Constructing Collective Media Memory

Fans, Cinema, and the Dutch collective memory of World War Two.

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1. Introduction

One of the most popular film genres in Dutch cinema is historic films on the Second World War. Historic films are feature-length films that portray (a part of) the story of a large historical event, like the Second World War. Research into the Dutch audience's opinion of best Dutch films ever made found three World War Two films in the top ten (Scholtens & Verstraeten, 2013, p. 119). Overall, these films have larger budgets and are critically acclaimed but they are also popular amongst a big portion of the regular, Dutch cinema audience.

In 2020, Dutch cinema produced another war film: *De Slag om de Schelde* (The Battle of the Schelde. It tells the story of the battle by the same name that happened in the southern province of Zeeland during the end of the Second World War. However, the film is not an ordinary war film. The film intends to help younger generations remember the reality of war (Ter Schure, 2020). Screenwriter Paula van der Oest explains how the film tells the stories of the battle, but without the heroic trope. "We want to teach a new generation that it is dangerous to simplify reality. That good and bad are not binary terms but that there is a large grey area" (Ter Schure, 2020). They want to elaborate on the dangers and tragedy of war without glamorizing the stories. To remember what the war was all about, to not forget the hardships that people had to go through.

The film aims to add a different historical narrative to the memory of a society. The memory of a society is also known as collective memory (Closer, 2020). Collective memory is the shared stories and narratives of the past by a society that shape their understanding of the present (Halbwachs, 1925, in Rigney, 2018). This memory is passed on from generation to generation. In which, mediation, including historical cinema, is a key factor in retaining these memories. Through films, the memories can be transferred or taken out of the archive by the audience.

Investigating how collective memory is constructed in films is relevant for today's society as the stories told through more interactive forms of storytelling like films, are more easily remembered by a society (Birkner & Donk, 2020). In the Netherlands, the Second World War has made a large impact and claimed a significant place in its national history and the culture. This can be seen by the relevancy of the subject in present-day news and political discussions. Therefore, how this time is remembered is important for understanding the current-day narrative and the Dutch national culture.

In the multidisciplinary field of media memory research of discussion on collective memory construction feature historical accuracy of large historical events, the power dynamic in the creation of the narratives of the memory, and media production (Birkner & Donk, 2020; Edy, 1999; Eley, 2001). These debates entail the role of journalists, media producers and historians in constructing memory, however, the perspective of the media audience is left out in most research. Therefore, this research will add the perspective of the audience, in particular the fans, in the construction of

collective memory in WWII films to the literature. Research into audience reception of historic films has been done, however, a combination between fan studies and collective memory has not been made as fan studies are a more recent research development (La Marre, & Landreville, 2009; Klinger, 1997). Discussing collective memory with the fans of the films will take the research a step further and allow for a deeper understanding.

To fully grasp the role that historic films play in the construction of World War II memory, this research focuses on the fans of these films. These fans are immersed in genre and will, therefore, be able to recognize the films that stood out to them. And how it added to their knowledge of the Second World War. Moreover, the fans provide a unique perspective of an ordinary audience member with an awareness of the topic and their recollection of it.

Films portraying past events allow for a reaction from their audience. And because of the nature of cinema and its widely reached audience, the impact and interpretation of the films should not be overlooked. The platform that is created through film allows for discussion and the formation of the public opinion of these events. And furthermore, exemplify why historical films, whose main purpose is to entertain, should be studied in relation to public opinion and collective memory. Studying the role that these historical films have in society and what impact they can have on the cultural discourse will demonstrate the impact of the media product and how the public interprets this process.

This research will dive further into this phenomenon and discover how the audiences of the World War II film genre recognize this process and how they engage with it. To investigate this audience's interaction with the films and their construction of memory, fans of historical films are the focus of this research. As fans are more invested in the media that they consume and are more aware of the place of the media product in the market. Therefore, this research aims to answer the question of *How do fans engage with the construction of collective memory in history films?*

The aim of this research is to understand how the fans engage with the films, how and whether they experience these films contributing to the construct collective memory and what role they, as entertainment media products find their place amongst history books and family stories. To discover how the fans experience the creation of collective memory through film and why they believe that these feature films do or do not have the potential to impact society. Furthermore, it will give insight into the ways that fans go beyond the media product to satisfy their interest and grow their knowledge. Lastly, the results of the research will provide an insight into how a generation that is far removed from the first-hand experience understands the memory and how they think it can be passed on to generations to come.

2. Theoretical framework

In analysing the way that fans of historical films engage with the construction of collective memory through film the following theories and literature will be used to understand the current debates surrounding the topic. The three concepts that serve as the main pillars to this research are: collective memory, film as genre, and audience reception. Collective memory is the first concept discussed as this concept is the societal and cultural phenomenon that is impacted by film. The discussions around the creation and preservation of collective memory, will portray the different theories on this concept and the different opinions on the role of entertainment media in the process. This is essential in answering the research question, as it examines a more unconventional approach to the construction of collective memory that includes a big role for entertainment media.

The second concept is film as genre, this section will dive into the historical film genre, which World War II films are a part of, and discuss the perception of this genre. How the genre is on the line between being entertaining and informative and what impact this has on the requirements that are put on the films in this genre. Understanding the complexity of the films in this genre aids in explaining how these films have become as part of the collective memory construction process. Furthermore, the analysis of the genre allows for highlighting elements that fan audiences recognise and express their experiences with.

Lastly, the experience of the audience is discussed in the audience reception section. Debates on this concept discuss the different experiences of audiences of media products, the different audiences that there are (including fan audiences) and how the reception of a media product can reach beyond its audience. This concept addresses the (fan) audiences and their understanding of the material shared through the media product.

2.1 Collective Memory

2.1.1 Memory of a society

The memory of a society exists of the events and feelings that a society share and that shape their identity. The memory is filled with the experiences and opinions of multiple generations and transferred to younger generations as time goes on. This type of memory is a communicative memory, it is created and retained by communicative efforts within the society (Welzer, 2008). Without communication, the memory will become lost forever. As said by Hamilton (2018), collective memory is what is taken on by a community when living memory dies.

The literature describes two types of memories of a community. Firstly, there is the concept of collective memory by Halbwachs (1925, in Rigney, 2018). This term is mostly used in social science. In Humanities studies, the term cultural memory is used (Assmann & Czaplicka, 1995). Both terms

capture the memory of a society, with the collective memory focused on the dimension of the social aspect and cultural memory on the cultural aspect.

2.1.2 Cultural memory

In the research by Assmann and Czaplicka (1995) cultural memory is linked to the origins of national identity. They discuss the theory of national or cultural identity being created by the socialization and customs. They follow the theory of Nietzsche that said that for evolutionary purposes humans need a way to stay consistently the same throughout time. The solution to this consistency is cultural memory (p. 126). Cultural memory is defined as "a collective concept for all knowledge that directs behaviour and experience in the interactive framework of a society and one that obtains through generations in repeated societal practice and initiation" (Assmann & Czaplicka, 1995, p. 125). Cultural Memory has also been described as shaping the narrative of the past through sharing stories of the past, in which the role of the media is essential (Rigney, 2018, p. 242).

Cultural memory is a concept which has been used to describe a societies response to historical events or trauma. And although it overlaps with the concept of collective memory, focusses on a different part of the memory. Additionally, while collective memory is usually linked to a national society, cultural memory can be linked to a cultural group as well. Which gives the concept another dimension, that adds to the collective memory.

A recent study by Assmann (2021), discusses the debate in interest and perception of collective memory in the past decade. This shift entails the concept from being a niche, academic concept to becoming a public conversation topic. This happened mainly in the western world in the past decade where an emphasis was placed on cultural sensibility and cultural heritage (Assmann, 2021, p. 26). This popularity of the concept created terms like cultural heritage, cultural appropriation, and historic wounds to become more frequently used. Assmann (2021) also described how societies use it to build identities and address past trauma of the population (p. 28).

The growing relevance of a concept like cultural memory in society is useful in understanding how a society understand its heritage and how societies deal with experiences from the past. For this research it is particularly interesting to see the differences in cultural and collective memory and whether the Second World War, as a historical event, finds itself in either one or both two memories. Furthermore, it can help understanding how and whether culture plays a role in the memory of the Second World War.

2.1.3 Collective memory

Zooming in on the dimension of the social aspects rather than the cultural aspects, there is the concept of collective memory. Collective memory is a collection of memories that are shared amongst a society and passed on from one generation to the next (Closer, 2020). The term, created

by philosopher Maurice Halbwachs in 1925, puts the emphasis on the shared experiences of a community. The concept is similar to the concept of cultural memory but with more influences from everyday life. Collective memory is created by passing on social, cultural memory and memories formed through everyday interactions within a society (Assmann & Czaplicka, 1995). Collective memory or the memory of a society shapes the beliefs and actions of a society and creates the dynamic within a society or community.

Collective memory, therefore, goes beyond traditions, rituals and other intentional aspects that can be seen in cultural memory. Collective memory is broader and also includes experiences that are not directly linked to the individual. Cultural memory has a role of building identity and emphasizes cultural heritage, this is linked to the individual within society (Assmann, 2021). Collective memory is not directly linked to the individual but more to the society in general. Taking the Second World War as an example, cultural memory like historical wounds or trauma could be present in cultural communities that directly experiences them like the Jewish population in Europe. However, when selecting a larger, more general population, like the Dutch population. Collective memory of the war will be found but the memories of the war from past generations will not be a part of their personal identity. And because this research is not limited to one cultural group, the term collective memory is more applicable and useful.

Collective memory consists of three types of memory (Closer, 2020). The first type is national or official memory. This is the memories or knowledge that is taught to a society from official sources. These sources are governmental organisations, public education, and public broadcasters. Secondly, there is religious memory that captures the knowledge taught by religious institutions. This is common in communities where religion is a bonding factor at the centre of the community. Thirdly, there is familial memory. These are the stories told by family members people in one's social circles. These stories usually tell first-hand experiences of events. These could be more minor events and more related to a smaller group of people within a society. However, mass media products, like film, are usually not included in this typology of collective memory. Unless they are created by government affiliated parties, in which case they are a part of the national memory. And because there is little to no mention for mass media in this typology, films are less included in collective memory studies.

This division of collective memory shows which groups in society have the control over what stories get told and from which perspective. With national memory, the stories that are considered to be worth remembering can be seen in statues, street names and monuments (Gross, 2016). These tangible elements of society are used to make the memory part of society's daily life for generations to come.

Nonetheless, this process is less linear than the theories make it appear. In contemporary society different cultures have mixed and within this multicultural society many people grow up with memories from different cultures and societies. Meaning that the collective memory, that would usually have slight variations in familiar memory, can vary on a larger scale in national and religious memory as well. This can cause tensions and disagreements in multicultural societies when determining what to pass on to the next generation and might cause loss of cultural memory of minority groups in society (Dessi, 2008, p. 534).

The typology mentioned above has been used in most studies discussing collective memory as it is the typology created by Halbwachs in the original collective memory theory. However, there has been debate around using the method. Thomson, Frisch, and Hamilton (1994) describe these debates revolving around the top-down approach of most collective memory research versus the bottom-up perspective. The approach where the national or religious institutions decided what a next generation would remember became a topic of concern in the 1980s (p. 34). Furthermore, the stories told were seen as usually confirming the idea of history that large groups of society had in their minds. Meaning that marginalized or oppressed groups in society would not get their justice on the national scale, as their memories were not a part of the story told. Which is one of the weaknesses of collective memory as a concept. It is the memory of a community; however, it mainly draws on the experiences of the majority or the people in power and disregards minorities in society.

Birkner and Donk (2020) describe how modern society provides tools for fighting against this top-down approach to collective memory. They digital media, especially independent or user-generated content, being used to gather attention to rebel against state decisions, for example the renaming of a town square. Hoskins (2017) confirms the ideas of Birkner and Donk (2020) while also expanding on the role of digital media. The media is used by the population and not just institutions to create their own collective memory. Furthermore, they claim that this new model of communicating experiences and creating memory means the end for the traditional type of collective memory. These studies all confirm the idea that there is something missing in the typology created by Halbwachs, or that it is just outdated almost a century after its release. The role of the audience and the media, in particular independent media creators.

2.1.4 Remembrance

The aforementioned types of memory are all slightly different but with the same core purpose, remembrance. The collective memory is part of a society to remember the past and possibly learn from it. Remembrance is a combination of practices and processes. Two of these practices are 'acts of memory' (Bal, Crewe, & Spitzer, 1999) 'mnemonic practices' (Olick & Robbins 1998). Acts of memory refer to cultural practices and traditions that are carried out to remember

the past. Mnemonic practices are more general acts to give meaning to an event or memory to be able to recall it better in the future.

However, there are different sides in the consciousness of passing on cultural memory. There is a part of the memory, the working memory, that is actively transferred and a more passive side of the memory that is passed on but archived by the receiving generation (Assmann, 2008). Information that ends up in the archive is more at risk of being forgotten by the receiving generation or not transferred to the consecutive generation.

To prevent the memories from being forgotten by society, media plays a key role. Rigney (2018) emphasizes that mediation is an essential factor of preserving the memories at risk in the archive. This mediation can range from books, newspapers, and documentaries to video games and feature films. The factor that all these media products have in common is the power of storytelling. A society will remember stories better than lists of facts (McGregor & Holmes, 1999).

In the mnemonic practices, the aforementioned power of the institutions is practiced. Molden (2016) discusses this in the mnemonic hegemony theory. The theory entails how collective memory is a passing on of hegemonic ideas to the next generation and in that selectively forgetting experiences or opinions that do not align with them (p. 131). The ideas and experiences that end up in a collective memory are the ones that are deemed superior to the others because of the people in power. This is especially visible in western societies where the socioeconomic upper classes control the institutions and therefore, the lower classes are misrepresented or not represented.

Mingling in the power struggle between the institutions and members of society is the media. The media can play a large role in the representation of the sides or to show a more nuanced, third person perspective. Peri (1999) confirms the role that media play is essential in getting the voices heard and for creating a more communal, less divisive experience. Besides creating content that can be remembered, like visuals, it is a large enough force to alter the way that the memory is framed. As it reaches a broad audience it can enforce remembrance in a way that they deem suitable.

2.2 Film as genre

2.2.1 Can feature films go beyond entertainment?

As mentioned before, historic films use mediation to tell a story of the past to a contemporary audience. The purpose of these films is films as with most feature films is to entertain and generate profit for the film studios. In the past, this has led to the dismissal of historic cinema as having an impact on the audiences viewing the films beyond entertainment. Nevertheless, O'Connor (1988) discusses the role of historic scholars in this space and the importance of viewing feature films as a

large-scale retelling of history (p. 1205). It is mentioned how the visual media products such as films and tv series portraying historic events have a connection to the social and cultural history. The exposure of the audience to these historic events creates a platform for discussions and intrigue, with which it "becomes a central topic in the social and cultural environment" (O'Connor, 1988, p. 1203).

Even though, the main aim of the film is to entertain, its value to society should not be dismissed. The high availability and accessibility of the films, especially with online streaming services mean that the messages communicated in the films can easily reach a large audience. Other sources of information on the Second World War, like history books or documentaries, can be less accessible because of the complexity and volume. Whereas watching feature films are seen as entertaining activities that require little effort. Reaching the larger audience is essential when constructing collective memory as the memory of a society needs to reach all citizens for it to be passed on to the next generation. O'Connor (1988) also emphasizes the changing information and entertainment climate claiming that "it appears likely that even well-educated Americans are learning most of their history from film." (p. 1201). This statement implies that a large majority of society will learn about historical events through media products instead of conventional history books or classes. It can be assumed that this statement also applies to other western nations where visual media plays a large role in everyday life, like the Netherlands. However, as the statement is from three decades ago, the media landscape has changed and a large new information source has debuted since, the internet. Thus, the statement may have to be altered to: even well-educated members of society will learn most of their history through film and the internet. Therefore, non-conventional history sources need to be considered in the creation of knowledge of the past, including feature films.

An example of a Dutch film that went beyond its entertainment aim is the 2020 feature film '*De Oost*' (The East) by Jim Taihuttu. This film centres around the independence war in Indonesia fighting against the Dutch colonizers directly after the Second World War ended in Europe. The film faced controversy and many discussions, even before being released (Bakker, 2021). The war, even though it is a large part of the Dutch history, has not been a point of conversation in contemporary society until the Dutch King Willem Alexander formally apologized for the war in 2020. After that event the film was received as a welcome introduction to what happened in the film. It did, however, get reprimanded for sketching an untrue image of the Indonesian soldiers and is now decorated with a disclaimer on the fictious nature of the story. Nonetheless, the buzz that the feature film created did allow for the subject to become a central topic in Dutch society. Showing that regardless of the fictious story, the film does have the power to create a new narrative around a topic on the verge of being forgotten. One news article called the war, something that got lost because of collective memory loss and that the film would help to recover from the loss (Van Maanen & Nuberg, 2021).

2.2.2 Construction of collective memory through film

As a result, the collective memory is heavily influenced by media and storytelling. Cinema is thus a powerful tool in the conservation or alteration of collective memory. The construction of memory through film works at two levels: collective and individual. Firstly, on the collective level feature films can construct a collective memory through starting of a conversation amongst a large number of people in a society (Erll, 2008). These conversations allow for shaping the memory though interpersonal communication inspired by the film's narrative.

Secondly, on the individual level representations of history in film aids in visualizing the past and allows the audience to picture themselves in the portrayed situation (Erll, 2008, p. 397). The immersive nature of historical films creates the possibility of transferring patterns and narratives from the story to the audience, both consciously and unconsciously.

The power of historical films raises the media debate of whether entertainment can or should influence the collective memory on a topic like WWII instead of the role being taken by commemorative journalism. Neiger (2020) discusses six elements of the relationship between media and collective memory in journalism studies to understand the different roles that entertainment media and journalism play. The elements include the function of the memory for the community, the socio-political connections and the narratological characteristics (Neiger, 2020, p. 2). Examples of how these elements play a role in the creation of collective memory are the following, the socio-political connections are portrayed by the media in multiple ways. They decide who gets to be on the stage and in which way these people or organisations are portrayed. This power allows for a voice against the national collective memory creation. As the national collective memory tends to follow a more nationalistic discourse where the home country plays the main role. A media product, like a feature film covering the topic, can show different perspectives or storylines that are missed through the national narrative.

Safran (2001) summarises the representation and institutional power of films portraying war. Even since before the Second World War, institutions in a position of power have been controlling the narrative on war. The political censoring happened on films that communicated a message that was not in line with what the government was communicating. This led to the censoring of an anti-war film in the late 1930s as the government (of the United States of America) was getting ready for a war and did not want the public to think less of the value of war. The other side of controlling the narrative on war is by the government using mass media to promote a more pro-war attitude (Óskarsson, 2014).   Since then, censorship has been changed in the world of cinema and more different voices have made their voice heard through media. This presents a possibility for a narrative that reaches the public, which is not controlled by a governmental or religious institution.

2.2.3 The genre

All these feature films depicting stories of the second world war, fall into the same genre, historical war films. However, they can also be placed in their own sub-genre of World War II films. This genre can be characterized by the following traits, they are set in war times, meaning that the background of the film is the second world war (Landon, 1998, p. 59). This is usually implied, and the audience's knowledge of the event is assumed. Furthermore, the style tends to be more realistic (Bodnar, 2001). Films that mention or feature the war in a more unrealistic or science fiction style are excluded from the genre (e.g., Marvel's Captain America). And lastly, as an extension to the realistic style, the stories reference real events or places from the war, even if the story is fictional.

These characteristics help define the sub-genre universally, however, there are notable differences in the approach to this genre across different nations. The most famous one being the American or Hollywood war films. Basinger and Arnold (2003) mention the hero/group/objective trope as an essential part of Hollywood film portraying the Second World War (p. 6). This trope entails one hero that is shown as the protagonist, who together with his group of people (colleagues, soldiers, friends, survivors) must complete a certain task, an objective. On a larger scale this is referred to as Heroism, which stems from the idea of the American dream (Pollard, 2002). A single, seemingly ordinary person completes a task that seems impossible. This idea is echoed by Bodnar (2001, p. 805) and Basinger and Arnold (2003) explaining how it is a way of glorifying the ordinary soldier, and indirectly, the concept of war.

Furthermore, Hollywood war films simplify the politics of war by portraying two sides of the fight, the good and the bad (Basinger & Arnold, 2003). Through this simplification, us versus them thinking is encouraged, with America as the hero and the German army as the villain. Us versus them thinking is a part of the social identity theory, that explains a binary way of categorizing people in social situations (Hogg, 2018). This categorization makes it simpler for the audience to differentiate the characters and understand the conflict but excludes the nuance and complexity of war politics.

In European cinema, like French or Dutch, this is less common. Dutch war films tend to portray a more grey-toned view of who is good and who is bad, as opposed to the black and white thinking of Hollywood films (Burke, 2017). Furthermore, themes like Dutch identity and Dutch behaviour are emphasized, which gives the films a more nationalistic atmosphere. Lastly, the scenarios shown in the films usually revolve around dealing with the occupation and/or opposition to the occupation, which positions the Dutch population as a victim of the war (Burke, 2017).

Nevertheless, genres do evolve over time, and the war film genre is no different. As Burke (2017) mentions, how these films are "a representation of the concerns of a country at the time it was made" (p. 23). Similarly, Bodnar (2001) adds that the films reflect or oppose the socio-political

situation at the time of making the film. These statements mean that the time in which the film is created alters the film to fit the current social-political climate.

Understanding the genre and its changes and nuances over time helps to understand the role that the films play and also help in understanding the audience reaction to the films. For example, when films confirmed the hegemonic ideas, the audience would respond differently than if the film portrayed an untold story of the other side showing the home country as the villain. The response to the films also plays a role in determining whether the ideas become a part of the collective memory, which will be further discussed in section 2.3 *Audience Reception*.

To further understand the impact of films portraying historic events, O'Connor (1988) discusses the film theory. A two-stage process to analyse the film itself and anticipate how the audience will receive the messages encoded into the film (p. 1204). The first step is a general analysis of the film's narrative, content, and the films' historical context. This step zooms in on the film itself analysing the camera angles, editing, light exposure and soundtrack, and how these elements impact the reception of the film to the audience. This analysis will expose the patterns of interpretations used in the film (O'Connor, 1988, p. 1204). Furthermore, the first analysis will investigate how the production process was carried out, who were the collaborators and when it was made, to see what that means for the social or political messages communicated through the film. The last part of the general analysis is determining how the audience of the film in the modern day, received the messages of the past. To see how their generation reflects on the events portrayed in the film.

The second step of the film theory analysis is more specifically targeted at the historical event that was chosen as the topic of the film (O'Connor, 1988, p. 1208). The reception and interpretation of the historical event is analysed beyond the limits of the film. O'Connor (1988) emphasizes the importance of a society's information streams discussing the topic. The information streams mentioned can vary from political speeches to newspaper articles, or from history classes to video games. Including the information streams beyond the film itself will sketch a more comprehendible discourse on the subject that will aid with the understanding of the audience's reception of the films re-telling of the event. This method of examining the narrative of an event beyond the film is echoed by Klinger (2005) in reception research of films re-telling the past. Klinger (2005) argues that when studying the audience's reception of historic films, the researcher should strive for a *histoire totale*, a total understanding of the past and present discourse of the event amongst a society (p. 108). A full understanding of the event in both times is necessary to recognize and understand the ideologies and alternative interpretations that could influence the audience's reception.

`   *2.2.4 Feature film versus documentary*

In the film theory, O'Connor values the information streams equally and does not differentiate between sources with informative and entertaining intent. He claims that sources with informative intent, like documentaries, do communicate a more accurate or objective message, when being compared to fiction films (Rosenstone, 1988 in O'Connor, 1988). This brings up a debate between the value of documentaries and feature films in creating collective memory.

La Marre and Landreville (2009) did comparative, reception research into documentaries and feature films covering a historic event. Their findings are based on building interest, accuracy in retelling, and gaining the audience's attention for the historic event. They argue that the different aim for the media product, whether it is informative or entertaining, does impact the value in some ways. The first way is the building of interest. As feature films have an emphasis on entertainment, they tend to have more dramatic or emotional elements. These emotions increase the interest in the issue especially when the emotions triggered by the film are negative emotions, such as disgust and guilt (La Marre & Landreville, 2009; Frijda, Kuipers & Ter Schure, 1989). However, if the documentary has more explicit content and covers personal stories, the emotional value of the documentary can reach a similar response as to the film. The second way of impacting the value is how long the film can keep the attention of the audience. The long shots, background noises and narration of a documentary is less successful in keeping the attention of an audience for an extended period of time. Whereas the fast editing, studio sounds, and the close shots of a feature film are more interesting for the audience in a longer time span (La Marre & Landreville, 2009, p. 539). Yet, this distinction in film techniques is no longer clearly separated. In order to improve both concepts, both have taken elements from one another to create more hybrid films, that are both informative and entertaining.

The last way the value can be impacted is the level of realism, or how much the audience perceives the media product as realistic. Pouliot and Cowen (2007) name the phenomenon as perceived realism (p. 241). Perceived realism is how much the audience accepts the media product to convey factual information. Documentaries have a higher level of this perceived realism because of the communication and film style. Meaning that they have a higher value in this facet of the analysis. However, the feature films, even though, they have a lower perceived realism score, are more successful in the creation of memory (Pouliot & Cowen, 2007, p. 253). The feature film outweighs the documentary in the recognizable themes and storylines, that are easier remembered by a general audience. Pouloit and Cowen (2007) explain how this phenomenon occurs when the audience recognizes themes in the narratives that they know how to respond to. The evoking of emotions aids in the remembrance of the overall storyline of the film.

2.2.5 Historical accuracy

Therefore, reflecting on audience research, the line between what is historically accurate and what is believed to be accurate seems to be more blurred than in film creation. This brings on the question of how important historical accuracy is in the creation of historic feature films? O'Connor (1988) argues for the historical accuracy to be an important element in fictional films and draws guidelines for the ensuring of this accuracy, starting with the collaboration of historians in the production process. Nevertheless, their statement is nuanced by the limitation that historical accuracy might bring to a feature film and that creative freedom in storylines is essential for successful films (p. 1203).

Weinstein (2001) recognizes the value and faults in historic feature films but suggests a manner of intercepting the faults in historical accuracy of feature films while still utilizing their strengths to aid in memory building. A collaboration of feature films and education is suggested where the students discuss and analyse the historical event through imagery of the film while also being pointed to the less historically accurate elements of the film (p. 28). His research showed that student both learn more about the historical event as well as gaining an appreciation for films beyond the ordinary blockbusters (Weinstein, 2001, p. 32). The interactive way of engaging with the historical event ensured more interest and motivation for research. This way, the historical accuracy, one of the largest issues discussed surrounding collective memory building from feature films, has been partly resolved. However, not all audiences are students or open to research beyond the film which means that the historical accuracy remains a topic for discussion.

2.3 Audience reception

2.3.1 Audience reception of films

Films within the genre of historic war films have been analysed in two dimensions, firstly, based on the messages they decode and communicate to audience. This emphasises the interpretations of the films' audience. And secondly, the impact that they have on society at large. Meaning that the effect goes beyond the film's audience.

But when zooming in on the audience themselves first, there are multiple ways in which they can receive a media product. Hall (2007) recognised three different types in the reception, also called readings. Dominant or preferred reading, oppositional reading, and negotiated reading. Which mean that the audience accepts the communicated message fully, refuses the message or partly accepts the message. How much they accept the message changes how they see the text. In the dominant reading, the writer and the audience are aligned, and the message is communicated and accepted fully by the audience like how the writer intended it. With the oppositional reading, they refuse the

meaning created by the writer and make their own sense of the media product. And with the negotiated reading parts of the message are understood as intended but parts are interpreted differently by the audience.

In building collective memory, the reception of the media products message is crucial as when the message is refused, it will most likely not become a part of the collective memory. And it also highlights the two active factors in communicating a message via a media product, the producer and the audience. The producer encodes the message, and the audience decodes the message, but they decide how and whether they do so. This puts power in the audience and refuses the idea of a passive audience. Which idea is echoed by Bratich (2005) and Livingstone (2003) they both agree with Hall's notion that the audience is also in power in the communication.

Furthermore, Bratich (2005), explains how audiences along with society, is ever changing and therefore, will have changing opinions. This can be seen in a generation consuming media intended for another generation. Their opinions and interpretations may be very different as they are surrounded by a new society which has gotten used to altered norms and values.

A response to Hall's theory of decoding are the paradigms of Abercrombie and Longhurst (1998) the spectacle paradigm, resistance paradigm, and the behavioural paradigm. These paradigms look at the behaviour of the audience after media consumption on an individual level (behaviour paradigm), the groups in societies negotiation of ideology (resistance paradigm) and the identity formation constructed by society and driven by narcissism (spectacle paradigm). The one most relevant for this study is the resistance paradigm where a group in society negotiate their ideas and believes based on a media product. A war film showing a different perspective could enforce rethinking of ones own beliefs.

Biltereyst and Meers (2018) built on the paradigms of Abercrombie and Longhurst (1998) and making them relevant for contemporary, digital society. One element that is highlighted in the changing of the audience is accessibility of the media products (Biltereyst & Meers, 2018, p. 307). When large, international audience have access to digital media products and communication technologies, this changes the way that audiences receive messages through media products because of the added communication dimension.

2.3.2 Cultivation theory

As fans of the films consume more films than a non-fan, the effect of the films will be larger on the fans according to the cultivation theory by Gerber in the 1960s (Mosharafa, 2015). Following the logic of this theory, a cycle of interest is created. The fans actively seek out the World War II films because of their interest in them and the wider topic and assuming that one of the aims of the film is to tell the stories of the war and create interest in the larger topic, the audience will have more

incentive to engulf themselves more into the topic and learn more. To summarize people with an interest in the topic to begin with, will be more likely to develop a larger interest into the topic, according to this theory. This theory has been criticized for oversimplifying the media effects. Mosharafa (2015) mentions how this theory is revisited with every technological development and how, especially in the past two decades, has to be altered to fit the media environment. However, the media is still a strong force in creating people's worldview and with algorithms on most online platforms, it is still possible to alter a person's views through media consumption. Which means that the fans can reinforce their views on the Second World War through their fandom of World War II films and other media consumption.

2.3.3 Reception of historical films

Research in this discipline investigates how the audience receives and interpretes media products. The research done in this discipline also touch upon elements like recollection and memory. Reception studies that cover the genre studied in this research is by LaMarre and Landreville (2009) and Pouliot and Cowen (2007) that studies how the audience perceive re-enactment feature films of historical events compared to how they perceive informative documentaries on the same event. The research method used in these studies is qualitative experiments, where the audiences are exposed to different films and discuss how they view different facets of the film.

Similar to this research, the audience members are the units studied and the focus is on their conscious experiences with the media products.

Another reception research is by Weinstein (2004) and includes the construction of collective memory by the audience members. The aim of this research is to discover how students perceive the historical events portrayed in the films and how critically they view the accuracy of the portrayal of the historical event.

2.3.4 Fandom

Lastly, a central term in this research is the concept of fans. Fans are the people whose behaviour and opinions are studied in this research. The theory will explain their behaviour so it can be recognised in the participants. The term fan is defined as "an enthusiastic devotee", with the word derived from the noun fanatic (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). The theories surrounding fans and their communities, also referred to as fandoms, are most famously explained by Jenkins in Textual Poachers (1992). The theory of fans and fandom captures the high levels of participation and engagement with the object of affection, whether this is a person, act, club, brand, or media product (Jenkins, 1992). Furthermore, the term fandom has been used to refer to a community of fans that exist independently from the object of affection (Carson, 2017). These fandoms interact with one

another and encourage fan behaviour. Examples of this are content creation like fan fiction or compilation videos.

The theory of fan audiences has been further developed into multiple facets of audience research. One of which is the concept of active audiences by Livingstone (2013). Active audiences are audiences that interact with a media product beyond the passive consumption of said media product. This can be in a myriad of ways, with historic films this could mean, researching the topics, purposefully consuming media with a similar topic, actively engaging in discussion surrounding the topic or creating fan content, ranging from blog posts tot compilation videos.

Within the active audience a distinction can be made based on the level of engagement of the fans and their online behaviour. The 90-9-1 rule states that of fan interaction and content creation, one percent of the fans contribute the majority, nine percent fill up the rest of the content creation and engage with the content created by the one percent and the last ninety percent tend to be less engage and mostly consume the fan content (Carron-Arthur, Cunningham & Griffiths, 2014). They are also called the lurkers, as they watch what is going on in the fandom and are aware of the fan discourse but have the most passive behaviour.

This elaboration on active audiences and fans, help to differentiate between fans and people who merely like the films. If one is a fan of something they are more likely to engage with the subject beyond passive consumption and are motivated to share the passion with others.

2.3.5 Motivation for fan behaviour

But how do we explain why these fans interact with the content on a higher level than the average audience member? One explanation for the high engagement of fans is their motivation. The driving force behind their actions. There are two types of motivation, intrinsic, from within themselves, and extrinsic, influenced by external factors. In one research on fan motivations, Wann, Ensor and Bilyeu (2001) found that the most highly engaged fans had a strong intrinsic motivation for engaging with content and that the less engaged fans had a more extrinsic motivation for their behaviour. The intrinsic motivation for fan behaviour also indicates that these fans are more likely to engage in fan behaviour in a private setting. The fan behaviour motivated by external factors is stimulated by recognition and attention from other fans or the idol themselves, and therefore, seek out the social interaction. This is not as present in intrinsically motivated fans. Their behaviour is stimulated by sensory factors such as enjoyment or self-fulfilment (Zhao & Wu, 2020). Therefore, these fans are less likely to benefit from engaging in fandom communities and seek less social interaction from other fans.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research design

This research looks into the role that feature films portraying the second world war play in the Dutch collective memory of the war. In order to find out the role that these films play and how they can possibly construct collective memory, fans of World War II films were asked about their opinions and insights on the topic. The interviews create an image of the collective WWII memory of these fans and their opinion on the role that feature films played in the construction of this memory.

In order to research the question of *How fans engage with the construction of collective memory in history films?,* qualitative, in-depth interviews were conducted with Dutch, self-identified fans of historical films discussing their opinions and interpretations regarding this topic.

This research is a qualitative research because it aims to discover how the fans experience the creation of collective memory through film and why they believe that these feature films do or do not have the potential to impact society.

For the research method, qualitative, in-depth interviews were decided upon because of the connection and open communication between the researcher and the participant that will aid in discussing a sensitive topic like war. A one-on-one interview setting aids the building of rapport and lowers the pressure on the participant. In a group setting, like in a focus group, sensitive topics are tougher to discuss as the participants may be aware of the other participants' opinions and, therefore, adjust their answers. The social desirability bias may come into play and cause the participant to answer politically correct instead of sharing their true thoughts. An interview lowers the risk of this bias and thus is the most suitable method.

Furthermore, in interviews, the participant is given space to explain their answers to questions and share personal stories related to the topic. This is essential for this research topic as this can reveal deeper and more unconscious thoughts or beliefs that cause the participant to form the opinions that they have. Lastly, the research will be based on a thematic analysis of the interview transcripts. This manner of coding will allow for a full understanding of the data and allow for more elaborate results.

3.2 Data collection

3.2.1 Sampling

The interviewees in the sample will be selected based on the following criteria. They must have Dutch nationality and currently reside in the Netherlands. Furthermore, the participants must also have completed their primary and secondary education in the Netherlands. This is a relevant criterion for this research because of the mandatory history programs in Dutch schools. Selecting on this criterion will make the national collective memory of the participants more aligned and a more stable factor in the comparison between interviewees.

Moreover, the interviewees must have been born between 1981 and 1999 because of their generational group. This age group, the Millennials, are currently, furthest removed, adult generation from the Second World War. Their parents are Generation X and most of their grandparents will either be Baby Boomers, who were born just after the war was over, or of the Silent Generation, and lived during the war but were still young children. Because of this, the Millennials are further removed from people who experienced the war and the state of Dutch society at that time. Resulting in the fact that their knowledge of the Second World War will either come from history classes in primary and secondary school or media products like books, cinema, or documentaries. Definitions of Millennials vary on the age range that makes someone belong to the generation. However, most definitions pick the early 1980s as a starting point and the new millennium as the cutting off point (McDonald, 2015; Stein, 2013; Fry, 2016). Therefore, 1981 to 1999 will capture the Millennial generation. Meaning that the participants will be between 21 and 40 years old. Beyond the age and nationality requirements, this research will strive for diversity in the sample in regard to gender, geographical location, and education level.

Furthermore, as mentioned in the research question this study investigates fans. Therefore, the participants must also be a fan of historical films portraying the Second World War. Determining whether someone is a fan is, was done through the following process. The messages on social media asked for someone who self-identifies as a fan of the films to get in contact, also, people were asked that if they deemed someone in their personal network to be a fan to nominate them too. The message included mentions of some of the main World War II films that are discussed in research into the genre or collective memory. Including the specific films ensured that the possible participant had an idea of the films that would be discussed and that they were familiar with some important films in the genre. The next step in determining whether someone is a fan and therefore, suitable for this research, was through a (direct messaging) conversation explaining what the research entailed and why they considered themselves a fan. Frequent interaction with the media and enthusiasm towards the topic were the criteria that the participants were judged on. Other characteristics of

being a fan as discussed by Jenkins (1992) like being a part of a fandom or generating fan content, were less applicable in the case of World War II film fans as the topic is more sensitive and niche than for example a music artist.

The sampling criteria mentioned create a large population to sample from. Some implications that a large population may have is that the small sample that was selected from the population is too low in numbers to represent the entire population. Furthermore, having a large population can limit the possibility of fully discovering all quirks and nuances of the population in the results, as the sample can be too homogeneous in its opinions.

The in-depth interviews will be held in-person as far as the circumstances allow for it. Otherwise, the interviews will be conducted over a video chatting platform like Skype, Zoom or Microsoft Teams. The interviews will be audio-recorded and transcribed to allow for in-depth analysis. The interviews will only be conducted if the interviewee has given their written or verbal consent through a consent form, for both recording their data and using the data for this research.

The demographic information that will be collected for the research will be handled carefully when reporting the results and the anonymity of the participant will be protected. The demographic information that will be collected is age, gender, nationality, and education level, as these are relevant for the research. Any (personal) information of the participants is being handled carefully as the topics discussed in the interview can be sensitive.

Recruitment of the twelve participants (n= 12) will be done through an open call on the social media platforms LinkedIn, Facebook, and Instagram to use personal networks to find participants. The message will call for Dutch citizens, aged 21 to 40, that consider themselves fans of historical films, in particular films on World War Two, that are willing to discuss these in further detail. The message will be accompanied by visual examples of films like *Zwartboek* (Black Book), *Schindler's List* and *Saving Private Ryan,* to clearly communicate the topic and attract the right audience. the post will address people that identify as a fan and are familiar with films covering events of the Second World War. Furthermore, the message will call for resharing and spreading within peoples own personal networks to reach a larger number of people and make the process finding the participants more efficient. The sampling method used in the recruitment is convenience sampling because of the niche interest criterion.

For this research, the sample existed of twelve participants (n= 12). These participants were interviewed about their views on and experiences of the impact of World War Two films. The participants were aged between 22 and 39 years of age, with an average age of 28,9. Meaning that these participants all fit under the umbrella term Millennials, referring to their generation group. The group existed of 25% females (n= 3) and 75% males (n= 9) who all currently live in the Netherlands. The participants had varying education levels, with a little less than half of the participants having

completed an HBO-level degree (n= 5), a similar group being university educated (Bachelors or Masters) (n= 5) and one sixth having an MBO-degree (n= 2). All participants had gotten their primary and secondary education in the Netherlands, and all identify with the Dutch Nationality. There was a variation in the years of history education the participants had had. However, seventy-five percent of the participants (n= 9), chose history classes in high school as a part of their study programme. Meaning that they had at least eight years of history classes (four years at primary school and four years at secondary school), whereas the others had a maximum of six years of history education. The full list of participants and their specifics can be found in Appendix C.

3.2.2. Ethics of social research

The ethics of social research were being respected at all times and all participation was voluntary. Firstly, the anonymity and confidentiality of the participants was ensured. This was done through creating anonymous profiles of the participants when collecting and analyzing the data, existing of their gender, age, and education level. Furthermore, the interviews were done in private one-on-one sessions either on- or offline where the researcher was the only one hearing their answers.

Also, the participants had to give their informed consent before participating in the research. They were informed through a consent form, provided before the interview to allow time to consider the information provided. The consent form itself explained the aim of the research and informed the participants of the potential risks, benefits and of their rights. The participants could either sign the form could either be signed or verbally give their consent to protect their anonymity.

3.3 Operationalisation

When interviewing the participants for this research, a number of themes that were developed from the literature took a central position. These themes were approached in a manner that it was simple to understand for the participants even if the themes they were discussing were rather complex.

The themes that will be discussed during the interviews are compiled in an interview guide which can be found in Appendix B. This interview guide was developed based on the literature after reviewing the theoretical framework. The interview guide exists of the themes that are to be discussed during the interview along with various sample questions to deepen the conversation. The topics that the participants were asked about during the interviews are their identification of being a fan and how they became a fan. Also, they will be asked about their view of the Second World War and go into memory and the construction of memory. Furthermore, the participant will be asked to share their thoughts on film as a tool for collective memory construction and what elements they recognize as tools to achieve memory construction. The interview will go into their personal opinions and memories of The Second World War. Also, the relationship between film and history will be

discussed and the relevance of historical accuracy in fiction works. Lastly, the participants will be asked to share their opinion on remembrance of the Second World War in the Netherlands in the future and how the generation after them (Generation Z) will experience this.

The open discussion on these topics will allow the participant to dive into their favourite films and the message that it portrays of the past, which will help to identify how they engage with the construction of World War II collective memory through these films.

The films discussed in the interview will be any feature film portraying the Second World War. The participants are free in mentioning their favourites, but they will be asked to elaborate on a few types of film. Examples are American war films versus Dutch war films, the storyline on or outside of the battlefield, and films based on a true story. These types of war film will help to demonstrate the participant's preferences and opinions regarding them, relating to style, language, and culture.

The interviews aimed discuss and discover the opinions and experiences of the interviews regarding memory construction of the Second World War. Also, recognising the attitude towards the role of historic films covering the war.

The interviews were introduced to the participants by explaining that they would be asked about their experiences with World War II films and their opinions on the collective memory of the Second World War in the Netherlands. Which was also explained to them in the consent form that they received prior to the interview. The term collective memory is a common word in the Dutch vocabulary and, therefore, did not need much further elaboration.

The interviews were structured in a manner where the participant started talking about their favourite films and what they remembered about them. This was done to ease the participant into the topic. Following this topic, they were asked about why they chose these films and slowly moved into the concept of their interests and fan identity. Collective memory is next on the interview guide. However, from this point onwards, the participant is leading the interview with the stories that they want to tell, and the interviewer subtly leads them through the rest of the themes. The interview is ended with the theme of the future and the next generation before allowing the participant to ask questions and raise any concerns that they might have.

The concepts of collective memory, memory construction, fan behaviour, audience perception and perceived realism are all covered in the interview through the use of questions describing the concepts. The way that these concepts are measured in the research is by noting the word use of the participants, the importance they assign to the topic, and their general opinion towards the topic. If particular phrases or opinions are echoed in many interviews, these will be combined in the coding process and given a spot in further analysis. An example of the phrasing of the questions covering more complex themes is 'how important do you find it that what is shown in

World War II films is true', covering the topic of the importance of historical accuracy in fictional films.

3.4 Data analysis

The interview transcripts will be analysed and coded using a thematic analysis approach. This approach is effective in recognizing patterns and finding themes in the data through an iterative process of coding and categorising (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The meaning of the themes found in the data will be further understood through revision of the themes and linking them to the literature. A thematic analysis of the data allows for a mixture of theory- and data-driven analysis. Where the theory provides the structure for the themes and the data allows for unexpected results (Guest, MacQueen, & Namey, 2011).

This approach is appropriate for this research as the different concepts of the theoretical framework will work as themes in the data analysis. Additionally, as this research is focused on perception and opinions working with themes enables for revealing broader themes across personal experiences and opinions (Guest, MacQueen, & Namey, 2011). The initial coding of the data will lead to a large number of initial codes. Next, the codes are categorised into larger categories. These larger categories will be the initial themes for further analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). These themes will be revisited multiple times in the cycle of coding and categorising to create themes that capture their full meaning and relation to one another.

The thematic approach for analysis entails coding the interviews into initial codes, which form the larger categories which lead to the themes. All the coding and analysis for this research was fully done by hand. No coding software was used. The codes were entered into digital spreadsheets and colour-coded to visualize the categories and themes. This manual approach meant that the interviewer could select and combine codes into categories where it was seen fit. Especially with the subject matter, phrases or words can have the same meaning or the same undertone without being the same word or phrase. With manual coding, it is easier to recognize these codes for analysis.

The coding process itself focused on identifying the relevant experiences and opinion to compare to the literature. The coding was partly theory-led and partly data-led to allow for relevant results to compare and contrast to the literature without excluding unexpected or surprising findings. Especially the recollection of film experiences was relevant to be able to analyse elements from their experiences to reception and memory literature.

All interviews were initially coded in one phase. After being immersed and reviewing the data, ideas started to form. The coding entailed gathering words and phrases from the data that fit those ideas or elaborated on them. Examples of which are childhood experiences, grandparents' story and personal interest. After which the codes were reviewed and double codes were eliminated, creating 173 initial codes. Whereafter the codes were reviewed and systematically

categorized into 14 larger categories. These categories existed of more well-rounded ideas. The loose phrased that belonged to a vague idea, came together and told a story in the categories. Later on, after more revision and the categories were grouped together to form four themes to allow the formation of overarching conclusions. The categories that were created all found a place in an overarching theme. The categories were paired up bases on similar intentions or characteristics. The merging of codes and categories was all done with the questions and answers of the participants in mind to keep the maintain the meaning behind the words. An overview of the categorization of the larger categories and themes can be found in Appendix A. These themes will be the foundation for the results of this research. In between the different phases of the coding process the data was revisited to ensure the right interpretation of the codes and to accurately categorise the codes into the right groups.

3.5 Transparency, systematicity, authenticity, and credibility

The credibility of this research is high because of the broad research question and targeted sampling. The question is focused on the audience research, which by interviewing film fans ensures this perspective. Furthermore, the feature films covering World War II are highly present in the discussions covering (collective) memory because of the orientation on film in the beginning of the interview. Also, the films give the interviewees tangible examples to use when explaining about their experiences with collective memory and the Second World War.

The data was analysed by the interviewer after conducting all twelve interviews. The analysis was done based on the thematic coding method to minimize bias from the researcher. Nevertheless, there are factors that could have influences the credibility of the findings. Firstly, the ethnicity of the participants and interviewer. All participants and the interviewer of this research identified as Caucasian. This could mean that the results are biased towards the opinions of people with a Caucasian ethnicity. The ethnicity of the participants was not a requirement for participation of this research, but it did show up as a result of the sampling.

Furthermore, the diversity of gender in the sample is also not equal. Three quarters of the participants in this research were male, which could suggest that the opinions and experiences of male fans were overrepresented in the results. However, no literature suggests a strong difference between genders in reception or memory construction. Therefore, the impact of this overrepresentation will likely be limited.

Any possible biases were accounted for by having the circular coding in the thematic data analysis. Through the revisiting of the data and basing the coding on both theory and the data, the personal or cultural bias was limited. However, the Dutch nationality of the researcher may have been a help in the interpretation and understanding of the data by the participants. As the topic of

the interviews revolved around Dutch culture and behaviour, a researcher with less familiarity of the Dutch culture could miss unformal cues and implied meanings. Which could lead to slightly different conclusions from the same data. However, this was limited by the use of pre-determined systems of data analysis.

4. Results

The collected data created by the interviews were coded into the following results as explained in chapter 3: The Methodology. The coding produced four main themes that the conclusions of this research will be based upon. These four themes are, 'Existing Interest', 'Authenticity', 'Accessibility' and 'Triggers'. Each of these selective codes includes three to five categories. The coding scheme including the themes and larger categories can be found in Appendix A.

The research question that this study aims to answer is *How do fans engage with the construction of collective memory in history films?* The themes found through the analysis of the interviews represent the factors and elements that the fans recognize in their engagement with historical films and collective memory. The factors that they recognized shaped their understanding of the films and impact how the films are perceived in the memory building.

Additionally, the participants gave examples of the films that they perceive to have aided the building of their knowledge on the Second World War. The list of these films, together with their release date, country, and director can be found in Appendix D.

4.1 Existing Interest

One of the most important factors in the process of construction of collective memory is the existing interest. The film fans mentioned how an essential part of their engagement with World War II in general stems from their interest in the topic. This code exists of the following categories, 'childhood interest', 'intrinsic motivation', 'incentive to learn', and 'real-life interaction'.

4.1.1 Childhood interest

Childhood is a topic that is central in the experience of the fans in their experience of World War II. The participants mentioned how the first contact with the stories of World War Two happened during their childhood and that this is where their interest began. "I was around eleven when I remember reading comics about it, but I must have been five or six when I started reading the small books" (interview 5, 38, male). This interest was piqued by media products like feature films in a small number of cases, however, the majority of the personal histories started with stories in their direct environment. These stories were from grandparents or great-grandparents that experienced the war or the local war stories from their direct environment. **"I** think that as with many interests, it started unconsciously in my childhood. (…) I do remember how my grandfather, who did not play a role in the war, still told us many stories of that time." (Interview 6, 38, male). These experiences were a way where the children could come in contact with a scary phenomenon in a safe environment. And although the largest war in history seems like it would be a frightening topic, especially for a child, almost all interviewees remember no such feelings. The overall consensus is

that the war was so unfathomable that they could hardly believe it had actually happened and any proof that it had is remembered fondly by the interviewees. One interviewee mentions how they used to read cartoons made about the war (interview 7, 38, male). And another how a school trip to a local monument made them realize that it was not something that happened far away but that even their local town played a role in the war (Interview 8, 23, male).

The age where the interest was piqued for most was towards the end of their primary education, around the ages of eleven and twelve years old. This growing interest was mostly brought on by history classes and excursion to museums or monuments. As all participants remember their interest growing at this point in their life, one could suggest that the history classes, as a part of the national history curriculum played a role in this trend. According to a document describing the guidelines for history guidelines for primary education between 1993 and 2010, the Second World War is one of the main four topics of the history education (Van der Kaap, 2010, p.2). The history classes are also taught in chronological order, which confirms that the history classes covering the Second World War are taught around the ages most participants remember.

Intrinsic motivation includes the idea that the behaviour towards the feature films portraying World War II is motivated from within the fan. Meaning that it is not driven by external factors, like success or prestige but more likely by sensory factors like enjoyment and intrigue. Many participants made the claim that their interest and fandom was not driven by any factors and that the Second World War was just something they had always been interested in. "Yes, I think it is more of a personal interest" (Interview 2, 25, Female). Furthermore, they juxtapose their fandom status when claiming that it is something they feel like is very personal. The liking and interest in World War II films is for some a highly personal characteristic. Whereas some others do behave in a more social manner in their fan behaviour. "I spend quite some time on Facebook groups about the Second World War" (Interview 12, 39, Male), and "I have a friend who is also a fan of these films, and we tell each other about the films we've seen." (Interview 7, 38, Male). They do share their excitement over the topic with fellow fans and friends to engage in conversation beyond the films.

This social interaction connects to the 'real-life interaction'. The real-life interaction has two facets. The social interaction with like-minded people, like other fans or people with an interest in history. This leads to discussions on the topics or even excursions, to see monuments, camps and even battlefields like in Normandy, France. The other side of real-life interaction is the confrontation with the events of the Second World War. These confrontations can be monuments, ruins but also a remembrance event or a mention in news media. This is a part of the existing interest because whether the fan seeks out this confrontation, they have the awareness of the existence of the war and will notice the sights more. "Yeah, it is visible in everyday life, especially in a city like Rotterdam

but I think that people who are not fully aware of what happened there, would not recognize the signs." (Interview 1, 26, Male).

The last subtopic that makes up this theme is incentive to learn. This entails the curiosity of the fan towards the historical event. The fans have the inquisitiveness to learn about what happened and why, which draws them to content covering the war. "I tend to google information about the film I am watching, while I am watching it. That way I know what I am looking at" (Interview 4, 26, Male). This theme was highly present amongst the participants. The intention with which they consume the content, like World War II feature films, is to learn as well as to be entertained. The theme of 'existing interest' in this research suggests that in the engagement with films discussing World War II, a pre-existing interest in the historical event is present for most fans and is an indicator of how they engage with the subject. Considering the role that this theme plays in the creation of collective memory through feature films, it seems that the existing interest is a requirement for fan engagement with the films. Proven by the tales of the participants' experiences beyond the films and how their experiences enriched their film experience.

When examining the literature, this can point to two things, either that for something to be taken into the collective memory of a society the audience must be interested in the topic in the first place. Or it could be that it is the audience reception that accepts the ideas that the media product is communicating them, like in the dominant reading by Hall (2007). The audience with an interest seems to respond better to the war films, which suggests that the reception is influenced by pre-existing interest.

4.2 Authenticity

The second theme in produced from the data is authenticity. Authenticity refers to the concept of being real, and true to the original. This theme refers more to the elements of World War II feature films themselves and how they aid in the construction process of collective memory. Furthermore, these elements are all elements from films that the fans deemed to be a good example of the genre. The categories that make up this theme are, 'realism', 'film quality', 'cultural details', 'historical accuracy', and 'realistic complexity'.

Realism is one of the characteristics of the World War II film genre. It entails that the different parts of the film depict a real occurrence. It can be satisfied though basing the storyline on a true story with references to the real scene. Or by having the film look like what people imagine a real battlefield would look like for example. The emphasis is on the non-fiction nature of the fiction films. Although it seems paradoxical to have a non-fiction, fiction film, the seemingly real re-enactment of historical events that have not been caught on camera, is valued by the fans because of its power to create a visual. One participant describes their opinion on realism as follows **"**It doesn't all have to be true as long as the storyline is believable, and it could have happened" (Interview 5, 23,

Female). Another interviewee emphasized how the overall visuals are important "…Because it happened so long ago and the films provide the visual, so you can see what it was like." (Interview 6, 38, Male).

Extending the concept of realism into the technological side of cinema is the term 'film quality'. The expectations of film in the World War II genre are high. Films like *Schindler's List* and *Saving Private Ryan* have shown that World War II films can be highly successful and good quality films. The fans appreciate good film making and mention how film quality aids in sketching a good image of the event. For example, "Battlefield scenes that have been improved by CGI are much more believable and impressive." (Interview 9, 28, male). The technological advances in the past decades have also created higher expectations of war films to come, as real sets that could not be replicated in real-life can now be filled in by a computer, which allows for seeing scenes from a different perspective. The Film *Dunkirk* was given as an example of improved battle scenes and overall portrayal of the soldiers (Interview 12, 39, Male).

Cultural details include the cultural details that are referenced in the feature film. The Second World War van a global historical event. This means that many different countries and, thus, cultures interacted with one another. Which allows for portraying the differences between national cultures in interaction scenes. This portrayal needs to be realistic by not glossing over obvious differences like language and behaviour. "I can't take a film seriously if the Germans are speaking English." (Interview 10, 33, Male) and "Sometimes they act as if the soldiers could easily communicate with one another. It is as if they forgot about the language barrier, which was very bothersome." (Interview 6, 38, Male). These are two experiences from fans discussing their opinion on the matter of language in a film. In short, the fans would like to see an element like language differences portrayed in a World War II film because it was a large part of the soldiers and ordinary people's experiences.

Realistic complexity is a movement against the oversimplification and often romanticization of war in entertainment media products. The complex nature of war is what is intriguing to most fans and historians. The complexity includes the political situation, strategy planning and dis-and miscommunication that defined the background of the war. Films that do not portray this element are not suitable films to build collective memory with as they do not reflect the war realistically.

Historical accuracy is the epitome of authenticity in film. To what extent is the film true to records of history and to what degree is the portrayal factual? This accuracy is assessed by whether elements of the film are true to what they have learned about the war through informative sources. They perceive this accuracy as the films' element being based on research into the past instead of being made up. This was described as essential to some degree by the fans. "I find it essential for the large storylines to be accurate, but some smaller emotional scene can be more fictious." (Interview 4, 26, male). Or as one framed it "What we know should be accurate, what we do not know can be

made up." (Interview 1, 26, male). The interviewees refer to historical accuracy as an important part of the retelling of the war, but it does not have to limit the entertainment value. Interviewee 1 refers to romantic storylines and how those may very well have happened even if there is no proof for that. These smaller, made up storylines are also accepted as long as they do not interfere with the portrayal of actual historical events like battles or attacks.

In conclusion, elements of film that make it seem real or authentic, are appreciated by the fan film audience. Additionally, the authenticity of a film aids in the overall understanding of the Second World War. When romanticizing or simplifying storylines for audiences, the imagery that is created is untrue and therefore, the memory of the event will be incorrect. By showing more complexities of war, audiences will get a more realistic idea of what war was truly like.

4.3 Accessibility

Accessibility refers to the way that a film is available for audiences. This entails the audiences being able to watch, understand and relate to the story. The theme exists of the following categories, 'specific event references', 'personal perspective', and 'convenience/availability'.

The most obvious practice of accessibility for films is the accessibility in the literal sense, whether the audience has access to the film. This is represented by the category convenience/availability. The concept of availability was heavily visible in the analysis of the participants' answers as all participants mentioned one film as a war film that they could easily remember. This film was the 1998 feature film by Steven Spielberg *Saving Private Ryan.* This film could be categorized as a blockbuster and is still readily available with regular tv screenings and presence on digital streaming platforms. One even recognized the film as being widespread saying "Yeah *Saving Private Ryan*, it's okay and like everybody knows it." (Interview 11, 26, male), confirming the status of the film. Because of the celebrity status of the film is has been used it as a case study for research and reflection upon World War II films (Bodner, 2001; Landon; 1988). The impact of these larger, more accessible films is arguably larger than smaller independent films. For the construction of collective memory, successful blockbusters that reach large audiences are useful as a chunk of a population is consuming the same content and give it a place in the social and cultural society. The study by Biltereyst and Meers (2018) confirmed this importance of accessibility in the activity and reception of the media product. The active audience can function the best with easily available media.

Specific event references include references to general knowledge leads that aid in the understanding of the place in society. The fans have a timeline of the war filled with general knowledge events and where they happened. In order to understand where to place the film that they are watching into the timeline, references to specific events are relevant. Interviewee 12

mentioned that "Films focus on one event, this makes them unique and be able to co-exist, to all contribute to the story of the war" (39, male). Meaning that a film like *Saving Private Ryan* mentions dates and location so that the audience is aware of the place and time the story fits in their timeline. This also aids audiences that are not as familiar with the war as the fans as the leads used tend to be like D-Day, or the winter of 1944, large events that people have some general knowledge of.

The personal perspective covers the emotional accessibility of the films' storyline. A personal perspective means that the narrative follows the emotions of at least one person throughout the story. This perspective makes the emotions more easily recognizable and allow for the audiences to go along with the character. The fans describe this as looking over someone's shoulder (interview 1, 26, male). Emotions are important in the remembrance of films and stories and therefore adding a perspective from which the audience can recognize the emotions that they should be feeling, aids in the understanding. And thus, in the constructing of memory.

So, through these three aspects of accessibility the films and their stories become more available to a broader audience on a literal, emotional and knowledge scale. In the experience of the fans these elements all aid in the reception of the film. And if a film is well received and understood by its audience, it is easier to remember.

4.4 Triggers

The theme 'triggers' refers to elements that trigger a response of the audience. The audience is stimulated by the situations created by the feature film. The elements that make up this theme are, 'emotional', 'familiar', 'pique interest', and 'leaves audience with questions'.

The emotional code refers to how film triggers an emotion as a response of the audience. The emotions can be triggered by different aspects of the film. Example of situations where specific audience reactions are triggered are battlefield scenes that trigger disgust, shock and/or sadness. "…Like one of the first scenes of *Saving Private Ryan*, showing the boats arriving in Normandy… They never even had a chance (of survival)." (Interview 9, 26, male). Furthermore, feelings like disbelief, guilt or regret might be felt when confronted with imagery portraying the Holocaust. **"**It is just very hard to imagine how it must have been. I almost can't believe that it actually happened." (Interview 2, 25, female). These emotional triggers connect the audiences' point of view with the events of the war. The emotions triggered by the event are based on morals and socio-political opinions in contemporary society. And therefore, show the modern-day perspective on the events of the past. Some films even emphasize on this experience by discussing morals and values that differ from and are relevant in contemporary society. This shows how, even though the films portray the past, they are created for modern audiences.

The code 'familiar' as a part of the trigger theme refers to films presenting situations that are linked to the familiar memory of an audience with the aim of connecting the audience to the film.

The familiar memory is the part of a societies collective memory that finds its origins in stories from informal sources. These sources are usually people or small communities in one's direct environment that pass on the stories related to their personal history. In the case of the Second World War, these stories can be first-hand experiences from grandparents or great-grandparents or stories describing events that define the history of a community, for example in a town or neighbourhood. These stories are stored in the collective memory already and these become stimulated when the audience are confronted with them.

Moreover, some participants explained how their own experiences visiting historic sites and monuments had created a similar type of memory which was also stimulated by references in film. The presentation of the visuals they had experiences in real life, on the screen, caused the impressive and overwhelming feelings of visiting the site to return. "Like you know that first scene in *Saving Private Ryan* with the cemetery in Normandy, it is very impressive but even more so when I visited it." (Interview 10, 33, male).

The last code that makes up this theme of triggers is 'leaves audience with questions'. This is an overall characteristic of the World War II feature films. The films build a scene and create a narrative for the part of the war that they are portraying. However, the elements that stands out to the film fans is the parts that are left out. The background information influencing the strategy planning in the scenes or the futures of the characters in the films that were based on real people. "When I watch a film like Schindler's List where it is based on a true story, I do want to know what he actually looked like and what happened to them for example." (Interview 4, 26, male). "I do do my research to find out what the bigger story is, the story beyond the film." (Interview 11, 26, male). These fans explain how to them, researching what they are watching is a part of the film experience and what makes the non-fiction, fiction films more interesting than full fiction films.

Pique interest is a situation where, similarly to the other triggers, the film evokes a response from the audience. However, in this situation the film creates an interest into a topic or event that was not part of the film fans knowledge before. The piquing of interest happens in both film and in real life situation and is especially common when forgotten stories are retrieved. "Watching the film (A Bridge Too Far) was eye opening and created a whole new dimension to my knowledge of the Second World War in the Netherlands." (Interview 4, 26, male). The piqued interest leads to personal research efforts like in the code 'leaving audiences with questions', but it generates more knowledge and often new perspectives to their current references of the war.

The triggers as described above are all leads for an audience response. This process and the response of each discussed code, portrays how the elements of the films stimulate the audience response to the film and in a more generic sense, the film experience. The more notable the film experience is the more the likely it is to be remembered.

To summarize the World War II film fans, recognize the following aspects of the film that affect the audience's interpretation of them, in their experience of construction of collective memory. Firstly, for an audience to have the full experience and understand the World War II film, they must have some pre-existing interest into the topic. The fans experience this existing interest from within, motivated by intrinsic factors. This motivation being stimulated by films and experiences beyond media, defines their fan behaviour towards the topic. Secondly, the level of realism is essential in the films portraying the Second World War. Even though the film is a fiction feature film, the film should be based in fact. With references to real events and people to create the experience of authenticity for the audiences.

Thirdly, the films must be physically, intellectually, and emotional accessible. This accessibility ensures that all members of the film can grasp the messages communicated in the story. Audiences that do not identify as fans of history films and/or that are not highly educated in history studies, must still be able to watch and understand the actions and reactions in the film.

Lastly, the films trigger reactions from the audiences these triggers range from emotional to educational and encourage higher engagement of the (fan) audience. One could say that these triggers are cues for the intrinsic motivation of the fan. As sensory triggers are the base stimuli for this mechanism.

5. Discussion

A comparison between the findings of the interviews and the literature, many themes present themselves in both analyses. Both confirming the previous research and contrasting the expectations build by the previous research on this topic.

5.1 Realism and authenticity

The first theme that was highly visible in the literature on World War II films, was the concept of realism. How realistic and true to reality the portrayal of the war is in feature films. The literature on remembrance and media practices emphasizes the importance of realism in the films to ensure that the audience receives a correct visual (Neiger, 2020). Whereas literature which is more specialized in cinema calls for a sufficient level of realism and accuracy without giving up the entertainment value (Bodnar, 2001). The findings of this research found that overall authenticity of the film and the events portrayed is essential for World War II film fans. These fans mentioned how they prefer a more historically accurate portrayal of the complexities of was instead of an over-simplified account of a battle. Surprisingly, the films given as examples of good war film in their opinion, include films like *Inglorious Bastards, Pearl Harbor* and *Red Tails,* films that are considered highly fictional accounts of the Second World War (Mustermann, 2016).

An explanation for this can be that the fans are not fully aware of the historical accuracy themselves. The fans assume to know the reality. Their frame of reference is built by the different facets of collective memory and the other information streams that they consume, including media. This is where the theory of Pouliot and Cowen (2007) on perceived realism allows for further understanding. The theory claims that it is not about the actual historical accuracy of the film but whether the audience assumes the portrayal is accurate based on their knowledge. Only specialists on the subject of the second world war will be able to notice historical inaccuracies beyond cultural details and complexities like the discussion of politics. These specialists in this research were someone that works in World War II remembrance conservation and someone with a degree in Dutch history. These fans were able to point out clear differences between reality and the portrayal in films, like the architecture of the bunkers or the alignment of the story's timeline with other battles and attacks on the battlefield. For the others, the interest does not go beyond the historical interest, and it is not a part of their daily life.

Furthermore, reception studies on World War II feature films by Pouliot and Cowen (2007) and La Marre and Landreville (2009), found that the expectation of authenticity in feature films is lower than in documentaries and that the entertainment value of the films is more important. Seeming disproving the findings in this research, but when accepting the theory of perceived realism, the conclusion is more nuanced. The conclusion on the importance of authenticity in film based on the combination of the findings and the literature says that the level of realism needs to be accepted

by the audience as good enough. Meaning that it follows the larger storylines that are a part of the general knowledge and collective memory. Furthermore, the entertainment value will make up for the gaps in the factual portrayal.

5.2 Accessibility

The accessibility of stories is also a reoccurring theme. The findings show that the availability of films and documentaries on streaming platforms or in cinemas encourages the audience to engage with the films. Furthermore, this accessibility is one of the strengths of media products like film. Erll (2008) names this advantage of film, how the large reach with a societal topic causes discussions and conversations within a society. Whereas this buzz is much harder to recreate with history education of religious stories, which are the tools for national and religious collective memory.

5.3 Film fan behaviour and motivations

Another theme that was dominant in this theme was the concept of fan behaviour and their motivation. intrinsic motivation. According to an incentive to engage in a specific activity that derives from "pleasure in the activity itself (e.g., a genuine interest in a subject studied) rather than because of any external benefits that might be obtained" (Intrinsic motivation, n.d). The fans mentioned that they believe that their interest for the Second World War comes from inside themselves instead of motivation from others. This statement aligns with the theory of Wann, Ensor and Bilyeu (2001) on motivation in highly engaged fans. The fans that were the most engaged with the subject, were intrinsically motivated. And therefore, the fans that are the most engaged with the Second World War films and that might consider themselves fans are expected to be intrinsically motivated.

However, an aspect of their fan behaviour that is not similar to convential fan behaviour, is the social interaction and connection with other fans. Most fans in this research mentioned how they would usually consume the content alone or with one other person. Whereas fan studies mention the concept of fan communities and the social interaction that happens in these communities (Carson, 2017; Livingstone, 2013). Apparently, when one is a fan of war films, this is causes different fan behaviour than when one is fan of a music artist or sports club, where the emphasis is on the fan communities (Wann, Ensor & Bilyeu, 2001). One cause for this private fandom can be the sensitive nature of the topic, it is not a topic to be lightly discussed in everyday discourse, which might cause the fans to also not to bring it up. Another cause can be a link to the intrinsic motivation of the fans. The fans that are more intrinsically motivated to not need justification or praise for their interest to bloom. Meaning that they are less likely to seek out social interaction that serves that purpose.

Furthermore, the unusual fan behaviour extents to the theory of active audiences by Livingstone (2013). The core element of this theory, creation of fan content and online presence, were not present in the group of feature film fans. Instead, the engagement with the media product

entailed research, offline excursions, and the consumption of World War II documentaries. The 90-9-1 rule of engagement by Carron-Arthur, Cunningham and Griffiths (2014), was visible in the different levels of engagement amongst the fans. There was a low engaged group who liked to watch the films and interacted with the content of those films through small amounts of research. There was also a more engaged group that took part in excursions to historic, World War II sites additionally to watching the films and doing research. And the smallest percentage of fans were the most engaged group, with dedicating their free time to the topic, as a volunteer workers or educators on the topic.

5.5 Collective memory

Literature on collective memory discusses the three types of memory, familiar, national, and religious (Closer, 2020). Originating from our direct surroundings, education, and our religious communities, respectively. These three types are seen as the three steams of information on a topic that together form the collective memory of a society. However, the results of this research heed to add a fourth type of memory: media memory. Media memory entail the stories told through media streams of information. This is through entertainment media which include feature films and other platforms. An important characteristic of media memory is that it is not controlled by any national or religious institutions to differentiate it from the other types of collective memory. Also, media that is not controlled by overarching institutions can bring a new perspective to a story or bring untold or hidden stories to the light.

On the opposite side of media memory, there is religious memory, which was not present in the findings of this research. No participant mentioned a religious or even cultural institution as a source for their knowledge and memory of the Second World War. Which can be explained by the declining interest in religion in the Netherlands (CBS, 2018). Additionally, it is also not mentioned as being relevant in any recent research into collective memory of the Second World War in Contemporary society.

These results suggest that in the past decades, a shift has occurred in the source of memory transferring. The role of religious institutions in society has lessened and, therefore, the role that it plays in attributing to the collective memory has diminished. This gap has been filled by stories in media, in part feature films. However, as mentioned before the media memory does not only exist of feature films but also the internet. The internet as an institution has claimed its place in the society of modern western countries such as the Netherlands and might have taken over the role of religious institutions in the creation of collective memory.

5.5.1 Can the gap in familiar memory be filled by media memory?

Furthermore, one of the exploratory questions of this research is how films construct collective memory. The findings suggest that there are many ways for films to contribute to the creation of

collective memory. Especially through the power of storytelling element (McGregor & Holmes, 1999). Familiar memory, one of the three pillars of collective memory, exists of these more personal stories of people in someone's direct environment. The power of the familiar memory is the storytelling and the close proximity to the source. However, as the generations are growing older and the people that experienced the events first hand leave society, a gap is created by the missing of these stories in society. The gap is created in the personal stories told by the older generations, as generations who are further removed from the historical event lack in the knowledge and ability to accurately pass on the stories. This is also partly cause by history growing in volume and more recent memories being prioritized by newer generations.

As this gap is starting to form in the creation of collective memory. We can ask ourselves what new platform can fill this gap. Could the media memory fill this gap? The findings of this research suggest that feature films already play a large role in the construction of collective memory. Moreover, the way that film presents its messages and communicates these is similar to the passing on of familiar memory. Also, the media memory is more accessible than for example national memory, which is often taught during history education, because of the entertainment element.

6. Conclusion

6.1 Main conclusions

The construction of collective memory is a complicated process influences by a multitude of different societal, political, and technological factors. The role of feature films was discussed in relation to the construction of collective memory with fans of these films. From this, we can formulate the following conclusions. Firstly, the authenticity of the story told through media, in this case, a feature film, must portray the historical event authentically. This authenticity does not mean that the film is one hundred percent historically accurate, but that the audience perceives the portrayal as being realistic and accepts it as being a visual representation of the event.

Furthermore, the fans that engage with the historical feature films, present unusual, private fan behaviour with less emphasis on social interactions, like most fandoms but more on researching and discovering more about the topic. These interactions prove that engagement with this topic stimulates curiosity and an incentive to learn. Additionally, the films trigger emotions and remembrance which aid in the audience engagement with the topic.

Additionally, the element that is relevant for the fans engagement with the topic is their existing interest. This interest fuelled by a pique of interest in their childhood aids them in building a substantial knowledge of the Second World War. The existing interest is also relevant for using feature films as tools for creating media memory as the interest will motivate people to consume the media. Therefore, to be able to possibly fill the gap created in the familiar memory by the older generations, members of society should develop an interest in the films for them to be as effective in the creation of memory as it has been with the film fans.

6.2 Reflecting on the research

6.2.1. Expectations

Reflecting on this research the expectations that were created beforehand have partly been fulfilled. The expectation was that fans of the films were aware of the different types of films within the genre and that they could share their wisdom on their speciality. This expectation was fulfilled. However, one expectation that did not come true, was the reserved attitudes of the fans towards larger societal implications of the films. I had expected this because of the severity of the topic and the difficulty. But the participating fans were very knowledgeable on the topic and shared their hopes and concerns on the development of society's collective memory.

6.2.2 Limitations of the research

A limitation of this research lies in that the racial and cultural background of both the researcher and participants may lead to results and conclusions that are not representative of the larger Dutch population. As all participants identified as Caucasian and have lived in the Netherlands their whole

lives, the results of this research may not reflect the opinions of the larger, multicultural population living in the Netherlands.

Furthermore, the sampling method chosen for this research, an open call on social media and through using personal networks, the sample may not be representative of the population despite selection efforts. Using social networks is similar to the snowball sampling method and can, therefore, lead to a similar group of people, instead of a more diverse selection. This can lead to the results being skewed or misleading because of under or overrepresentation.

Another limitation of this research is the focus on conscious audience perception. By using the interview research method, the results are based upon the conscious construction of memory and the unconscious ways are missed. Also, by asking the participants about their opinions on historical films covering the Second World War in general, more in-depth discussions of their concrete opinions and ideas.

6.3 Future research

For further research into this topic, an experiment on how certain films or documentaries pique the participants' interest or is remembered could add to the literature. As this research speaks to the consciousness of the participants and what they noticed remembering the unconscious impact that the films might have is missed. In order to realize this unconscious impact, research similar to marketing research could be helpful in deciphering the most effective way to communicate a message that will end up in the collective memory.

Furthermore, research into the next generation after Millennials and how they view the Second World War could examine how big the gap, created by the limited familiar memory is compared to Millennials. The Generation Z members could also explain how they interact with the films and whether their behaviour on the war shows a contrast to the Millennial behaviour of whether they act more similar. To fully be able to compare the research to this research the participants should also be of Dutch nationality.

Lastly, as most reception research of war films was done in the 1980s and 1990s the findings can be outdated. Therefore, I suggest re-doing the research with current war films and see whether they differ much from the films a few decades ago and how the current film audiences respond to historical feature films.

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Appendix A: The coding

Table A1: Coding scheme including themes and larger categories.

	Themes	Larger Categories
1.	Exisiting interest	Childhood interest
		intrinsic motivation
		incentive to learn
		real-life interaction
2.	Authenticity	Realism
		Film Quality
		Cultural details
		Historical accuracy
		Realistic complexity
3.	Accessibility	Specific event references
		Personal perspective
		convenience/availability
4.	Triggers	emotional
		familiar
		pique interest
		leaves audience with questions

Appendix B: The interview guide

The interview guide

Themes

- Fandom/ identity as a fan
  - What are some of your favourite WW2 films?
    - Can you give a short summary and name an element that makes it stand out to you?
    - Are you also interested in other historical films/period pieces?
      - Why (not)?
    - Do you prefer Dutch/European/American war films? & Why?
    - Favourite sub-genre?
  - How did you become a fan?
  - When did the interest in WW2 stories start?
    - Was it because of a film/media product?
  - Fan communities
    - Do you have people you talk about these things with?
    - Do you engage in other activities relating to WW2 stories, e.g., visit museums, research, documentaries, etc?
    - Is this inspired by the films?
- National discourse of WW2 in NL
  - What would you say is the national discourse of WW2 in the Netherlands? (What words are used when describing the films)
  - Is it a part of the Dutch identity?
    - Would you say it is linked to your roots?
    - Do you think it is a relevant topic to remember in today's society?
- Memory construction
  - What is/are collective memories of WW2 in the Netherlands?
  - What does WW2 mean to you?
  - What is your 'own' memory of WW2?
    - Origins in education/films/personal stories/other?
  - Only the Dutch perspective or also others?
  - What events/dates matter to you?
  - From what point of view do you see the events?
    - E.g., Dutch, 3rd Person, German, American, etc.
- Relationship film & history
  - What is your opinion on the role that film plays in history?
  - What is your opinion on historical accuracy?
  - Are fictional films valuable in the national discourse around WW2 in the Netherlands?
  - Or are they changing the narrative?
  - Compared to for example documentaries, what do you think?
  - Do you think that fictional films have a larger/lesser impact on the discourse than documentaries?
- The stories that are told
  - What is your opinion on the stories told?

- o Do you think the important stories get told or that some stories get told to much/get too much attention?
  - o Do you think that stories of ordinary people get forgotten more easily whereas stories relating to politicians etc.?
  - o Do you ever think about whose stories get told and to whose interest these stories get told? Or from what perspective? Like the portrayal of the Germans or Jews?
  - o Do you think artists, like filmmakers or screenwriters, tell the stories that would otherwise be forgotten? Do they have the responsibility to?
- The future
  - o What role do you think that WW2 films play in the future?
  - o Thinking of your own youth, how do you think that will be similar or different for the newer generations?
  - o Will films on WW2 be relevant for the collective memory of the event?
  - o Or will it slowly be forgotten?
  - o Or will the memories/stories of films be more known than the stories taught in schools?
    - ▪ And what role will the internet play in this?

Keep in mind:

- The words used when describing the national discourse and the films.
- What do they think the films do/ are supposed to do?
- What elements do they notice/identify?
  - o What makes a good WW2 film?
- How do they perceive the stories told?

Appendix C: The participants

Table C1: Research participants and their demographic profiles

Participant	Consent	Gender	Age	Education Level	School in NL	History all of high school?
1	Verbal	M	26	Masters	Yes	Yes
2	Verbal	F	25	Bachelors	Yes	Yes
3	Verbal	F	22	Bachelors	Yes	Yes
4	Verbal	M	26	HBO	Yes	Yes
5	Verbal	F	23	MBO 4	Yes	Yes
6	Verbal	M	38	HBO	Yes	Yes
7	Verbal	M	38	HBO	Yes	No
8	Verbal	M	23	Masters	Yes	Yes
9	Verbal	M	28	HBO	Yes	No
10	Verbal	M	33	HBO	Yes	Yes
11	Verbal	M	26	Masters	Yes	Yes
12	Verbal	M	39	MBO 4	Yes	No

Appendix D: Featured films

Table D1: Films mentioned by participants during the interviews.

Title	Year	Country	Director
Saving Private Ryan	1998	USA	Steven Spielberg
Fury	2014	USA	David Ayer
Schindlers' List	1993	USA	Steven Spielberg
Hacksaw Ridge	2016	USA/AUS	Mel Gibson
Pearl Harbor	2001	USA	Michael Bay
Red Tails	2012	USA	Anthony Hemmingway
Defiance	2008	USA	Edward Zwick
Operation Overlord	2018	USA	Julius Avery
Inglorious Bastards	2009	USA/DE	Quentin Tarantino
The Pianist	2002	UK/Poland/France	Roman Polanski
Dunkirk	2017	UK/France/NL	Christopher Nolan
Boy in the Striped Pyjamas	2008	USA/UK	Mark Herman
A Bridge too Far	1977	UK/USA	Richard Attenborough
The Imitation Game	2014	UK	Morten Tyldum
La Vita e Bella	1997	IT	Roberto Benigni
Zwartboek	2006	NL	Paul Verhoeven
Oorlogswinter	2008	NL	Martin Koolhoven
Süskind	2012	NL	Rudolf van den Berg
Bankier van het Verzet	2018	NL	Juram Lürsen
Riphagen	2016	NL	Pieter Kuijpers
Het Bombardement	2012	NL	Ate de Jong
Das Boot	1981	W-DE	Wolfgang Petersen
Der Untergang	2004	DE	Oliver Hirschbiegel