoforte; Netnografia; Social media; Contro-memoria.

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Introduction

«How can one celebrate this Memorial Day, Lloyd?
By not confusing memory with remembrance, sir.
And what would be the difference, Lloyd?
Remembrance honours the dead we must not forget, sir.
Memory preserves the facts we must not repeat.
I fear that memory is being lost along with reason, Lloyd.
And that is why we must fight to defend it, sir.
Every day? Every minute, sir».¹
(Simone Tempia)

This imaginary dialogue with the butler Lloyd (Tempia, 2016) crystallises a fundamental tension running through contemporary commemorative culture: the distinction between remembrance as ritualised homage and memory as critical, historically grounded labour. While remembrance tends to stabilise itself in symbolic gestures – acts that reassure rather than unsettle – memory, in its stronger sense, demands contextualisation, reflexivity, and ethical vigilance. It is a practice of elaboration rather than mere retrospection.

In the digital age, this tension becomes particularly salient. Social media platforms do not simply host commemorative acts; they reconfigure the conditions under which remembrance, mourning, and forgetting take place. Logics of visibility and algorithmic curation shape what becomes salient and what recedes from view, often privileging affective immediacy over historical depth.

It is within this transformed mnemonic environment that Holocaust commemoration must now be re-examined. The circulation of Holocaust memory across platforms reflects what Baer and Sznajder (2016) have conceptualised as the globalisation of Holocaust memory, detached from national frameworks yet unevenly recontextualised.

The title *Ghosts in the Machine* intentionally echoes Gilbert Ryle's critique of Cartesian dualism (1949). Here, however, the 'ghost' is reworked as a metaphor for the spectral condition of digital memory: traces of trauma and loss appear fleeting and immaterial, yet remain deeply shaped by platform infrastructures and political-economic logics.

Within digital environments, what survives historical trauma no longer persists as lived memory in the classical sense, but as an algorithmically mediated residue: fragments of testimony, ritualised images, hashtags, quotations, and performative gestures that circulate independently of their original contexts. These 'ghosts' of experience are continuously reassembled through metrics of visibility, engagement, and monetisation, producing a form of remembrance that is at once omnipresent and decontextualised. Trauma, once anchored in embodied suffering and collective historical consciousness, risks being transformed into datafied remembrance – present everywhere, yet increasingly detached from critical reflection and symbolic integration.

The central question is therefore how the digital mediation of Holocaust remembrance reshapes historical trauma into a spectral, algorithmically mediated form of memory and what this shift entails for the possibility of critical remembrance in contemporary digital culture. While platforms promise unprecedented access, participation, and mnemonic pluralism, they also tend to standardise commemoration into repetitive and easily consumable forms. The very conditions that enable remembrance to circulate widely may thus simultaneously erode its reflexive, ethical, and critical dimensions.

In this light, digital memory appears neither inherently emancipatory nor merely manipulative. Rather, it constitutes a contested terrain in which practices of critical remembrance coexist with processes of neutralisation, commodification, and ideological smoothing. The 'ghosts in the machine' name this unresolved tension: the persistent presence of historical trauma within systems that preserve memory while subjecting it to the logics of visibility, repetition, and exchange. Examining these dynamics through a critical theoretical lens makes it possible to interrogate not only how Holocaust

¹ Vernacular meme on *Instagram* (posted on January 27, 2024), with 10,510 likes ([instagram.com/vita_con_lloyd](https://www.instagram.com/vita_con_lloyd)) and on *Facebook* ([facebook.com/vitaconlloyd](https://www.facebook.com/vitaconlloyd)). Unless otherwise indicated, translations are mine.

memory circulates online, but also how the conditions of digital culture shape what can still be remembered critically.

Platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and X no longer merely mediate memory; they organise it. Couldry and Hepp (2017) conceptualise contemporary social life as ‘deeply mediatized’, arguing that media are no longer external channels of representation but infrastructures through which social reality itself is constructed and enacted. In the age of digital platforms, media operate as environments that organise practices, relations, and forms of meaning-making. Rather than merely shaping communication, media increasingly ‘constitute the social’ (p. 3), requiring social theory to rethink its foundational categories in light of mediated realities.

Rituals once anchored in monuments, archives, or testimonial transmission now circulate through feeds, hashtags, and engagement metrics. A paradoxical condition takes shape: the proliferation of commemorative traces coincides with a weakening of symbolic working-through – a phenomenon conceptualised here as ‘algorithmic oblivion’.

The analysis proceeds through a qualitative and interpretive approach that treats memory as a dynamic cultural practice shaped by communication infrastructures, rather than as a fixed archive. Following Olick *et al.* (2011), memory is approached here not as a static repository of the past, but as memory-labour: a dynamic set of practices, narratives, and conflicts through which the past is continually rearticulated.

To examine this condition, the article reclaims the critical vocabulary of the Frankfurt School. Within the Frankfurt School tradition, critique is inseparable from a suspicion toward forms of reconciliation that mask domination, a concern central to Jay’s reconstruction of critical theory (1982). Adorno and Horkheimer’s critique of the culture industry illuminates how standardised tropes and pseudo-individualisation reappear in digital commemoration; Benjamin’s philosophy of history foregrounds the imperative to rescue threatened images of the past; Marcuse (1955) interprets the artistic imagination as preserving the “‘unconscious memory” of the liberation that failed, of the promise that was betrayed’ (p. 144). In Marcuse’s perspective, memory does not function as reconciliation with the past, but as the preservation of unrealised possibilities that continue to negate the existing order. Rather than integrating historical suffering into a coherent narrative, such remembrance sustains critique precisely by refusing closure and by keeping alive the memory of what could have been.

Freud’s psychoanalytic distinction between repetition and working-through remains central to understanding how traumatic material resurfaces in transformed symbolic forms.

Building on this tradition, the article combines theoretical reflection with a qualitative netnographic study of 300 posts drawn from ten Holocaust-related hashtags published between January and August 2025 on Instagram, Facebook, and X. Using MAXQDA, posts were coded along six analytical axes that capture the oscillation between ritualisation, conflict, and critique.

Two lines of inquiry structure the analysis: a critical reinterpretation of Holocaust memory within the algorithmic ecosystem, and the identification of counter-memorial practices that resist commodification and reassert the ethical and political stakes of remembrance. Rather than simply ‘applying’ Frankfurt School concepts to digital media, the article approaches platformed memory as a historical mutation. Such a return to Frankfurt does not imply the uncritical transposition of inherited categories to the present, but their reactivation in relation to transformed historical conditions. As Fazio (2020) suggests, the continuing relevance of Critical Theory lies precisely in recovering its critical intentions while rethinking its conceptual vocabulary in light of contemporary forms of digitalisation, surveillance, and social administration. Algorithmic infrastructures do not replace mass culture; they radicalise its tendencies, transforming remembrance into a circulatory regime governed by visibility, repetition, and affective immediacy. Within this regime, memory risks losing its character as symbolic labour and regressing into ritualised repetition or ideological instrumentalisation.

Against this background, the article contributes to digital memory studies by introducing the concept of algorithmic oblivion to explain how platform infrastructures reshape Holocaust remembrance through logics of visibility, rapid circulation, and affective immediacy. Empirically, it

shows how Instagram, Facebook, and X organise distinct platform grammars of remembrance, while also leaving room for counter-memorial practices that resist ritualisation and spectacularisation.

1. Memory as Data: From Archive to Supply

Within trauma studies, the Holocaust has long been understood not merely as a historical event, but as a rupture that exceeds representational frameworks and challenges the very possibility of narration (LaCapra, 2014 [2001]; Eyerman, 2013; Hirsch, 2012). Its memory resists closure, linearisation, and full symbolic mastery, returning instead in fragmented, belated, or repetitive forms. From this perspective, the Frankfurt School's reflections on memory, repression, and the administered world intersect productively with psychoanalytic trauma theory: both foreground the risk that what cannot be worked through returns in distorted, ritualised, or compulsively repeated forms (Adorno and Tiedemann, 2003; Horkheimer and Adorno, 2002 [1944/47]).

In this context, the transformation of memory into data is more than a shift in medium or format; it reconfigures the temporal, symbolic, and political conditions under which traumatic memory circulates. In traditional settings, archives were embedded in institutional frameworks – libraries, museums, state repositories – governed by principles of preservation, contextualisation, and epistemic responsibility (Assmann, 2011; Erll, 2011). Their function was not simply to store traces of the past, but to stabilise historical narratives and sustain the slow work of collective reflection.

Platform infrastructures increasingly absorb and displace this archival function. Yet their governing logic is not oriented towards preservation or historical depth, but towards prediction, monetisation, and real-time interaction (van Dijck, Poell, and de Waal, 2018). Memory, under these conditions, is reorganised as a continuous flow of data, optimised for visibility, engagement, and circulation. The result is a mnemonic regime in which remembrance is valued less for its capacity to sustain understanding than for its capacity to generate affective response.

Psychoanalytically, this shift carries decisive implications. In *Remembering, Repeating and Working-Through* (1914), Sigmund Freud argued that repressed material does not simply disappear, but returns in transformed and symptomatic forms. Repetition, in this sense, signals not mastery but the persistence of an unresolved past; working-through designates the temporal labour² through which repetition may be gradually transformed into symbolic elaboration and historical intelligibility (Freud, 1958 [1914]). In traumatic memory, the failure of working-through results not in forgetting, but in compulsive return. Freud's distinction is mobilised here not in a clinical sense, but as a formal theory of memory processes applicable at the cultural level. Digital platforms structurally tend to privilege repetition over working-through. They multiply mnemonic traces while weakening the temporal, narrative, and symbolic conditions necessary for elaboration. Fragments of the past return incessantly – images, slogans, quotations, ritual gestures – detached from historical context and narrative integration. Algorithmic circulation thus risks producing a collective form of acting-out, in which trauma reappears as spectacle rather than being transformed through reflective engagement (LaCapra, 2014 [2001]). From the perspective of cultural trauma theory, remembrance operates less as the preservation of factual knowledge than as an ongoing process of meaning-making through which societies negotiate responsibility, identity, and moral orientation (Eyerman, 2013).

This tension can be further clarified by revisiting the concept of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* as developed within Critical Theory. In its original formulation by Theodor W. Adorno (1959), *Aufarbeitung* designates more than the symbolic acknowledgment of historical wrongdoing. It names a materialist and fundamentally negative practice: not the reconciliatory integration of the past into a coherent collective narrative, but a critical confrontation with the structural conditions that enabled catastrophe and that may persist into the present. From this perspective, remembrance becomes ideological whenever moral condemnation or ritualised commemoration substitutes for an analysis of social continuities and objective conditions.

² Here, “labour” refers to a temporally extended and reflexive process of working-through, rather than to productive or instrumental work, drawing on psychoanalytic and Critical Theory traditions.

By contrast, Jürgen Habermas (1995) rearticulates *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* in a more explicitly normative and discursive key, emphasising processes of public deliberation, moral learning, and the reflexive reshaping of collective identity through the acknowledgment of past injustice. While this idealist paradigm foregrounds the transformative potential of self-understanding and democratic discourse, it also opens the risk – already identified by Adorno – of reconciliation becoming premature or compensatory. As Johannes Schulz (2024) has argued, these two paradigms should be analytically distinguished: an idealist model oriented towards collective self-enlightenment and a materialist model aimed at uncovering the enduring structural causes of past violence.

Platformed forms of commemoration tend to privilege visibility, repetition, and affective affirmation, thereby aligning more easily with idealist modes of working through the past, while marginalising the slower, conflictual, and structurally oriented labour implied by Adorno's materialist conception of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*. The Frankfurt School's critique of mass culture provides a useful lens through which to understand this tendency. Horkheimer and Adorno (2002 [1944/1947]) show how cultural standardisation and commodification can neutralise negativity by incorporating potentially disruptive forms into established patterns of consumption. Applied to traumatic remembrance, this critique draws attention to the risk that historical suffering, once formatted as readily consumable cultural content, may lose some of its capacity to disturb established meanings and provoke critical reflection. Under platform conditions, this tendency is intensified: memory circulates as repeatable, shareable, and increasingly standardised content, potentially displacing confrontation with historical rupture in favour of recognisable and affectively accessible forms.

Contemporary theories of digital memory further clarify this transformation. Van Dijck (2007; 2013) has shown how platforms replace the archive with the feed: a temporally unstable, affect-driven stream organised around behavioural prediction rather than historical relevance. Users do not retrieve memory; they scroll through it. Remembering becomes a performative and responsive act, shaped by metrics of visibility and participation. In this environment, memory is increasingly anticipatory, formatted for discoverability and algorithmic resonance rather than for contextual depth.

Stiegler's notion of tertiary retention provides a further critical lens. The technical exteriorisation of memory, he argues, is no longer collectively governed, but increasingly designed, owned, and monetised by industrial systems (Stiegler, 2010). Platforms thus operate as memory brokers, shaping not only what is remembered, but how societies relate to their past. Mnemonic traces are fragmented, decontextualised, and reassembled according to logics of novelty and engagement, rather than continuity or symbolic integration.

The problem is not simply the digitisation of memory, but the fate of traumatic memory under conditions that privilege circulation over elaboration. Platformed remembrance tends to reproduce the very dynamics that trauma theory identifies as obstacles to working-through: repetition without transformation, visibility without historical intelligibility, and affect without narrative integration. Memory proliferates as data, yet risks losing its capacity to sustain critical engagement with the past. This compression of remembrance into a continuous present can be read in light of Koselleck's (2004) analysis of modern regimes of historicity, in which the relationship between past, present, and future is historically variable rather than given.

This tension constitutes the precondition for algorithmic oblivion, understood not as the disappearance of memory but as its compulsive circulation in forms that weaken the possibility of symbolic and historical working-through.

Seen in this light, digital commemoration can also be approached through Mannheim's (1952) account of generational transmission. For Mannheim, new generations encounter the inherited cultural heritage through a process of 'fresh contact', involving not simply transmission but selection, reinterpretation, and the reorganisation of inherited experience (pp. 171–173). This process becomes particularly significant as Holocaust memory increasingly passes to generations without direct biographical ties to the event. Digital platforms are therefore not merely spaces in which inherited memories are preserved, but environments in which they are selected and rearticulated through contemporary visual, affective, and communicative practices.

2. Spectacle, Loss, and the Commodification of Grief

Inspired by Adorno's critique of the culture industry (Adorno, 1991) and Butler's notion of "grievability" (the right to mourn) (2016), this section examines how mourning is increasingly subsumed into the attention economy. For Adorno, the culture industry standardises and commodifies cultural expression, transforming even the most intimate or critical forms of art into products aligned with the imperatives of mass consumption. Within digital platforms, this logic extends to mourning itself: grief is repackaged as consumable content, optimised for algorithmic circulation and attention capture. From this angle, the spectacularisation of remembrance can be understood in Debord's sense (2021 [1967]), as a transformation of historical suffering into consumable appearances circulating within the economy of attention.

Digital memorials – whether in the form of social media posts, remembrance pages, or video montages – present themselves as spaces of solidarity and witness. Yet their circulation within platform logics often transforms them into commodities, valued for their capacity to generate engagement rather than to foster reflective or transformative remembrance. As Adorno argued, when cultural forms are subsumed under the logic of exchange, their critical or emancipatory potential is diminished. Mourning, in this sense, risks becoming a predictable genre within the repertoire of platform content.

Within the platform economy, grief is frequently aestheticised: images of candles, black-and-white portraits and carefully curated captions become part of a visual language optimised for emotional immediacy. This process can strip mourning of its historical and political depth, transforming loss into an affective moment to be consumed, liked, and shared. The risk, as Hirsch (2012) and LaCapra (2014 [2001]) warn, is that memory becomes a repetitive performance rather than a symbolic working-through, precluding the critical work necessary to process trauma.

The visibility of grief is also profoundly unequal. Certain tragedies – often those involving individuals who conform dominant cultural norms – receive amplified media coverage and widespread digital commemoration, while others remain marginalised or invisible. Butler's concept of grievability (2016) highlights this structural inequality: not all lives are recognised as worthy of public mourning. In the context of digital platforms, this inequality is further shaped by algorithmic preferences, which favour content that attracts high engagement, reinforcing existing social and geopolitical hierarchies.

Finally, the commodification of grief also raises questions about ownership and control. Platform terms of service often grant companies broad rights over user-generated commemorative content, effectively placing even the most intimate acts of mourning into a corporate archive. In this case, the logic of the culture industry – as diagnosed by Adorno – meets the infrastructure of data capitalism, producing a form of mourning that is both public and privatised, visible yet subject to corporate governance.

This dynamic recalls Marcuse's insight (1955) into the ambivalence of aesthetic form. While art preserves the unconscious memory of a betrayed promise, its pleasurable and reconciliatory qualities simultaneously risk neutralising critique. Under platform conditions, this ambivalence is intensified: aestheticised grief circulates as consumable affect, preserving traces of historical suffering while dulling its capacity to disturb, negate, or demand transformation.

3. Algorithmic Oblivion: The New Regime of Forgetting

While digital platforms present themselves as unprecedented repositories of human memory, they simultaneously enact novel and structurally specific forms of forgetting. This paradoxical condition can be described as *algorithmic oblivion*: a regime in which mnemonic traces proliferate, yet the conditions for symbolic integration and historical working-through are progressively weakened. Oblivion, in this sense, does not denote the absence or erasure of memory, but its compulsive circulation in decontextualised and repetitious forms.

Algorithmic oblivion should not, however, be understood as a deterministic effect of platform infrastructures or as a condition that uniformly governs users' mnemonic practices. It describes a structural tendency through which platforms shape the conditions of visibility, temporality, and

circulation without fully determining how users interpret, appropriate, negotiate, or resist them. The same affordances that favour repetition and affective immediacy may therefore also be mobilised to produce contextualisation, testimony, pedagogical engagement, or critical reflection. What is at stake is not the disappearance of user agency, but the conditions under which that agency is exercised.

From the standpoint of trauma theory, this dynamic becomes deeply problematic. As Freud demonstrated, traumatic memory does not obey the logic of linear recall. What cannot be symbolically elaborated returns in repetitive, fragmented, or displaced forms, often as acting-out rather than recollection (Freud, 1958 [1914]). Remembering, in its critical sense, requires temporal distance, narrative mediation, and sustained interpretive labour. When these conditions are absent, repetition becomes compulsive rather than transformative.

Benjamin's insistence (2023 [1942]) that the past carries a 'secret index' binding it to redemption emphasises that memory is never guaranteed by repetition or preservation alone. The past matters only insofar as it enters into a relation with the present, activating unrealised possibilities and silenced lives as ethical claims rather than inert traces (pp. 3-4). Holocaust memory fails not through disappearance, but when it loses its capacity to address the present as a promise. Read through this lens, algorithmic oblivion is not defined by loss of traces, but by the disruption of the present-past relation through which those traces could become ethically claim-making.

Under platform conditions, this relation is systematically eroded by temporal architectures that privilege repetition, immediacy, and circulation over historical mediation. Their temporal architecture is organised around continuous refresh, novelty, and immediacy, encouraging users to encounter the past as an endlessly renewed present. Drawing on Chun's (2016) notion of habitual new media, platform memory can be understood as repetition without retention: content reappears incessantly, yet without accumulating narrative depth or historical coherence. The past is not integrated into a meaningful temporal sequence, but recirculated as affective stimulus. While the archive-feed distinction initially served to describe a structural shift in the organisation of memory, its implications become fully visible at the level of traumatic temporality.

From a Marcusean perspective, algorithmic temporality radicalises the historical alliance between time and domination. The continuous present produced by platform infrastructures erodes the capacity to remember not only what was, but what could have been. Oblivion thus operates not through erasure, but through temporal saturation: the incessant flow of the present displaces the memory of unrealised freedom.

Paradoxically, this condition recalls Mayer-Schönberger's (2011) argument that forgetting is not merely a failure of memory systems, but a necessary social function – one that digital infrastructures profoundly destabilise.

Adorno's critique of the culture industry offers a crucial framework for understanding this transformation. For Adorno, mass-mediated culture fosters passive consumption by standardising experience and neutralising negativity (Horkheimer & Adorno, 2002). Under algorithmic conditions, this logic is intensified rather than superseded. Feeds curate memory fragments according to metrics of engagement, privileging what is immediately legible, emotionally resonant, and easily consumable.

The subject is increasingly positioned as a user navigating pre-selected mnemonic stimuli, although this positioning does not exhaust the ways in which individuals engage with the past. Users may reproduce dominant commemorative scripts, but they may also reinterpret, contextualise, or contest them through their own mnemonic practices.

This process produces a form of historical amnesia masked by hyper-visibility. As Huyssen (2003) has argued, modern cultures often respond to anxieties about forgetting with an excessive production of memory. In platform environments, this surplus is algorithmically managed. Posts, images, and videos are retrieved, amplified, or suppressed according to opaque criteria of relevance and profitability. This produces a selective recall that amplifies certain narratives while marginalising others, effectively producing an algorithmic historiography that writes and rewrites the past in real time. Such selective recall is not neutral. LaCapra (2014 [2001]) emphasises that unprocessed trauma risks oscillating between denial and compulsive repetition. Esposito (2017, p. 5) adds a further dimension to this problem, since memory cannot be reduced to the accumulation or repetition of mnemonic traces. It depends on selection and contextualisation, and therefore on the interplay

between remembering and forgetting. What changes under platform conditions, therefore, is not the inherently selective character of cultural memory, but the infrastructural conditions under which selection, visibility, and forgetting take place.

Algorithmic oblivion gives this dynamic a specifically infrastructural form. Traumatic pasts are neither silenced nor worked through; they are perpetually reactivated without the symbolic scaffolding necessary for elaboration. Holocaust memory, under these conditions, risks becoming an object of ritualised circulation or political instrumentalisation rather than a site of ethical confrontation. Stiegler's analysis of tertiary retention further illuminates the stakes of this regime. The technical exteriorisation of memory, once associated with collective transmission and care, is increasingly subordinated to industrial and commercial logics (Stiegler, 2010). Platforms function as custodians of collective remembrance while simultaneously expropriating users' capacity to shape temporal relations to the past. Memory becomes proletarianised: individuals participate in remembrance without exercising meaningful control over its organisation, duration, or interpretive framing.

Algorithmic oblivion can therefore be understood as a structuring of forgetting. It is not merely that certain memories disappear from view; rather, the very forms through which memory can appear are shaped in advance. The feed privileges immediacy over duration, affect over interpretation, and rapid circulation at the expense of historical framing. In doing so, it undermines the conditions necessary for what Adorno termed *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* – a critical working-through of the past that resists reconciliation and closure.

Yet algorithmic oblivion does not exhaust the possibilities of digital remembrance. Precisely because it operates through repetition and circulation, it also generates points of friction in which historical context, testimony, and symbolic labour may re-emerge.

In this sense, algorithmic oblivion names not a total condition, but a contested regime. It designates the dominant tendency of platformised memory to transform trauma into endlessly circulating fragments, while also delineating the terrain on which counter-memorial practices may emerge. Understanding this regime is therefore a prerequisite for identifying how digital environments can both inhibit and, under certain conditions, sustain the critical work of remembering.

4. Counter-Memory and Platform Resistance

Against this tendency, counter-memory designates practices that reintroduce duration, context, and critical reflexivity into digital remembrance. Counter-memory does not simply oppose memory to forgetting; rather, it intervenes in the very forms through which memory appears, circulates, and acquires meaning within platform environments.

These practices resonate with Marcuse's notion of unconscious memory as the preservation of unrealised freedom and betrayed promises. Counter-memorial interventions do not aim at reconciling the past with the present; instead, they keep the negation of existing conditions alive by resisting closure, saturation, and aesthetic pacification.

The concept of counter-memory is commonly traced back to Foucault, for whom it signalled a challenge to official histories and institutionalised narratives (Foucault, 1977). In the present context, however, counter-memory must be understood not only as a political or historiographical intervention, but as a response to the specific dynamics of traumatic memory under algorithmic conditions. What is at stake is not merely the contestation of dominant narratives, but the preservation of the conditions necessary for working-through in environments that structurally favour repetition and immediacy.

As trauma theory has shown, working-through requires temporal spacing, narrative mediation, and interpretive labour (Freud, 1958 [1914]; LaCapra, 2014 [2001]). Counter-memorial practices on social media often enact precisely these operations: they slow down the feed, expand captions beyond minimal affective cues, foreground testimony and archival material, and explicitly situate fragments of the past within historical and relational frameworks. In doing so, they interrupt the compulsive circulation of decontextualised traces and reopen the possibility of reflective engagement.

Critical theory provides a further lens through which to interpret these practices. The Frankfurt School's emphasis on negativity and its resistance to premature reconciliation directs attention to

forms of remembrance that refuse to resolve historical catastrophe into reassuring or stabilised meanings. From this perspective, counter-memory does not seek closure or offer consolatory narratives. Rather, it preserves dissonance, discomfort, and unresolved tension as conditions for critical remembrance. In digital environments saturated with standardised tropes and emotionally reassuring rituals, such refusal acquires particular significance.

Benjamin's philosophy of history sharpens this point. His notion of redemption does not imply salvation or completion, but the rescue of threatened images of the past from conformist continuity (Benjamin, 2023 [1942]). Counter-memorial practices can be read as attempts to seize such images at moments of danger, interrupting the homogeneous flow of platform time. By insisting on historical specificity and by foregrounding silenced or marginalised experiences, they challenge the logic through which algorithms privilege what is already legible, popular, and affectively resonant.

The political stakes of counter-memory are further illuminated by Butler's concept of grievability. Digital platforms reproduce and intensify hierarchies of visibility that determine which lives are publicly mourned and which remain peripheral (Butler, 2016). Counter-memorial practices contest these hierarchies by expanding the field of mournability, drawing attention to victims historically excluded from dominant Holocaust narratives – such as Romani people, disabled individuals, and homosexual victims – and by questioning the limits of ritualised commemoration. In this sense, counter-memory operates as an intervention into the moral economy of attention, not merely into representational content.

At the same time, counter-memory within platform environments remains structurally precarious. As van Dijck (2013) has emphasised, platforms are not neutral stages but actors with economic and political interests that shape visibility, longevity, and circulation. Practices that slow down attention, resist aestheticisation, or foreground complexity may be downranked, marginalised, or absorbed into dominant formats. Resistance is therefore neither external to platform infrastructures nor guaranteed to endure; it unfolds within constraints that constantly threaten co-optation.

For this reason, counter-memory should not be idealised as an alternative regime of remembrance, but understood as a fragile and situational practice. Its significance lies not in overcoming algorithmic oblivion, but in exposing its limits. By reintroducing friction into the flow of digital memory, counter-memorial practices keep open the space of symbolic labour that trauma demands. They demonstrate that, even within environments structured by circulation and optimisation, memory can still function as critique rather than spectacle.

Here, counter-memory marks the point at which digital remembrance becomes reflexive. It is where memory turns back upon its own conditions of possibility, interrogating not only what is remembered, but how and under what constraints remembering takes place. Such practices do not resolve the tensions of platformised memory, but they render them visible – and, in doing so, sustain the ethical and critical work of remembering in the aftermath of historical catastrophe.

5. Methodology

This study combines critical theory with a netnographic analysis of Holocaust commemoration on social media platforms. Adopting an interpretive and reflexive stance, memory is approached not as a stable object or transmissible content, but as a situated cultural practice that is continually enacted through platform infrastructures, affective repertoires, and algorithmically structured logics of circulation. From this perspective, remembrance emerges at the intersection of symbolic forms, technological mediation, and social interaction, rather than as a simple reflection of pre-existing historical knowledge (Erll, 2011; Neiger, Meyers, & Zandberg, 2011).

This approach is especially suited to the study of traumatic memory. Trauma, as theorised within psychoanalytic and cultural frameworks, resists linear narration and stable representation, manifesting instead through repetition, displacement, and fragmented return (Freud, 1958 [1914]; LaCapra, 2014 [2001]). A netnographic methodology allows these dynamics to be examined *in situ*, by observing how traumatic pasts are activated, ritualised, contested, or critically reworked within everyday digital practices.

5.1 Data collection and corpus construction

The empirical material consists of 300 publicly accessible posts published on Instagram, Facebook, and X between 1 January and 31 August 2025. While limited in scale, the corpus is appropriate for an in-depth qualitative and interpretive analysis aimed not at statistical generalisation, but at identifying recurrent mnemonic patterns and platform-specific grammars of remembrance. The time frame was selected in order to capture both routinised and intensified moments of Holocaust remembrance, including two major mnemonic peaks: International Holocaust Remembrance Day (27 January) and Yom HaShoah (27-28 April). Analysing posts produced both during and beyond these commemorative nodes allows for an examination of how Holocaust memory is periodically ritualised, reactivated, and reframed within the temporal rhythms of platform-driven attention.

Posts were identified through ten Holocaust-related hashtags, including: #HolocaustMemorialDay; #WeRemember; #Shoah; #Auschwitz; #YomHaShoah; #HolocaustSurvivor; #AntiSemitism; #NeverForget; #giornodellamemoria; #viaggiodellamemoria. These hashtags functioned not merely as sampling devices, but as discursive markers signalling participation in commemorative practices and facilitating the circulation of memory within platformed publics.

Posts were collected manually through the native search interfaces of each platform. No API, automated scraping tool, or third-party data-extraction software was used. For each platform, the ten selected hashtags were entered individually into the search function, and the resulting publicly accessible posts were examined one by one. Posts in both English and Italian were included and analysed in their original language. Relevant posts were documented either by screenshot or by copying their textual content into a dedicated Word file, with a separate corpus file created for Instagram, Facebook, and X. The three platform-specific corpora were subsequently imported into MAXQDA, where both visual and textual materials were coded and analysed.

The manual collection procedure was consistent with the qualitative and interpretive orientation of the study, as it enabled posts to be assessed in their immediate communicative and visual context rather than treated as decontextualised data points. A stratified, quota-based sampling strategy was used to maximise analytical variation rather than statistical representativeness. The final corpus comprised 100 posts per platform, balanced across (a) the ten selected hashtags; (b) three temporal sub-periods (January–February, March–May, and June–August); and (c) institutional and individual accounts, where feasible. Within each stratum, posts were examined sequentially through the hashtag search results and included when they contained substantive commemorative, historical, or reflective content relevant to Holocaust remembrance. Duplicate posts, near-identical reposts, purely commercial or promotional material, hashtag spam, and content from private or inaccessible accounts were excluded. Comment threads were not systematically included in the corpus. However, when the discussion generated by a post was considered analytically significant for understanding how its mnemonic meaning was negotiated, contested, or reframed by users, relevant comments were documented and included in the qualitative analysis. These discussions were treated as contextual material rather than as independent units of analysis.

At the same time, the study recognises that hashtag search results on social media platforms are not neutral or fully reproducible outputs. Searches were conducted in a logged-in browsing environment rather than through neutral or incognito sessions. The visibility and ordering of posts may therefore have been affected by platform-specific ranking mechanisms and personalised signals associated with the browsing environment. The study did not attempt to reconstruct or experimentally control these recommendation systems, nor does the resulting corpus claim to represent the complete universe of posts associated with the selected hashtags. Rather, it constitutes a purposively constructed qualitative corpus of publicly accessible commemorative content encountered through the platforms' native interfaces during the period of data collection. Algorithmic mediation is therefore treated not only as an object of theoretical analysis but also as a methodological condition of access to the field.

5.2 Analytical strategy and codebook development

Coding was not based on a purely inductive logic; instead, a dialogical approach was adopted, in which empirical observation and critical theory were iteratively brought into relation (Kozinets, 2019). The six analytical axes were neither derived solely from the data nor imposed deductively from theory; rather, they emerged through an abductive process that linked key theoretical tensions to empirically observable patterns. Each axis captures a tension identified in the theoretical framework developed in the previous sections – such as repetition and working-through, spectacle and critique, or circulation and contextualisation. In this way, the codebook operates as a bridge between Frankfurt School concepts, psychoanalytic trauma theory, and platform-specific mnemonic practices. The six axes were organised into three broader analytical categories.

1. Memory as Ritual, encompassing standardised memorial tropes, aestheticisation/spectacularisation, and algorithmic grammars;
2. Memory as Conflict, capturing politicisation, semantic struggles, and agonistic reframing;
3. Memory as Critique, including counter-memory and critical/self-critical memory practices.

Coding was conducted by the author using MAXQDA through an iterative process, allowing for systematic comparison across platforms while preserving the qualitative depth of individual posts. Posts could receive more than one code when multiple mnemonic dynamics were present. For the aggregate comparison reported in Table 2, however, each post was assigned a dominant analytical axis on the basis of its prevailing communicative and mnemonic function, in order to avoid double counting.

5.3 Methodological reflexivity and ethical considerations

All posts included in the corpus were publicly accessible at the time of collection, and no private data were used. Usernames were anonymised in the analytical notes unless the account belonged to a public institution or a widely recognised public figure. Direct quotations are reproduced only where analytically relevant, without usernames or other identifying metadata; quotations from widely recognised public figures, such as Liliana Segre, retain their attribution where authorship is relevant to the analysis. The analysis focuses on discursive and representational patterns rather than on individual users' intentions or psychological states.

Methodological reflexivity was central to the research process. The study does not aim to access the 'authentic' meaning of posts, but rather to interpret how remembrance is shaped, constrained, and enabled within specific platform environments. As van Dijck (2013) and Couldry and Hepp (2017) argue, platforms shape communicative practices; accordingly, the analysis attends not only to what is remembered, but also to how platform affordances and algorithmic logics configure the conditions of remembering.

By combining critical theory with qualitative netnography, this methodological framework enables an examination of Holocaust commemoration as a dynamic and contested practice within digital environments. It makes it possible to trace how traumatic memory is ritualised, politicised, or critically reworked across platforms, and to identify the conditions under which remembrance may still function as symbolic labour rather than as mere circulatory spectacle.

Table 1 presents the six analytical axes and their organisation into the three broader categories of ritual, conflict, and critique, showing how Holocaust memory is articulated, negotiated, and contested within digital environments.

The resulting framework captures the movement between ritualised repetition, political contestation, and critical reflection. Rather than forming a linear progression, these modes coexist and often overlap within the same posts or interactional threads, generating tensions between symbolic reassurance, ideological struggle, and reflexive critique. The observed patterns are consistent with platform logics that tend to privilege recognisable and repeatable forms of content, while interactional affordances may intensify conflict. Critical and counter-memorial practices, by contrast, appear less prevalent within the analysed corpus.

From a classical perspective, such ritualised forms of remembrance can be read as expressions of what Halbwachs (1992) described as the social frameworks of memory, within which individual acts of remembering are stabilised, repeated, and made intelligible through shared symbolic forms.

Table 1. Analytical Axes of Digital Holocaust Memory: Ritualisation, Conflict, and Critique

CODE / Sub-code	Operational Definition	Typical Posts (Examples)	Theoretical Connection
RITUAL			
Axis 1 – Standardised memorial tropes	Recurrent symbols, slogans, dates, and commemorative formulas that stabilise Holocaust remembrance in recognisable and repeatable forms.	Lighting digital candles; annual use of #HolocaustRemembranceDay; ‘Never Forget’ or ‘Never Again’; photographs of memorials or concentration camp sites.	Horkheimer and Adorno: standardisation and pseudo-individualisation; Halbwachs: collective memory stabilised through shared symbolic frameworks.
Axis 2 – Aestheticisation / Spectacularisation	Representation of Holocaust memory through visually curated, affectively charged, or spectacular forms that may privilege emotional immediacy over historical contextualisation.	Curated memorial imagery; black-and-white filters; stylised photographs of Auschwitz; reels combining commemorative images with music.	Horkheimer and Adorno: commodification and aesthetic neutralisation; Debord: spectacle; Marcuse: ambivalence of aesthetic form.
Axis 3 – Algorithmic grammars	Communicative practices adapted to platform logics of visibility, engagement, discoverability, and circulation.	Hashtag stacking; strategic tagging; platform-optimised visual formats; repetitive or highly shareable commemorative content.	van Dijck: platform connectivity; Helmond: platformisation; platform logics as conditions of algorithmic visibility and circulation.
CONFLICT			
Axis 4 – Politicisation / Semantic conflict / Antisemitism	Political appropriation of Holocaust memory, struggles over terminology and historical analogy, or explicitly antisemitic discourse.	Debates over comparisons between the Holocaust and other genocides; disputes over the use of the term ‘Shoah’; political instrumentalisation; denialism or antisemitic trolling.	Adorno: memory in tension with ideology; Horkheimer: instrumental reason; Marcuse: semantic struggles as ideological battlegrounds.
CRITIQUE			
Axis 5 – Counter-memory	Alternative mnemonic practices that challenge dominant narratives, exclusions, or established commemorative forms and reintroduce marginalised histories or perspectives.	Posts foregrounding Romani, disabled, or homosexual victims; family archives; survivor testimonies; grassroots commemorative practices; challenges to official narratives.	Foucault: counter-memory as disruption of dominant narratives; Benjamin: rescue of threatened or marginalised pasts; Butler: expansion of grievability.
Axis 6 – Critical / Self-critical memories	Reflexive interrogation of the forms, limits, exclusions, or banalising effects of digital commemoration itself.	‘Are we really remembering, or just posting?’; critiques of Auschwitz selfies; reflections on the exhaustion or ritual repetition of ‘Never Again’; questioning the aestheticisation of Holocaust memory.	Adorno: <i>Vergangenheitsbewältigung</i> as critical, non-reconciliatory working-through; Schulz: materialist and idealist paradigms of working through the past.

6. Comparative Findings. Platform Grammars of Holocaust Remembrance

The netnographic analysis of 300 posts across Instagram, Facebook, and X shows that Holocaust commemoration is profoundly shaped by platform-specific grammars of communication. Although all three platforms reproduce a shared repertoire of standardised memorial tropes –most notably the injunction ‘Never Forget’, often accompanied by images of Auschwitz, candles, or memorial sites – these tropes are inflected in distinct ways according to the socio-technical logics of each environment. Remembrance thus appears not as a uniform practice, but as a situated form of memory-work articulated through different platform cultures.

Helmond (2015) conceptualises *platformisation* as the process through which social media platforms extend their infrastructural and economic logic beyond their own boundaries, reformatting the wider web to make external data ‘platform ready’ (p.1). She shows that platforms operate through a dual logic of decentralising features across the web while recentralising data via APIs, plug-ins, and metadata. Platforms thus actively shape participation and visibility through material–technical architectures rather than functioning as neutral intermediaries.

On *Instagram*, commemorative practices are predominantly structured around aestheticisation and spectacularisation. Posts frequently rely on curated visual styles, filters, slow-motion reels, and background music, framing remembrance as an affective and shareable experience. Solemnity is performed through visual refinement rather than through contextual depth, aligning with Instagram’s broader culture of aesthetic self-presentation. This dynamic exemplifies the risk, identified by Adorno and Horkheimer, that memory may be transformed into a consumable aesthetic object, in which affective immediacy substitutes for critical engagement. At the same time, Instagram displays a pronounced reliance on algorithmic grammars: extended hashtag strings (#Shoah, #NeverAgain, #HolocaustMemorialDay, #History, #Education) are commonly used to maximise visibility and circulation. Against this background, instances of counter-memory emerge primarily in posts that deliberately interrupt the flow of images by incorporating archival material, extended captions, or family testimonies, thereby slowing down the fast-scrolling logic of the feed and reintroducing historical specificity.

On Facebook, Holocaust remembrance is largely organised through institutional framing. A significant proportion of posts originate from schools, museums, NGOs, and civic organisations, presenting commemoration as a collective pedagogical act embedded within organisational discourse. Here, the grammar of grief is less oriented towards visual performance and more towards narrative explanation, didactic framing, and institutional authority. This stabilising function supports continuity and transmission, yet it also tends to reproduce routinised and ritualised forms of memory. Importantly, however, Facebook also hosts a notable number of critical and self-critical interventions. These include posts that explicitly foreground groups historically marginalised within dominant Holocaust narratives –such as Romani people, disabled victims, and homosexual victims –and reflections on the exclusions and silences embedded in established commemorative practices. In such cases, remembrance functions not only as homage to the past, but as a reflexive interrogation of its limits.

On X, Holocaust memory is most clearly articulated through politicisation and semantic conflict. The platform’s real-time, agonistic communicative structure makes it particularly conducive to the mobilisation of Holocaust memory within contemporary political struggles. Posts frequently recontextualise the Shoah in relation to ongoing conflicts –most prominently the war in Gaza –producing highly polarised and confrontational discourses. Here, Holocaust memory becomes a contested symbolic resource, invoked alternately as a moral benchmark, a tool of accusation, or a rhetorical weapon. This dynamic illustrates how memory operates as a site of semantic struggle rather than consensual commemoration. X also accommodates significant forms of counter-memory and critical memory, especially in threaded posts that provide historical clarification, challenge instrumental uses of the Shoah, or explicitly critique the reduction of memory to slogan or analogy.

Across platforms, Holocaust remembrance oscillates between what may be described as spectacularised memory and critical remembrance. Instagram foregrounds aestheticised solemnity and affective immediacy; Facebook institutionalises remembrance through pedagogical and organisational frames; X politicises memory as an arena of discursive and ideological conflict. Yet none of these environments is homogeneous. In each case, we observe counter-memorial practices that resist algorithmic oblivion by reintroducing context, restoring historical specificity, and expanding the boundaries of grievability. These high-friction interventions demonstrate that digital infrastructures do not simply host memory, but actively shape the conditions under which remembering becomes possible.

Table 2 summarises the distribution of the 300 analysed posts across six analytical axes, grouped into the three categories of ritual, conflict, and critique. While posts were often coded across multiple axes during the qualitative analysis, the table reports the dominant axis assigned to each post in order to avoid double counting and to ensure analytical clarity at the aggregate level.

From a comparative standpoint, the data indicate a marked predominance of ritualised memory practices (Axes 1-3), which account for 140 posts (46.7% of the total corpus). These practices include the recurrent circulation of standardised tropes such as ‘Never Again’, the aestheticisation of commemorative imagery, and the strategic deployment of algorithmic grammars to maximise visibility and circulation.

The Conflict axis (Axis 4, $n = 78$; 26.0%) captures the frequent mobilisation of Holocaust memory within contemporary political and semantic disputes, particularly on X, where remembrance is reconfigured as an agonistic and polarised discursive resource.

Critical and counter-memorial practices (Axes 5-6) account for 82 posts (27.3%). Although less prevalent than ritualised forms, these interventions remain analytically significant insofar as they disrupt routinisation and algorithmic drift by reintroducing historical context, foregrounding marginalised victims, and explicitly reflecting on the risks of banalisation and symbolic exhaustion inherent in repetitive digital commemoration.

Rather than forming discrete and isolated modes, these patterns point to a field in which ritualisation, conflict, and critique intersect and overlap. Ritualised forms may dominate, yet substantial portions of the dataset mobilise memory both as a site of political struggle and as a resource for critical, counter-memorial engagement. The possibility for posts to be coded across multiple axes further highlights the polyvalent and contested character of digital memory, as well as its entanglement within competing –and often contradictory –platform grammars.

Table 2. Overall Comparative Framework of Digital Holocaust Memory
($N = 300$ posts: *Facebook, Instagram, X*)

Analytical axis	Description	Macro-category	N. of posts	%
Axis 1	Standardised memorial tropes	RITUAL	103	34.3
Axis 2	Aestheticisation / Spectacularisation	RITUAL	14	4.7
Axis 3	Algorithmic grammars	RITUAL	23	7.7
<i>Axes 1–3</i> (<i>Ritual total</i>)	—	<i>RITUAL</i>	<i>140</i>	<i>46.7</i>
<i>Axis 4</i>	<i>Politicisation / Semantic conflict / Antisemitism</i>	<i>CONFLICT</i>	<i>78</i>	<i>26.0</i>
Axis 5	Counter-memory	CRITIQUE	60	20.0
Axis 6	Critical / Self-critical memories	CRITIQUE	22	7.3
<i>Axes 5–6</i> (<i>Critique total</i>)	—	<i>CRITIQUE</i>	<i>82</i>	<i>27.3</i>
TOTAL			300	100.0

6.1 Selfies and Site-Specific Memory: The Case of Auschwitz

Among the posts collected across Instagram, Facebook, and X, a recurrent and particularly contentious practice involves users photographing themselves at Auschwitz and sharing these images under commemorative hashtags. These posts crystallise the ambivalence of digital memory cultures: the same act – appearing in a photograph at a site of historical atrocity – may function as ritual participation, aesthetic spectacle, or critical intervention, depending on its framing, narration, and circulation.

Recent scholarship on digital Holocaust memory has highlighted how sites such as Auschwitz circulate online as visual and performative resources, often oscillating between education, affective engagement, and self-presentation (Ebbrecht-Hartmann and Henig, 2021). Feldman and Musih (2023) analyse Auschwitz selfies as practices emerging from a generational and medial shift in Holocaust remembrance. They argue that selfies mark a transition ‘from witness to witnesser and from onsite to online presence’ (p. 403), reflecting the decline of survivor-centred authority and the rise of digitally mediated forms of self-witnessing. Rather than being inherently transgressive, selfies rework earlier traditions of photographic, ritual, and embodied witnessing. Crucially, their meaning does not reside in the image alone, but in the interconnected processes of taking, framing, circulating, and publicly reacting to the image, through which the boundaries of legitimate Holocaust representation are continuously negotiated.

Read through the lens of algorithmic oblivion, these insights illuminate how Auschwitz selfies oscillate between ritualised visibility and critical friction, depending on whether digital circulation reinforces repetitive spectacle or opens space for symbolic working-through.

At one level, such photographs reproduce standardised memorial tropes. Iconic elements of the camp – the railway tracks, the ‘Arbeit macht frei’ gate, barbed wire fences – serve as recognisable backdrops for ritualised invocations such as ‘Never Forget’. In these cases, remembrance is less oriented towards historical specificity or contextual reflection than towards signalling affiliation with a shared commemorative community. The image functions as a token of participation in a collective rite, reaffirming belonging rather than provoking critical engagement. As Zelizer (1998) has shown, iconic images do not merely illustrate historical events but actively shape the moral and emotional frames through which collective memory is organised and transmitted.

In other instances, Auschwitz selfies drift towards aestheticisation and spectacularisation. When emphasis is placed on personal appearance, pose, or visual filters, the memorial site risks being transformed into a stage for self-presentation and personal branding. As Reading (2011) observes, digital memory practices are deeply entangled with logics of personalisation and circulation, blurring the boundary between commemoration and consumption.

Yet visual self-presentation should not in itself be equated with mnemonic passivity or trivialisation. The decision to place oneself within the visual field of Auschwitz may also express emotional involvement, a form of generational self-positioning in relation to an inherited past, a claim to witnessing, or an intention to communicate the experience to others. Such motivations cannot be inferred from visual form alone or reduced to compliance with platform logics. The analytical question therefore concerns how self-presentation, narrative framing, historical contextualisation, and subsequent interaction combine to shape the mnemonic meaning of these practices.

When self-presentation does reduce the memorial site to a setting for visual consumption, it exemplifies the Frankfurt School’s critique of commodification, whereby even sites of extreme historical suffering may be absorbed into regimes of visual consumption and affective immediacy.

At the same time, personal photographs at Auschwitz can also operate as forms of resistance to algorithmic oblivion. Posts that accompany images with extended captions recounting family histories, survivor testimonies, or reflective accounts of the emotional impact of visiting the site function as counter-memorial practices. By foregrounding narrative, duration, and contextualisation, these posts disrupt the fast-scrolling logic of the feed and reassert memory as symbolic labour. In this sense, they resemble what Reading (2009) conceptualises as “global memory”, whereby mnemonic practices circulate across digital platforms while retaining personal, political, and historical meaning.

These practices further generate critical and self-critical discourses about the legitimacy and limits of digital commemoration. Some posts explicitly condemn selfies at Auschwitz as trivialising or disrespectful, while others defend them as acts of personal witnessing or embodied remembrance. Frosh’s (2018) discussion of *Yolocaust*, Shahak Shapira’s project targeting apparently inappropriate photographs taken at Berlin’s Holocaust Memorial, is particularly relevant here. Frosh complicates the assumption that the meaning of such images can be inferred from their visual form alone, while conceptualising the selfie as a gesture of embodied sociability whose meaning emerges through its performance, circulation, and reception. The apparent lightness or incongruity of a selfie at a site of atrocity may therefore become an object of ethical judgement without necessarily revealing the intentions or historical awareness of the person who produced it. This reflexivity – often unfolding in captions or comment threads – demonstrates memory’s capacity to interrogate its own forms, echoing Marcuse’s insight that remembrance preserves traces of ‘betrayed promises’ and thus retains critical potential.

Auschwitz selfies exemplify the dialectical nature of platformised commemoration. Depending on how they are framed and contextualised, they may become hollow ritual gestures, aesthetic spectacles, or meaningful interventions that slow circulation and restore historical context. Their significance does not reside in the image alone, but in the assemblage of visual framing, textual narration, and algorithmic circulation that shapes whether and how they reinforce or resist algorithmic oblivion.

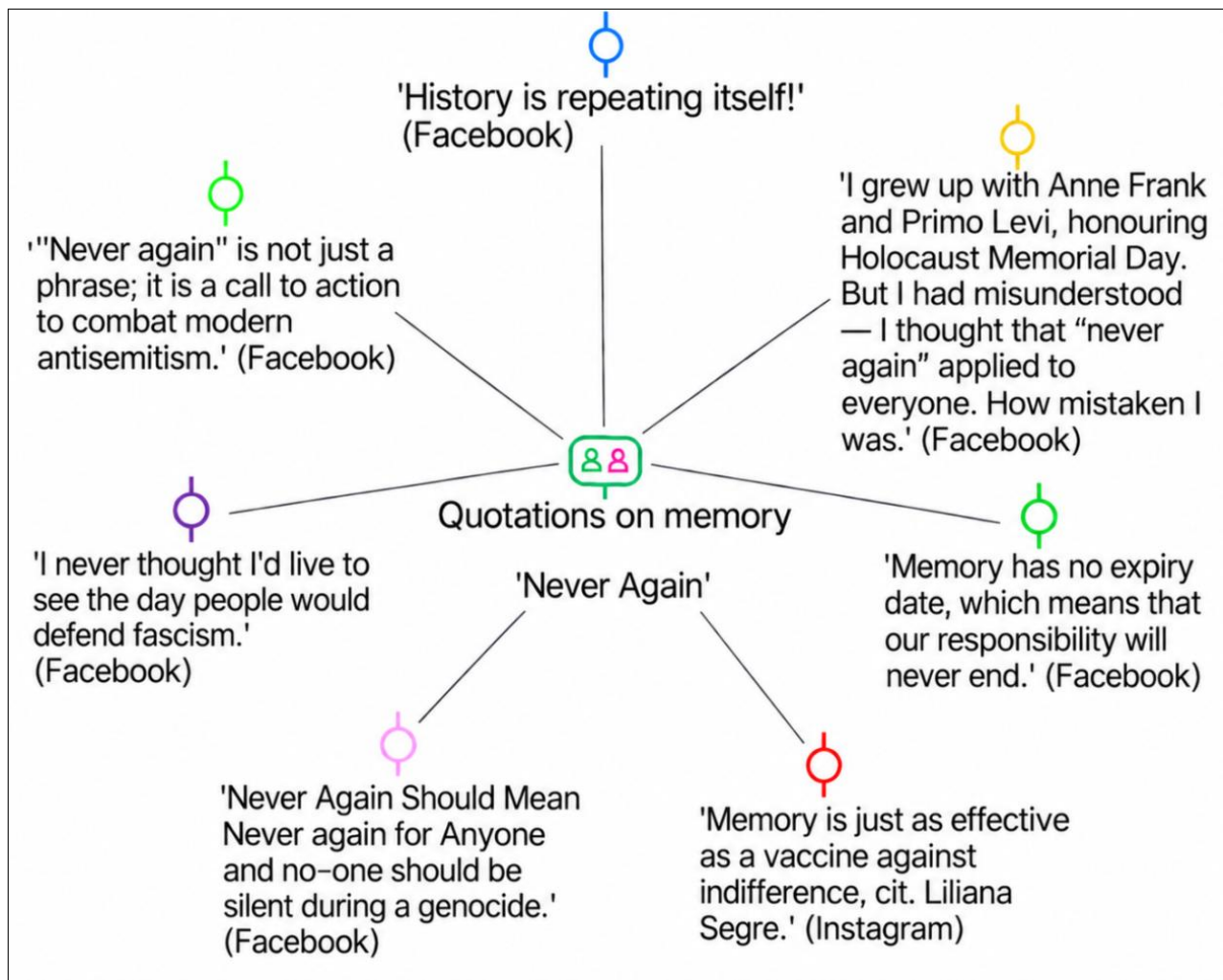
A comparable ambivalence emerges in the circulation of quotations centred on the trope ‘Never again’. The MAXQDA code map focusing on quotations highlights the centrality of this phrase across platforms, particularly on Facebook. At one level, such quotations operate as ritualised invocations, with formulations such as ‘Memory has no expiry date, [...]’ or ‘Never Again Should Mean Never again for Anyone.’ reaffirming memory as an enduring moral imperative. In these cases, the phrase functions as a stabilising mantra, detached from specific historical or political contexts.

The dataset reveals instances in which “Never again” is mobilised as a resource for political engagement. Posts link the slogan to contemporary struggles against antisemitism, racism, or the resurgence of fascism, transforming it into a tool of moral mobilisation. Other contributions introduce critical disillusionment, exposing fractures within the universalist promise of the trope. As one user reflects: ‘I thought “Never Again” applied to everyone. How mistaken I was’. Such statements reveal the gap between ritual repetition and lived historical experience.

Finally, the invocation of authoritative figures – most notably Liliana Segre’s assertion that ‘memory is just as effective as a vaccine against indifference’ – anchors the trope within an institutional register of legitimacy. These quotations simultaneously stabilise memory and delimit its acceptable meanings, situating remembrance within recognised moral frameworks.

These uses of “Never again” highlight its deeply ambiguous status in digital memory cultures. Although it often functions as a ritualised slogan, it can also be reused as counter-memory, highlighting exclusions, betrayals and broken promises, or as a political resource in today’s conflicts. Facebook emerges as the platform where quotation as a discursive strategy is most prevalent, providing space for both ritual affirmation and critical reinterpretation.

Figure 1. Digital Quotations on Memory: The Ambiguity of “Never Again”



Note. Quotations are reproduced *verbatim* from the analysed posts, including original capitalisation and typographical inconsistencies.

Source: Author's elaboration based on data analysed with MAXQDA.

Discussion

This study set out to theorise Holocaust commemoration under platform conditions by conceptualising algorithmic oblivion as a structural tendency through which mnemonic traces proliferate while the conditions for symbolic working-through are attenuated. The comparative netnographic analysis of Instagram, Facebook, and X substantiates this claim and clarifies the mechanisms through which platform infrastructures reformat remembrance into distinct grammars of memory. At the same time, the findings demonstrate that these infrastructures do not fully determine mnemonic practices, leaving space for countervailing forms of critique and reflexive engagement.

From the culture industry to algorithmic culture

Extending Adorno and Horkheimer's critique of the culture industry to contemporary platform environments, the findings reveal how standardised commemorative tropes – such as 'Never Forget', candles, and iconic images of Auschwitz – operate as pseudo-individuated units optimised for circulation and recognition. These tropes are endlessly repeated with minor variations, facilitating recognisable forms of participation without necessarily fostering historical understanding. In this respect, platformised remembrance radicalises rather than replaces the logic of mass culture:

standardisation is intensified through algorithmic amplification, while difference is tolerated only insofar as it remains legible and engaging.

Instagram's emphasis on aestheticised solemnity exemplifies this dynamic. Here, remembrance is frequently shaped through visual refinement and affective immediacy, turning memory into a consumable spectacle. X, by contrast, channels Holocaust memory into agonistic presentism, where the Shoah is mobilised within ongoing political conflicts and semantic struggles. Facebook's dominant institutional framing stabilises meaning through pedagogical and organisational discourse, yet often reproduces routinised commemorative forms. The comparison thus points less to three separate models of remembrance than to different configurations of a common tension between circulation and critical engagement.

Algorithmic grammars and traumatic repetition

What unifies these platform-specific styles is the presence of algorithmic grammars that privilege circulation, immediacy, and engagement. Practices such as hashtag stacking, optimisation of visual formats, and strategic tagging align remembrance with metrics of visibility rather than with interpretive depth. The empirical material therefore gives concrete form to the tension between repetition and working-through developed earlier. Platform environments continuously reactivate Holocaust memory, yet often without the temporal spacing, narrative mediation, or contextualisation required for symbolic elaboration. These findings provide empirical support for the notion of algorithmic oblivion developed above. Memory remains omnipresent, yet risks becoming anaesthetised through repetition and spectacle.

Benjamin's *Theses on the Philosophy of History* (2023 [1942]) provide a critical vocabulary for understanding the temporal and ethical stakes of digital remembrance. Rejecting historicism's conception of history as a continuous progression unfolding in 'homogeneous' and 'empty' time (p. 13), Benjamin insists that the past becomes meaningful only when it is seized 'at a moment of danger'. From this perspective, the multiplication of mnemonic traces is not in itself evidence of successful remembrance; what matters is whether those traces retain the capacity to interrupt the present and confront it with unresolved historical claims. Against this logic, counter-memorial practices resonate with Benjamin's injunction to 'brush history against the grain' (2023 [1942], p. 6), reactivating memory as critical labour rather than ritualised repetition.

Counter-memory as friction and working-through

Against these tendencies, the analysis identified a range of counter-memorial practices that introduce friction into the flow of digital remembrance and resist algorithmic oblivion. Posts that foreground survivor testimony, family archives, extended captions, or site-specific histories slow down attention and demand interpretive labour. These practices do not reject platforms outright but exploit platform affordances, such as carousels, threads, or long-form captions, to cultivate duration, context, and reflexivity.

From a trauma studies perspective, such practices can be understood as attempts to move from acting-out towards symbolic working-through. They do not resolve the tensions inherent in Holocaust memory, nor do they offer reconciliatory narratives. Rather, they sustain discomfort, ambivalence, and unresolved questions as conditions for ethical remembrance. In this respect, counter-memory resonates with Adorno's insistence on non-reconciliation and with Benjamin's call to rescue threatened images of the past from conformist continuity.

Counter-memory also intervenes in the politics of grievability. By foregrounding victims historically marginalised within dominant Holocaust narratives – such as Romani people, disabled victims, and homosexual victims – these practices expand the field of public mourning and challenge ritualised exclusions. Memory thus becomes not only a matter of honouring the past, but also of interrogating its silences and hierarchies.

In this sense, counter-memory echoes Marcuse's understanding of aesthetic imagination by preserving the memory of what has been denied or betrayed and turning it into a critical measure of the present rather than an object of nostalgia.

Visibility versus intelligibility

The findings suggest that ritual, conflict, and critique should not be understood as distinct forms of digital remembrance. They operate instead as overlapping modes of memory-work within the same platform environments. This overlap brings into focus the tension between the growing visibility of Holocaust remembrance and its historical intelligibility.

In this regard, the findings resonate with Corchia's (2023) analysis of the platformised public sphere, which suggests that communicative practices alone are insufficient to grasp the structural transformation of public life under platform conditions. What the analysis reveals is not merely a shift in commemorative styles, but a deeper reconfiguration of the infrastructural conditions under which memory becomes visible, circulates, and acquires social intelligibility. The issue, then, goes beyond changing styles of commemoration. Platformisation alters the conditions through which memory is organised, circulated, and made socially intelligible.

Digital infrastructures shape not only what is remembered, but how memory is organised, prioritised, and made meaningful. Platforms tend to privilege visibility over historical intelligibility, rapid circulation over contextual framing, and affective resonance over interpretive depth, thereby encouraging forms of mnemonic engagement that are immediately legible yet historically shallow.

Yet the analysis cautions against a deterministic reading of platform power. The persistence of counter-memorial practices demonstrates that digital environments do not fully determine mnemonic conduct or foreclose the possibility of critique. Users may appropriate platform affordances in ways that restore context, narrative density, and historical specificity, even though their agency remains situated within infrastructures that unevenly distribute visibility and attention. Under platform conditions, the space for such critical memory therefore remains possible, but fragile and uneven.

Limits and future research

This study is limited by its language scope and temporal frame, focusing on posts published between January and August 2025. Platform algorithms are dynamic and opaque, limiting reproducibility over time. Since the study analyses publicly accessible content rather than recommendation systems themselves, it does not directly measure algorithmic ranking or amplification; references to algorithmic logics should therefore be understood as theoretically informed interpretations of observable platform practices. Future research could extend the analysis longitudinally across multiple commemorative cycles, incorporate additional linguistic and cultural contexts, and combine netnography with trace ethnography to examine how counter-memories travel – or stall – within recommendation systems.

Conclusions

This article examines Holocaust commemoration under the conditions of the platform society, advancing the concept of algorithmic oblivion to describe a structural tendency within platformed memory whereby mnemonic traces proliferate while the possibilities for symbolic working-through are progressively weakened.

The analysis shows that platformised Holocaust memory is structured by a persistent tension between repetition and critique. Ritualised tropes, aestheticised imagery, and algorithmic grammars facilitate the rapid circulation of commemorative content, yet often detach memory from historical context and narrative integration. In this sense, remembrance risks becoming ubiquitous but shallow: endlessly visible, yet increasingly difficult to elaborate. Algorithmic oblivion thus names not the

disappearance of memory, but its transformation into a repetitive and weakly decontextualised flow that undermines the critical labour trauma demands.

The study also identifies counter-memorial practices that resist this tendency. Through extended narration, testimonial framing, archival references, and reflexive critique, some users reintroduce duration, context, and interpretive effort into digital remembrance. These practices do not overcome the constraints of platform environments, nor do they resolve the contradictions of Holocaust memory. Rather, they mark fragile yet significant attempts to preserve memory as symbolic work rather than mere spectacle.

Conceptually, the six analytical axes developed in this study –organised around the categories of ritual, conflict, and critique – offer a framework for distinguishing between different modes of memory-work within digital environments. This framework highlights that the same platforms can simultaneously host routinised commemoration, political contestation, and critical reflection. Digital memory is thus not homogeneous, but internally differentiated and shaped by competing cultural grammars.

More broadly, the findings indicate that the central challenge of Holocaust remembrance in the algorithmic age lies not in visibility, participation, or access, but in intelligibility. Platforms privilege circulation over contextualisation and affect over interpretation, yet they do not fully foreclose the possibility of critique. The persistence of counter-memory indicates that even within environments structured by algorithmic logics, remembrance can still function as a site of ethical reflection –albeit under precarious and contested conditions.

Holocaust remembrance in the platform society emerges neither as a purely spectacularised ritual nor as a fully critical practice, but as a field of tension between repetition and working-through. Algorithmic oblivion names the dominant tendency of digital memory to circulate trauma without elaboration, while counter-memory marks the fragile persistence of critique within that regime. Attending to this tension is essential not only for understanding digital remembrance, but for sustaining the ethical work of memory in the aftermath of historical catastrophe.

To return to Tempia's Lloyd (2016) and bring the argument full circle, the point is not to multiply reminders, but to defend the conditions of remembering as critical work –every day, and, under platform time, every minute. Remembering, ultimately, is not a matter of encountering the past again and again, but of understanding its history, reflecting on its meaning, and asking why it still matters in the present.

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