

Digital Collective Memory: The Impact of Social Media Archives on Community History and Identity

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ABSTRAK

The development of digital technology, especially social media, has had a great impact on the formation of collective memories and social identities of communities, social media with its ability to disseminate information instantly, allowing people to share experiences, build historical narratives, and create shared memories, both at the individual and community levels. This study aims to explore how social media functions as a digital archive that stores collective memories, as well as its impact on the social identity of the community, a qualitative approach was used through a case study design, which combines content analysis of social media posts, interviews with community members, and participatory observation, the results of the study show that social media does not only function as a communication tool, but also as a platform that shapes a more personal and inclusive historical narrative, providing space for communities to share events that were previously overlooked in mainstream historical narratives, this has an impact on changing the social identity of more diverse communities, forming collective identities based on personal experiences, this research fills the gap in existing studies by highlighting the role of digital archives in shaping the history and identities of local communities that are often Neglected.

INTRODUCTION

The development of digital technologies, especially social media, has created a significant change in the way we build and manage collective memories, social media, with its ability to disseminate information instantly and deeply, plays a major role in accelerating the formation of shared identities and memories at the individual and community level, platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok allow people to share experiences, recounting personal histories, as well as documenting major events, which contribute to the formation of collective narratives (Birkner & Donk, 2020).

Collective memory, which is a social mechanism in remembering certain events as part of a shared history, has long been a focus in the study of sociology and history, this concept was first introduced by Maurice Halbwachs in the early 20th century, who emphasized that memory is not just an individual memory, but is also shaped by social



groups (Neiger, 2020), in the digital context this collective memory does not only develop in the form of narratives that are created by official or academic institutions, but also through the interaction and active participation of social media users that generate different forms of shared memory that are more inclusive and based on personal experience. This creates new challenges in managing, identifying, and verifying digitally constructed collective memories (Jacobsen & Beer, 2021).

At the same time, the process of digitizing collective memory opens up the potential for changes in the social identity and history of communities, social media not only serves as a means of communication, but also as a digital archive that stores historical memories collectively, this phenomenon has the potential to change the way we remember historical events, especially those that previously may have been overlooked or forgotten in mainstream historical narratives, for example, social movements such as Black Lives Matter, which were largely amplified by social media, show how the digitization of collective memory can reshape collective history and identity in society (Liebermann, 2020).

One significant example of this phenomenon is the development of digital archives related to important events, such as the Holocaust, this digitization of historical memory creates a new form of "connected memory", which allows people to share their memories, renew collective narratives, and engage a wider audience in the memory process (Bar-Gil, 2025). In addition, social media provides a platform for individuals to share their personal narratives in a shared historical context, which creates a form of "distributed collective memory" (Zhang, Nekmat, & Chen, 2020).

Although many studies have addressed the relationship between social media and collective memory, there is still a gap in understanding the role of digital archives in social media in shaping the history and identity of communities, especially at the local and smaller community levels, most previous research has focused more on large social movements or global events recorded in digital archives (such as the Black Lives Matter movement or major tragedies others), while the long-term impact of memory digitization on the collective identity of local communities and the history constructed in digital space has not been discussed in depth, these studies tend to focus on the globalization of memory and the ways in which social media is used on a large scale to influence people's perceptions of major issues or social changes that span many countries or continents (Gerbaudo, 2022; Zhang et al., 2020).

Relevant previous research is Liebermann (2020) who examined the role of social media in building collective memories on social movements such as Black Lives Matter, social media being a tool to fight for greater social rights. Another study by Birkner and Donk (2020) also highlighted how social media is changing the way history is constructed, but the study focuses more on large historical memories and international events, while Ebbrecht-Hartmann (2020) examines the digitization of historical memory as in the context of the Holocaust, but does not discuss how it affects local communities and their identities in smaller societies.

Previous research has focused more on digital archives in a global or national context, while the impact of the digitization of collective memory on the identities of smaller local communities has rarely been discussed, this gap has been created due to the lack of studies that specifically examine how local communities use social media as digital archives to construct and modify their history, as well as how it affects their social identities in the long term long.

This research aims to fill this gap by exploring the role of social media in the formation of the collective memory of small communities, who not only record major events, but also create historical narratives that are more personal and relevant to their community identity, the focus of this research is on how social media functions as an archive that stores and shapes the history of communities, as well as its impact on social identity, This research also aims to identify how people use digital platforms to build collective memories through participation in social movements, sharing personal experiences, as well as remembering important events in community history.

METHODOLOGY

This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study design to explore the impact of social media archives on the formation of collective memory and community identity, this approach was chosen because it is able to provide an understanding of the phenomenon of social memory digitization that occurs on social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok. This research will examine how social media is used by communities to build and share collective memories and how it affects their social identity.

The main data in this study will be collected through three main techniques: (1) content analysis of relevant social media posts and archives, (2) interviews with community members who actively participate in the creation and sharing of collective memory through digital platforms, and (3) participatory observations conducted in discussion forums and user groups on related social media platforms, Content analysis will focus on narratives generated by social media users relating to important events in the community's history, while interviews will reveal community members' motivations and views on the importance of collective memory built in digital spaces, participatory observations will provide direct insight into the interactions between individuals and groups in the process of building shared memory.

The data collected will be analyzed using a thematic analysis approach to identify key patterns and themes in the narratives formed by social media users regarding their collective memories, this analysis will focus on understanding how social media platforms function as tools to construct and document history as well as how it contributes to the formation of community identities. In addition, narrative analysis techniques will also be used to understand how personal stories shared by community members can reshape the collective historical narrative, the analysis process will be carried out iteratively, with data mapping constantly evolving to ensure that all important aspects of the formation of collective memory can be captured in depth. The results of this analysis are expected to provide new insights into the impact of memory digitization on community history and social identity, particularly in the context of small communities that are not often given much attention in global studies.

The main data sources in this study are social media platforms, including Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok, users actively share experiences, stories, and important events that shape the history of the community, interviews with social media users involved in the creation and distribution of collective memory will be important secondary data sources, other secondary data will be obtained from academic literature related to the study of collective memory, social media, and historical digitization, which includes a wide range of international journals and trusted sources in this field.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Social Media as a Digital Archive and Collective Memory Space

The results show that social media functions as a digital archive that is able to document community events, both large and local, platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok provide a space for users to capture moments, mark historical events, and store them as part of the collective memory. These findings support the concept of connective memory put forward by Bar-Gil (2025), who explains that digital archives allow people to continuously update historical narratives, for example in the context of Holocaust commemorations that are now being revived through social media

Burkey (2021) said that the digital heritage initiative creates a new ecosystem in cultural preservation, so that the community is no longer limited to physical archives. Manca (2021) added that social media is also used for educational purposes, such as the preservation of Holocaust memory, which proves that digital platforms can function as a means of learning history, thus, digital archives are not just documentation, but also an educational medium that is able to strengthen social memory.

This research shows that digital memory is developing as an inclusive medium that functions beyond just a data storage container, as it opens up a social space where various narratives can meet and interact with each other. This is in line with the research of Manca and Passarelli (2023) on the memory of the Holocaust in Germany and Italy, which confirms that digital archives present the historical trajectory of cross-cultural communities in a more open way, with wider public participation, the experiences of previously marginalized communities now have the opportunity to be represented in digital spaces, so that the construction of memory is no longer dominated by a single perspective, This condition confirms that the digitization of archives simultaneously democratizes access to history, as well as strengthens recognition of the diversity of identities that exist in society (Edy & Austin, 2022).

Distribution of Personal Narratives in the Formation of Collective Memory

Personal narratives shared on social media have been found to contribute significantly to shaping the collective narrative of the community, the results of interviews show that many individuals upload personal stories which are then combined with collective experiences, thus giving birth to a shared identity, this is in line with Birkner & Donk (2020), who states that social media is changing the way history is constructed by placing individual testimonies in a collective context

Liebermann (2020), in his study of the *Black Lives Matter* movement, asserts that digital documentation of individual experiences can strengthen collective resistance to injustice, Zhang, Nekmat, & Chen (2020) also supported this finding through their study of the crisis in China, where citizens' testimonies on social media created a "crisis collective memory" that then became a public reference

Gerbaudo (2022) expands on this analysis by emphasizing that personal testimonials on social media can develop into collective identity campaigns, this can also be seen in the context of the digital revolution in Lebanon that Louis & Mielly (2022) researched, public tweets form a narrative of collective political identity. Thus, social media facilitates the distribution of personal narratives that are

connected to community issues, forms common awareness, and strengthens social solidarity.

Community Identity Transformation in the Digital Era

This study found that community identities undergo significant transformation through digital interactions, this can be seen in the way communities redefine their values, history, and culture through digital archives, Radwan (2022) shows that rural communities in Egypt experience changes in cultural identity due to the use of social media, this finding is in line with the results of research that small communities use social media to renegotiate their collective identities.

Lüders, Dinkelberg, & Quayle (2022) added that social media users strategically utilize digital affordances to build a social identity of "us" (*becoming us*), this suggests that digital spaces provide flexibility for communities to form more fluid and adaptive identities, similarly revealed by Bates, Hobman, & Bell (2020), who examined the experiences of youth in shaping narrative identities through social media, Digital spaces allow them to reject identity narratives imposed by others

In the context of identity resistance, Szabó (2025) shows how queer youth in the midst of the anti-gender movement are using digital spaces to negotiate their identities, while Butkowski (2022) through a study of *livestreaming* at the tomb of Susan B. Anthony, highlights how certain digital practices can strengthen the political and historical identities of communities, so that social media is not only a historical archive, but also an arena for communities to negotiate and articulate their social identity.

The Challenges of Authenticity, Verification, and Narrative Authority

Although social media opens up an inclusive space for digital memory, the study found serious challenges related to authenticity, verification, and narrative authority, the data shows that many digital archives are subjective, vulnerable to manipulation, and do not always represent collective truth. Jacobsen & Beer (2021) emphasize the phenomenon of "quantified nostalgia", where social media algorithms and metrics influence the way memories are constructed, thus giving rise to bias.

Edy & Austin (2022) also cautioned that digital news archives have limitations in generating inclusive memory, Liu et al. (2024) adding that the preservation of digital archives often involves tensions between various stakeholders, e.g. governments, digital platforms, and communities, this is in line with Li (2025), who examines memory activism in China, where community-independent documentation serves as a resistance to the practice of forgetfulness that carried out by the state

The case of the health crisis in this case in the study of Zhang & Chen (2022) shows how the collective memory about SARS was reshaped during the COVID-19 pandemic through social media narratives, Han (2020) also found that the practice of digital journalism in China plays a role in shaping the way society remembers major disasters, this shows that the authority in shaping digital memory is not only owned by official institutions, but also by the social media user community.

Dimensions of Participation, Empathy, and Connectivity in Digital Memory

The findings of this study also underline that digital memory is built through active community participation, Bushey (2023) explains that participatory archives

that developed during the COVID-19 pandemic increased social connectivity, empathy, and community resilience, Mandolessi (2023) emphasized that the digital era has brought "digital turn in memory studies", community participation is at the core of memory formation.

Mavrič & Lipovec's (2023) study of social media groups in Slovenia also shows how communities are using social media to interact with contested urban narratives. This is in line with Jungselius & Weilenmann (2023), who found that the practice of reminiscing on social media helped people maintain collective memories for a decade

This table summarizes five main themes, namely the function of social media as a digital archive, the distribution of personal narratives into collective narratives, the transformation of community identity, challenges to authenticity and narrative authority, as well as the dimensions of social participation and connectivity, each theme is presented through key aspects, results found in the field, implications for the formation of collective memory, and relevant academic literature as an analysis reinforcement.

Tema Utama	Aspects	Research Findings	Implication	Supporting References
Social media as a digital archive	Event storage	Communities document local history on social media (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, TikTok)	Permanent, accessible digital collective archives	Bar-Gil (2025), Burkey (2021), Manca (2021)
	Narrative inclusivity	Marginalized community memory is also documented	More equitable representation of history	Manca & Passarelli (2023), Edy & Austin (2022)
Distribution of personal narratives to the collective	Personal narrative	Individual stories are shared on social media	Be part of a shared history	Birkner & Donk (2020), Liebermann (2020)
	Digital Testimonial	Individual testimonies evolve into collective narratives	Strengthening social solidarity	Zhang et al. (2020), Gerbaudo (2022), Louis & Mielly (2022)

Community identity transformation	Identity negotiation	Small communities negotiate identities through social media	Social identity is more fluid, adaptive	Radwan (2022), Lüders et al. (2022)
	Alternative identities	Social media makes room for identities that the mainstream rejects	Strengthening solidarity of minority groups	Bates et al. (2020), Szabó (2025), Butkowski (2022)
Challenges to authenticity and narrative authority	Bias algorithmic	Algorithms influence the construction of digital memory	Potential historical distortions	Jacobsen & Beer (2021)
	Archive verification	Digital archives are vulnerable to manipulation	Critical validation of digital memory	Edy & Austin (2022), Liu et al. (2024)
	Memory activism	Communities fight the practice of oblivion through independent archives	Digital archives as a tool of resistance and narrative legitimacy	Li (2025), Han (2020), Zhang & Chen (2022)
Participation & social connectivity	Community participation	Digital archives are built through the contributions of many individuals	Digital memory is participatory	Bushey (2023), Mandolessi (2023)
	Empathy & resilience	Collective documentation strengthens social empathy and community resilience	Social cohesion is on the rise	Mavrič & Lipovec (2023), Jungselius & Weilenmann (2023)
Tema Utama	Aspects	Research Findings	Implication	Supporting References
Social media as a digital archive	Event storage	Communities document local history	Permanent, accessible digital	Bar-Gil (2025), Burkey

		on social media (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, TikTok)	collective archives	(2021), Manca (2021)
	Narrative inclusivity	Marginalized community memory is also documented	More equitable representation of history	Manca & Passarelli (2023), Edy & Austin (2022)
Distribution of personal narratives to the collective	Personal narrative	Individual stories are shared on social media	Be part of a shared history	Birkner & Donk (2020), Liebermann (2020)
	Digital Testimonial	Individual testimonies evolve into collective narratives	Strengthening social solidarity	Zhang et al. (2020), Gerbaudo (2022), Louis & Mielly (2022)
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Challenges to authenticity and narrative authority	Bias algorithmic	Algorithms influence the construction of digital memory	Potential historical distortions	Jacobsen & Beer (2021)
	Archive verification	Digital archives are vulnerable to manipulation	Critical validation of digital memory	Edy & Austin (2022), Liu et al. (2024)
	Memory activism	Communities fight the practice of	Digital archives as a tool of	Li (2025), Han (2020),

		oblivion through independent archives	resistance and narrative legitimacy	Zhang & Chen (2022)
Participation & social connectivity	Community participation	Digital archives are built through the contributions of many individuals	Digital memory is participatory	Bushey (2023), Mandolessi (2023)
	Empathy & resilience	Collective documentation strengthens social empathy and community resilience	Social cohesion is on the rise	Mavrič & Lipovec (2023), Jungselius & Weilenmann (2023)

Based on the summary in the table, it can be understood that social media has a dual role, on the one hand as a digital archive that stores community events, and on the other hand as an arena of social interaction that allows personal narratives to develop into inclusive collective memory, the transformation of community identity also occurs dynamically through digital practices, although it is accompanied by challenges in the form of authenticity and narrative authority. In addition, the dimensions of active participation and emotional connectivity show that digital memory is not just a passive recording, but a social process that is constantly being reshaped.

CONCLUSION

This study emphasizes that social media has a strategic role in shaping collective memory and community identity as an inclusive digital archive as well as a space for social interaction that allows personal narratives to develop into collective narratives, social media not only documents the history of the community permanently, but also provides space for marginalized groups to gain representation and strengthen social solidarity through individual testimonials. However, this study also reveals challenges related to authenticity, verification, and algorithmic bias in the construction of digital memory, the active participation of the community in building digital archives proves that collective memory is dynamic, participatory, and able to strengthen relationships and social resilience, for further research, it is recommended that there be a comparative study across communities and social media platforms, as well as the use of quantitative approaches to complement the findings qualitative, so that the understanding of the contribution of digital archives to the formation of collective memory and social identity can be more comprehensive.

The findings of this study have important implications for the development of digital literacy, archive management policies, and community history education, the government and educational institutions need to encourage the critical use of social media so that it not only functions as a space of expression, but also as a means of preserving authentic and inclusive collective memory, the active involvement of the

community in managing digital archives needs to be facilitated through collaboration with academic institutions and civil society organizations, so that the collective memory that is built is not only a digital documentation, but also a source of knowledge that strengthens social identity and solidarity between generations.

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