

To cite this article: Nguyen Minh Trang and Wu Tuan Dat (2025). Vietnam's 50th Reunification Day: Youth Narratives and Historical Memory through Digital Storytelling. International Journal of Education, Business and Economics Research (IJEER) 5 (4): 01-15

VIETNAM'S 50TH REUNIFICATION DAY: YOUTH NARRATIVES AND HISTORICAL MEMORY THROUGH DIGITAL STORYTELLING

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<https://doi.org/10.59822/IJEER.2025.5401>

ABSTRACT

Vietnam underwent severe challenges of war, from the resistance to the French to the Vietnam War with the United States. On April 30, 1975, Vietnam was officially reunified, and the country could embrace a long period of peace and opportunity for reconstruction. The 50th anniversary of Vietnam's Reunification Day (April 30, 2025) presents us with a significant opportunity for a national moment of reflection and remembrance of our history. Historically framed by the state narrative focusing on the victory that brought unity to Vietnam, this moment of commemoration will also reveal a generational shift in how history is seen, particularly with regard to memory, questioning, co-memorializing, and retelling of the past by Vietnam's youth, who became youth only after the war ended. This paper analyzes how youth (ages 18-30) in Vietnam engage in historical memory and narratives about the subject of reunification and national reflections about the war through their use of digital storytelling across TikTok, YouTube, Facebook, and Instagram. This paper presents the analysis of a small curated corpus of youth-generated material from the anniversary. The analysis demonstrates the wide range of stories told, from personal family stories to critical reflections to performative reenactment and political parody. The archive of youth-generated digital stories suggests a more sophisticated and nuanced re-imagining of memory, which is inherently personal, collective, and mediated. Youth use digital storytelling not just to commemorate, but to challenge their inherited histories and claim their place in Vietnam's changing national story. The paper considers how memories cannot be simply frozen in the digital world, but retraced and re-formed, and youth are increasingly at the center of how the nation tells itself to remember.

KEYWORDS: - Vietnam, 50th Reunification, Youth, Digital Storytelling.

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Published Online: July 2025

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

On April 30, 2025, Vietnam will celebrate the 50th anniversary of national reunification, a date that is firmly established within the country's historical awareness as a moment of success and closure at the end of decades of war. Known as Liberation Day or National Reunification Day, this occasion will typically take place through official state activities, media campaigns, and patriotism education that emphasize themes of national identity, sacrifice, and historical succession. However, for the generation that is born generations later and beyond 1975, the memory of 1975 is not lived but inherited - constructed more by storytelling and silence and representation through family, schools, and increasingly the digital media.

With more than 60% of Vietnam's young population under 35 and the rapid digitization, global connectivity, and economic transformation, they are redefining how history is remembered and told. In particular, during important national anniversaries, such as Reunification Day, mass on social media turns into an active space for young people to express, contest, and re-imagine historical memory. TikTok, Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube provide a variety of digital storytelling practices. TikTok videos reenacting wartime events, vlogs that are personal reflections recounting the family history, memes, music remixes of revolutionary songs and commentaries that are critical of the state's narratives. Together all of these, complicate the singularity of official memory and suggest that Vietnam's past is anything but settled in the digital age.

This paper examines the impact of Vietnamese youth (18-30 years of age) in their digital storytelling response to the 50th Reunification Day. By critically analyzing a selected case of youth content across digital platforms and considering this analysis through the lenses of cultural memory (Assmann), post-memory (Hirsch), and participatory culture (Jenkins), this paper argues that digital storytelling is more than a commemoration practice but serves as a negotiation: of generations, of history and identity, and of state framings and personal voice. In analyzing youth as active participants in the creation of national history, this paper adds to a growing body of research on memory in the digital age, Southeast Asian youth cultures, and the politics of historical narration in post-conflict contexts. It highlights youth as active producers of meaning and not passive participants in their memory, and produces new ways of seeing the past harnessing the affordances of the digital age.

1.1 *The Reunification of Vietnam (1975)*

The reunification of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam on April 30th, 1975 ended a long struggle. This was a struggle that began decades earlier with the French colonial power, and had its most devastating chapter with the Vietnam War involving the United States. The fall of the Vietnamese capital of Saigon to the North Vietnamese Army was the symbolic end of the Republic of Vietnam (South Vietnam), and the ultimate success of North Vietnam in unifying their nation under a state led by the Communist Party. The reunification moment was framed as a historic defeat against colonialism and civil conflict, and in which the task of nation-building, and ideological unity, was officially initiated in 1976 (Duiker, 2014). Since that time, the Vietnamese state has been consistent in framing each celebration of Reunification Day as a moment of liberation and ideological conclusion.

During annually commemorations, the military parades, cultural performances, speeches by governmental leaders and the media campaigns that continues to highlight the heroic sacrifices of the revolutionary generation. These commemorations emphasized unity, sovereignty, and the legitimacy of the Communist Party as the author of national salvation (Zinoman, 2001). In addition, state texts, documentaries, and monuments are also integral to sustaining this official memory and communicating it to subsequent generations (Schwenkel, 2009).

1.2 Memory and Post-War Generations

For post-Vietnam War generations (1990s and 2000s), the memories of unification are mediated through story, imagery, and institutions, but not directly. The intergenerational transfer of historical memory often takes place in the family context, where specific actualities of displacement, survival, or loss may differ from state memory (Kwon 2008). Due to this space between historical memory from the state and familial memory, sometimes we find multiple layers of memory, which can be contradictory. Historically, scholars are observing younger Vietnamese perspectives on the nation's war history which reflect changing socio-political and economic realities. Shifts across generations are clear in the ways youth engage with war monuments, increasingly question official narratives of the past, or express ambivalence about nationalist patriotic rituals (Taylor 2001). Although the legacy of the war continues to have emotional resonance, the meanings are no longer uniform, and allow for re-interpretations, in light of lived practices and experiences of related to the living within globalization, the urban experience, and the context of higher education.

1.3 Vietnam's Digital Landscape

Vietnam has seen extraordinary growth in digital connectivity in the last ten years, with the internet reaching an estimated 70% of the population by 2024 and youth being the most active users (Statista, 2024). Social networking sites are becoming increasingly relevant in our daily lives, during identity construction and in political expression. Social media is the new medium of storytelling, with Vietnamese youth experimenting with wide-ranging forms of digital storytelling, including short videos, personal blogs, visual essays, and memes. Social media allows users to historically engage with events in personal, creative and often emotional ways that are quite distinct from the dominant and official histories. State media has maintained dominance over memory; however, digital formats have opened up new avenues for memory and storytelling.

Nonetheless, this digital freedom occurs in an ambivalent regulatory environment. The Vietnamese government maintains significant control over online content via censorship laws, surveillance, and moderation by platforms (Nguyen, 2022). Posts that are potentially political and therefore sensitive (those that criticize the Party, or counter dominant narratives about the war) are subject to removal, and their creators face potential consequences. Despite these limitations, youth have successfully found ways to circumvent these limitations and be playful online by using irony and symbolism, indirect commentary, and other forms of content creation that complicate simple assumptions of control by the state, and agency by users.

In a document from YouNet Media, a top social media analytics company in Vietnam, it is reported that from March 27 to April 15, 2023, over 173,800 users participated in online discussions about the 50th anniversary of Reunification Day in Vietnam. Total participation of this user engagement

generated 1.15 million discussion posts, receiving over 8.22 million other engagements such as likes, reactions, shares, comments and views made on these posts. With 55.6% of the total discussions recorded on Facebook, this shows its leading role as a channel for the dissemination of information, opinions, and collective memory. TikTok, was next at 34.6 %, further reflecting how the rise of short-form video storytelling has created a medium in which young people can not only consume content, but can also craft their own stories that are personal, expressive, and emotional. The rest of the percentages were from Instagram, YouTube, or online forums. These figures demonstrate a high level of participation and diversity of expression, particularly among young people, in commemorating and engaging with a historically significant event. From the standpoint of memory studies and digital media research, this serves as compelling evidence that social media has become a new kind of public space for memory practices where individual and collective memories converge, intersect, and are reimagined.

Furthermore, the nature of the content presented strikingly diverse types of content: everything from serious memorialization and historical performative commemorations to memes, funny videos, and lively exchanges about the meaning of “reunification” and “division.” This evidence shows that memory is no longer fully controlled by state institutions and official curricula, and is rather being produced through a participatory memory model, wherein someone can be a storyteller using a digital tool; thus essentially providing endless storytelling possibilities.

2.0 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study examines how Vietnamese adolescents produce digital stories that serve as cultural memory of the country's reunification heritage using the interdisciplinary theory schemas that support modern memory studies, digital media studies, and cultural studies. According to Jan and Aleida Assmann (1995), cultural memory makes several significant distinctions between communicative and cultural memory. Communicative memory, or communicative forms of memory, includes informal and everyday ways of remembering such as a family stories that marks out a generational scope of a few generations. Cultural memory, in contrast, is the institutional, ritualized and mediated memory preserved, as an example, by texts, monuments, education, media, and many social forms employed by states around a coherent narrative of national identity. Pierre Nora's (1989) concept of *lieux de mémoire* (sites of memory) reflects such understandings and is indicative of the ways that societies develop spatial or physical and symbolic elements, such as holidays, museums, national anniversaries, that embody collective memory. In Vietnam, Reunification Day, as a potential site of memory, is embodied within state rituals and memorialization. However, digitized memory undermines distinctions and creates more decentralized spaces for memory work. Applying this framework to Vietnam's 50th Reunification Day reveals a tension between state-sponsored cultural memory and youth-driven communicative memory, which often emerges on digital platforms in fragmented, personal, or critical forms.

Digital storytelling is the sharing of individual or collective stories with various digital tools, including video, photography, audio and text. Digital storytelling encompasses a range of formats, from short-form video to vlogging, interactive timelines, and social media posts, enabling individuals to represent their perspectives in multimedia-rich ways that are also emotionally resonant (Lambert, 2013). For Vietnamese youth, digital storytelling is a way to engage with

history that is participatory and creative. Jenkins's (2006) theory of participatory culture is relevant for understanding how youth engage with digital platforms; participatory culture allows youth to actively engage in cultural production instead of simply passively consuming cultural content. Users create, share and remix content in participatory cultures; this process supports collaborative and decentralized narrative creation. In participatory culture, digital spaces provide places for underrepresented voices, including those that occupy multiple positions simultaneously, to contest or extend (or even resist) historical narratives, particularly those that do not benefit them, not previously voiced in official discourses. For Vietnamese youth, digital storytelling provides youth with ways to express hybrid identities, articulate historical ambivalence, or disrupt dominant narratives, often with humor, satire, or affective personal testimony. All the time, these participatory practices erase differences between history and memory, public and private, sanctioned and subversive.

The term post-memory refers to the relationship of the subsequent generation to the traumatic events experienced by their forebears, though the subsequent generation did not directly live through these events. Post-memorial subjects still inherit memories - often fragmented and emotionally charged - through familial or community stories, images, and silences. Post-memory has particular salience for postwar Vietnam. In the context of Vietnam, children and grandchildren of war survivors engage with a past that is not theirs but one that nonetheless informs their identities. For some ethnic youth, the war and its aftereffects may not be experienced today as capital "T" trauma but as an ambient legacy perceived through family stories, photographs, inherited emotions, and national rites. Further, "digital" within this notion of post-memory also becomes an important factor to characterize how and where these inherited memories can shift to meaningful narratives in the present. Youth can use digital forms (e.g. memes, reenactments, voiceovers) as opportunities to reinterpret lived and inherited experiences of Vietnam's past in the context of their own generational concerns, such as the realities of globalization, migration, and increasingly political ambivalence (the legacy of the legacy?). Therefore, the relevant point here is that post-memory is not static; it has become past-tense, remixed, contested, and performed legacies that will evolve how nations remember and how individuals develop their sense of history.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

This study used a qualitative content analysis in order to analyze patterns of digital participation and cultural expression, relating to the 50th anniversary of Vietnam's Reunification Day. The data included a variety of digital platforms - TikTok, Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, and personal blogs. The reason for selecting these digital platforms was because they demonstrated user interaction and participation with public discourse in Vietnam.

Data sampling focused on user-generated materials that include, but were not limited to, videos, captions, comments, live streams, hashtags, and blog postings from April 1 to May 5, 2025. Within these user-generated materials, the analysis placed emphasis on themes, symbolism, expressions of emotions, and participatory practices. The posts were coded into themes that included acts of patriotism, cultural reimagining, logistics of events, and digital community organizing. Moreover, the analysis contextualized platform-specific participation trends, e.g., TikTok viral features (trending sounds and filters), Facebook membership engagement, and individual blogging styles.

The study aimed to uncover ways that digital media not only framed historical memory in its communication aspects, but also developed public participatory practices and inter-generational meaning-making.

4.0 RESULTS

Analysis of digital content created by youth that concerns Vietnam's 50th Reunification Day has surfaced three central storylines: personal and family memory; the tension between expressing national pride and critical reflection however, there is also a third storyline around affect in the digital space. As the world begins to open back up following three years of pandemic-related restrictions and interruptions to life, the 50th anniversary of Vietnam's Reunification Day generated a surge in digital engagement like never before - through online searches and social media; according to a report by Cốc Cốc, more than 2.8 million searches are recorded during the four weeks leading up to 30 April 2025; ranging from military parade schedules, fireworks schedules, and a range of other information, including national symbols, the national anthem, the national song, and Gen Z using the term "national concert" to describe the parade.



Figure 1. Digital engagement during 30/3/2025 event
Source: Authors complied from Coccoc, Tiktok

Search interest accelerated prior to April 30, hitting a high of 240,000 searches on April 25, a 550% increase from earlier in the month that was driven by viral video from the, rehearsals of ceremonial formations, helicopters, and fighter jets. Google Trends identified "50th anniversary" and "April 30 parade" as breakout keywords, with volumes doubling and tripling in a week in both urban centers like Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi, and provincial areas. On TikTok, engagement was particularly high - 9 out of the top 10 trending hashtags (for the final week of April), referred to Reunification Day. Hashtags including #dieubinh and #50namgiaiphongmiennam topped the 30 days trends, with over 153,000 user user-generated post tagged respectively. Over 60% of Vietnamese TikTok users are from Gen Z, so the holiday became a cross-generational digital event parasite by remix culture and visual narrative.

Cốc Cốc and Social Heat reported that around 58% of users engaged online to promote collective online or offline commemorative action, while 51% related to national pride. These statistics

reinforce how both mixed online and offline interactions served not only as information hubs, but as a mechanism for emotion and social engagement, while lists of practical questions dominated the discourse: 25% of users wanted to know about the event's location, 21% wanted to know about the event's time, and another 21% wanted to know about options to live stream and broadcast the events. Questions like “where is it taking place?” and “can I watch it online?” circulated widely on Facebook, TikTok, and online forums, hinting at potent interest and significance to users happening in real time. Social Trend also highlighted that Facebook was the site with the largest engagement (55.6%), with five new groups formed to post information and share logistics, attracting over 12,000 members. These trends begin to signal a move away from symbolic celebration and towards forms of direct and experiential engagement.

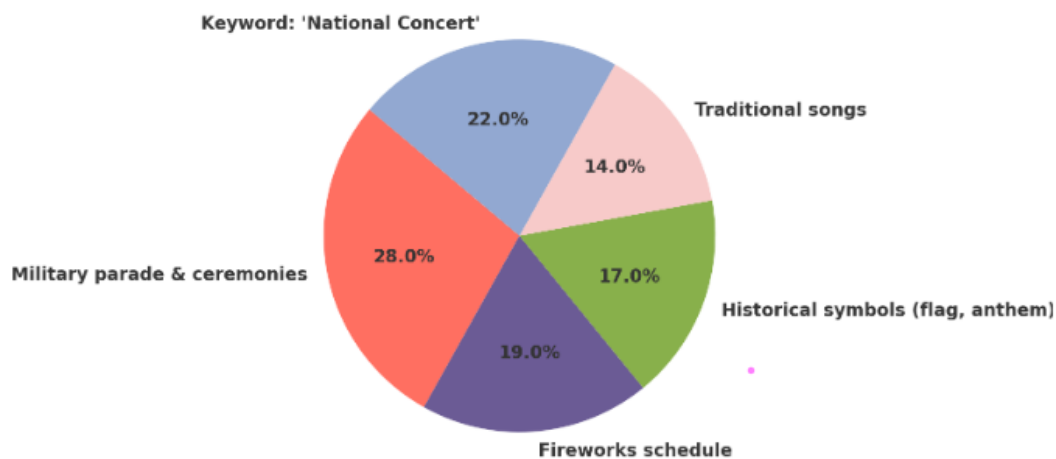


Figure 2: Content on social network
Source: Authors compiled from Coc Coc

Overall, Reunification Day 2025 became a hybrid digital memory event blending patriotic emotion, practical coordination, and intergenerational cultural expression across social platforms.

Personal Family Stories of War and Migration

Across platforms, one of the most remarkable threads was the expression of personal and intergenerational stories. Many young users recorded their grandparents' or parents' stories about their experiences during the war, often contextually assembling jumbled episodes, photos or oral testimonies into video montages or written captions. The stories were varied and included topics around military service, returnees' accounts and experiences of evacuation, re-education camps, or emigration after 1975. Some TikTok videos included users reflecting emotionally through voiceover or snippet interviews with family, documenting their stories alongside (old) photographs or letters from wartime contexts. Posts began with account snapshots using phrases like “My grandfather never talked about the war – but...” or “This is what my mom said happened when the Saigon fell.” In many cases, these stories highlighted what to reclaim suppressed and unspoken family stories. Notably, these personal stories often complicated state narratives, for example that youth from diaspora or former South Vietnamese backgrounds or locations told stories of loss or exile when narrating their experiences that questioned the singularity of reunion as a state victory.

However even those from Vietnam were recalling emotional costs of war trauma, poverty, separation that evoked more descriptive or nuanced accounts of historical context.

4.1 National Pride and Critical Reflection

The second, significant narrative tension occurring within the collective potential of the youth was between national pride/ritual and critical/ambivalent engagement. Some of these young voices openly echoed official narratives, sharing an enthusiastic acceptance or celebratory understanding of reunification as an absolutely heroic moment in Vietnam's struggle for sovereignty. These posts typically included a clear visual representation of the red flag with a gold star, popular revolutionary songs, and clips taken from state archives. Such posts typically emphasized peace, sacrifice, endurance and pride. Importantly, these Jung voices were usually situated next to, sometimes in the same post, questions of what had been lost, what had been omitted, or what survived as a point of erasure. For instance, some critical posts referenced the erasure of South Vietnamese soldiers, erasure through the families and representatives of dissenting voices, or the refusal to recognize the disparate nature of regional economic growth since 1975. Other posts contended with state-based rituals of memory. This, for instance, took the shape of creators posting satirical takes of school assignments about the war, asking whether these assignments actually offered a deeper understanding of the war, or whether they merely reproduced state propaganda. Ultimately, the line between pride and critique was not so easily delineated; narrative positions of pride frequently took up somewhere in between, where would-be engaged posts were underlined by pride of national identity, but also feelings of awareness, disillusionment, or emotional detachment from a state memory.

4.2 Memory as Celebration, Mourning, or Irony

The emotional valence of the content was very diverse, with memory often expressed through celebration, mourning, or irony, and often in ways that were surprising in combination. The posts that celebrated the day would align with commemorations, complete with filters, music, and statements like "We are proud descendants of victory"; they tended to celebrate unity and growth as a nation. Mourning posts included poetry, photomontages with black and white slides, montages including slow-motion footage, and sad music to honor those who fought and suffered, including unnamed civilian victims of war, lost diaspora families, and forgotten victims of war. There are examples of irony and satire, particularly on TikTok and Instagram, including users parodying state footage and historical reenactments, or remixing this footage with comedic soundtracks. Some posts used memes to point to a disconnect between generations; for example, the extent to which the war is taught in schools, or how holidays like April 30 are used for propaganda, rather than remembering the occasion. These affective modes allowed youth to express a complicated relationship to the past, through an emotional lens: celebration was experienced alongside grief; critique was delivered through humor; reverence was done without ostentation. This emotional layering makes sense to the ambivalent presence of historical memory in youth identity-making that was palpably felt, but not always palpably aligned with a dominant official script.

Beyond the thematic content of their narratives, Vietnamese youth employed a wide range of aesthetic strategies to shape how memory is presented, felt, and shared across digital platforms. These strategies of visual, auditory, and stylistic demonstrate how youth are not only telling stories

about the past but also experimenting with how history is made meaningful through form, tone, and media.

Visual storytelling figured prominently in a number of the analyzed posts. Several creators used archival images, including photos of Saigon in 1975, family photos from the war era, and propaganda posters. Creators applied various means to reframe and repurpose these images for present consumption, including montage video, digitally colorized images, and adding text, to connect the past and present. Some constellations of youth created reenactments of historical moments by employing only a few props or costumes, and either sincerely interpreted pivotal moments (e.g. the fall of Saigon, or a soldier's farewell) or humorously reflected upon a historical moment or narratives from a particular historical moment. These performative acts highlighted an embodied participatory connection with memory in bringing past representations into the bodies and cameras of the present. Creators also readily employed filters and editing capabilities for content styling. The use of sepia tones, graininess, or split screen representations comparing the past and present are all visual markers that offered creators both nostalgic and critical purposes. Overall, this digital aesthetics resonates with the visual language of memories of both imperfect, layered and emotionally fraught.

Sound: Use of Music, Oral Histories, Voiceovers

Sound functioned for young people, as a powerful affective and narrative element in storytelling. Many TikTok and YouTube videos were sound-tracked with revolutionary songs like "Như có Bác Hồ trong ngày vui đại thắng," which conveyed an evocative sense of patriotism. In some posts, these songs were also remixed and coupled with modern beats or used ironically, with clashing visuals, which altered their meaning. A more intimate approach involved the use of voice audio and oral histories. Some posts employed the voices of grandparents or parents sharing their experiences of war. The closeness of oral history audio clips struck emotion in viewers when paired with family photos or footage of the speaker. In other posts, creators narrated their posts to provide reflective commentary, working to provide context or emotion that would have otherwise been lost on the visual tones. In these cases, the voiceovers often included hesitations, laughter, or emotion, showing viewers the transmitting of memory is unresolved and affective.

Humor appeared as both a coping strategy and a narrative strategy of counter-narration. Youth often engaged and navigated sensitive or politicized historical content with memes, parody formats, or elements of absurdity and exaggeration. The use of humor was especially notable on TikTok and Instagram, where the platform's affordances of short-form video and visual remixing practices inherently lent themselves to irony and detachment from narrative standards. For example, TikToks reenacting "how history is taught in school" contained silly slapstick actions and ridiculous mocking dialogue. Memes that compared political situations of 1975 with early 21st century situations, sometimes humorously implying historical recurrence or contradiction. Parodic skits where creators impersonated both "North" and "South" Vietnamese characters while also exaggerating stereotypes of the past, to critique historical reductionism. In this way humor allowed youth to reach and engage history in a seemingly oblique way, which could make serious and complicated issues more inviting, avoided censorship, or signaled a sense of shared generational

ambivalence toward memory and national identity. These acts in a manner we could think of as asserting agency over past meanings and connections perceived in memory.

The digital stories made by Vietnamese youth to commemorate the 50th anniversary of Reunification Day illustrate not only outputs with different ways to engage with history, but also deeper tensions. These tensions highlight fundamental ideological, geographic, and political fault lines that complicate how memory is made, and how it is shared. While digital spaces facilitate creative avenues and larger narrative power for youth, they also provide constraints - some that are very clear, while others are not about what can be stated, shown, and circulated. A major tension evident in the dataset is between official memory, as promulgated through state media, education, and commemorative practices, and ground-up or personal narratives, as demonstrated through youth. Posts aligned with government narratives (e.g., celebrating victory, commemorating the Communist Party, or expressing national unity) often deployed familiar patriotic aesthetics with the use of revolutionary music, flags, state sanctioned slogans, etc.

In contrast, grassroots stories, especially those that drew heavily from family narratives often disrupted this cleanly celebratory tone. Posts authored by young people who identified as diasporic or Southern Vietnamese, for example, offered perspectives of loss, displacement, or ambivalence as it relates to reunification. Rather than iterating a straightforward binary of “liberator vs. liberated,” these stories often rendered reunification as painful and complicated. This tension sometimes spilled over to user comments, as more patriotic users questioned the legitimacy, or “loyalty,” of posts that critiqued these narratives, while others praised the creators for their courage and honesty. In some cases, creators responded defensively or added disclaimers such as “just sharing family history, not political” which also signaled how personal storytelling lives in the constant scrutiny of ideology.

The emerging contrasts took shape in different yet similar ways across urban and rural youth, at times apparent in the style and tone of the posts, as well as their framing. Urban users, more frequently than not, who predominantly hailed from Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City, and Da Nang engaged in some experimental, or ironic form of storytelling. Urban youth regularly instilled humor, remix aesthetics, and critical commentary as entry points into reinterpreting historical memory. Rural youth, specifically, but not limited to, users in rural or provincial areas, more frequently shared posts that related to commemorations that reinforced traditional values and nationalistic narratives. Posts that underscored the roles of gratitude to veterans, sacrifice to family, and benefits from national unity exhibited a more profound level of sincerity; they lacked ironic detachment. This scenario is not universally accepted; however, it does suggest that geographic and educational access led to different ways for youth to consider and engage with sites of contested memory. Importantly, a lack of engagements between urban and rural youth does not indicate apathy or disconnection between them, representing different frameworks of meaning-making borne from lived experience, socialization, and differences in access to media.

A final, pervasive tension was the negotiation of political sensitivity. Several creators made allusions, whether explicitly or implicitly, to the danger of engaging with difficult historical subject matter in public. Posts that were critical of the consequences of the war, policies of reunification, or

the erasure of Southern histories were often vague or metaphorical. Some even commented on the temporality of memory itself, wondering whether they were “allowed” to tell certain stories. This kind of oversight and caution produced a paradox: while digital media indeed opens space to enact more participatory memory practices, it also solidifies boundaries around what kinds of memory practices are acceptable to enact. The result is a culture of memory that emphasizes inventive navigation, where humor, uncertainty, and symbolism are employed, not only for account style, but for existence in a spatial discourse of political management.

Music served as an expressive means of communicating history and emotion, especially to younger audiences, in the setting of the 50th anniversary of Vietnam's Reunification Day (April 30, 2025) and the surrounding digital memory contexts. For instance, Nguyen Van Chung's song "Viết tiếp câu chuyện hòa bình" (Continuing the Story of Peace) was featured on the April 30 Ho Chi Minh City broadcast performance "Rạng rỡ non sông Việt Nam" (Radiant Homeland Vietnam). The song quickly reached number one on youtube Vietnam's trending chart, accumulating more than 2.2 million views in a short period of time. The song went beyond its original broadcast context, and became a viral moment on social media in platforms like TikTok, Instagram, and Facebook, with over 4 billion views overall counted in user generated videos. Young users were ingeniously pairing the emotional mixing of the anthem's compelling music and poetic lyrics with footage or images of military parades, flag salutes, or personal vlogs that visually document the national rehearsal events about how music has the potential to create an emotional archive and express culture in the digital context. What is particularly significant is that the bulk of this engagement from the singing was predominantly engaged by Generation Z, a generation often characterized as disengaged from traditional political history to this point of their life. However, they played a tune that connects serious, national themes with accessible, relevant contemporary musical styles of popular music, which drew youth to actively commemorate and reinterpret April 30th as not only a historical date, but rather a meaningful moment situated in their experience of culture and within their digital experience. This raises questions about how a historical consciousness is activated among young people through popular music and digital media, which is not through formal education or ideological instruction, but through affective, participatory, and shared experience. It affirms that today, historical memory is not just inherited history, it is instead a continuing experience of remixes and emotional re-writing situated in digital forms.

5.0 DISCUSSION

5.1 *Rewriting National Memory: Youth between Reproduction and Resistance*

While many youths' digital narratives lined up with official sentiments around national unity, sacrifice, and postwar peace, a considerable share showed critical or begrudging attitudes to the states positioning of reunification. Instead of an oppositional relationship for or against, the majority could be understood as navigating a continuum of re-enactment and re-definition. Some youth re-enacted the states position on national memory through celebratory representations that mimicked those of state commemorations patriotic music, flags, and veneration of revolutionary heroes. Other youth used the same symbols as the state to created ironic or distanced representations. Other youth assembled disjunctive or counter-memories through family testimonials, humor, or material contradictions that implied a critique of the costs of reunification or erased southern experiences. This complicated negotiation resonates with Jan Assmann's (1995)

ideas on cultural memory, where it is a contested process. Rather than rejecting state discourse entirely, youth are negotiating and hybridizing it with their own lived experiences and post-memory inheritances (Hirsch, 2008). Therefore, they are contributing to a pluralization of public history, as it embraces not only grief that was glossed over, diasporic memories, as well as current skepticism of state sentimentality.

5.2 Digital Space as a Memory Arena: Negotiating the Public and Private

Platforms like TikTok, Instagram, and Facebook can be understood as memory arenas—meaning fluid and dynamic spaces and sites for familiarizing personal memories and collective memories (Nora, 1989). In these memory arenas, youth use public memory (through commemorating, educating, critiquing) and engage in their own private memory work (through processing trauma they inherited, seeking acceptance, constructing identity). While museums and monuments are formal sites of memory, digital memory arenas provide ways of bringing memories to action by being witness to a collective past that is both participatory and fleeting. For instance, a youth's TikTok about their family story can generate hundreds of comments that shift that private memory into a social site of engagement full of cultural memories. On the other hand, the same TikToker can delete the video due to political sensitivity, making the ephemeral nature of publicness untenable in Vietnam's digital space. Even the publicness of digital memory work makes the cases of private memory work public and social (the private marker of family story is publicly engaged). This duality of private and public memory in social media produces ambiguity, complicating the tradition of public and private memory binaries. Digital media allows for important moments of intimate vulnerability to remain vulnerable and become collective witnessing, and public forms of commemoration (through social media) to be repositioned and reclaimed through a personal view.

5.3 The Role of Technology in Memory Transmission: Affordances and Constraints

With digital technology, there are possibilities for memory transmission that have not been possible for a generation born long after 1975. Through editing video, the creation of remix culture, and participatory features, like duets or comments, young people can animate historical works in ways that make them emotionally salient, aesthetically pleasing, and culturally important. These platforms provide a post-memorial aesthetic (Hirsch, 2008), where historical distance is surpassed through affective engagement, artistic recreation, or emotional immediacy. TikTok is especially notable because it enables forms of storytelling that integrate movement, voice, sound, and images, allowing users to "feel" the past, not just reflect on it. But these affordances exist alongside structural limits. State censorship, algorithmic suppression, and concerns of reprisal frequently lead creators to self-censor or intentionally obfuscate what they are trying to accomplish. Moreover, the speed of digital content and its transient nature can make memory absent or volatile to misinformation. The same tools that allow for expressive reinterpretation can also mislead creators toward reducing complexity or trivializing history. Digital generations in Vietnam are navigating a difficult mnemonic space. They are not simply recipients of history as much as they are trying to revise it but are themselves also not liberated from historical imperatives and limitations. Instead, they are remapping national memory drawing on digital tools, with all the opportunities or risks associated with that kind of mediation.

5.4 A Cross-Generational Cultural Convergence

One highlight of commemorating this year's celebrations was to see how different generations expressed patriotism through the cultural norms of their age. For example, as a part of Gen Z's evolving identity, many in their age group attributed pop culture experiences to their participation in the military parade. They playfully called the event "the national concert", referred to displays of military prowess as "concert booths", and a free flag or t-shirt giveaway from a soldier was described as a "freebie" - terms borrowed from the language of music festivals and fandom. As one participant, a young man from Ha Long City explained: "the vibe felt like New Year's countdown time or an outdoor music festival. People were vlogging and putting filters on their parade shots like they were pictures from a concert." This shows how the memories of history aren't simply preserved, but are also transformed by youth culture and the reckoning of making formal state ceremonies, an active, participatory and re-imagined digital experience.

6.0 CONCLUSION

In present-day, digital spaces have become significant sites where youth have been intentionally negotiating the meaning of this historical event. Young Vietnamese have shown us that memory is no longer simply about state-led commemorations or textbook representations; memory is now co-constructed, emotionally mediated, and performed out in the digital space. This research has evidenced that the youth of Vietnam are not just remembering the past, they are reframing it! They are utilizing family legacies, humor, irony, and aesthetics from the digital space to try to remix national memory. In acknowledging this, some of the content reproduced and repeated narrative presented through official state memorialization. However, a significant amount of material reflected ambivalence, emotional complexity, and otherwise repressed experience particularly from diasporic or Southern family narratives. These stories push against the assumed inertia of Reunification Day and expose embodiments of the war and its aftermath in unpredictable and multiple ways. This paper outlined how digital storytelling is not simply an act of creativity, but a political event. So, the younger generation is not only agency over the historical consciousness of Vietnam, it also lays bare limits of agency in a mediated and politically sensitive environment. In conclusion, youth's digital memory practices evoke larger generational shifts in Vietnam that show a movement toward more pluralizes, dialogic, and emotionally infused understanding of history. Their stories depict national identity as remade continuously by posts, videos, or memes rather than as fixed.

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