

Historical narratives in Web 2.0 as a functional element of national identities in Central and Eastern Europe

Social media become the immanent element of our everyday lives. We post on Facebook, watch YouTube video clips and follow political struggles on Twitter. It is also seen in the field of science – scholars, including historians, more often take advantage of the Web which is becoming more and more popular source of historical knowledge on the past.

In our project we would like to show how people discuss about history in social media. We will analyze those stories which are told by both content creators and regular users. We would like to answer the question how such stories about the past, told in social media, shape national identities on the example of three countries in Central and Eastern Europe: Poland, Russian and Ukraine. Those countries share not only difficult and twisted history. Even nowadays three nations are involved in geopolitical struggles – conflict in Donbass and Crimea has its important historical background what is used as an argument by both sides. On the other hand contemporary Polish-Russian relations are marked by the presence of the historical remarks on the common past: Katyń massacre, Polish-Bolshevik war, Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact and the communism era. In the last few years widely spoken are Polish-Ukraine historical topics: massacres of Poles in Volhynia in 1943 as well as controversies on the narratives about polish “Cursed Soldiers” and Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA). It is a vital problem that hasn’t been analyzed by historians yet in the context of the Web. Social media are becoming important mean in the spoken historical narratives conflicts. It is not only an object of the historical policy of those three countries but also an area where regular internet users express their patriotism and national identity. Moreover the Web is a place where harmful conspiracy theories take place (e.g. Great Lechina Empire pseudoscientific concept) as well as ideological propaganda that leads to conflicts between neighboring nations.

Our research will be innovative not only due to the new research material (social media sources) but also for using new methods and tools for analyzing historical sources. Used commonly in STEM, Data Science methods (computational analyses of data) might be useful in the field of humanities by broadening perspectives and shedding new light on current research problems. Below: aggregated percentile scores for the numbers of views (outer circles) and videos (inner circles) for 635 historical topic videos on Polish YouTube by categories. Original work by the authors.

