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Digital Holocaust memory: A study of Italian Holocaust museums and their social media users

1 Introduction

Cultural institutions responsible for preserving and transmitting the history and memory of the Holocaust include museums and memorials. These institutions remind visitors of the tragedy and aim to educate them about the events that led to it, the people affected and the lessons that can be learned from it. They also serve to honour the victims and those involved in relief efforts.[1] Additionally, museums play a crucial role in disseminating cultural memory, which encompasses both individual and collective processes.[2] As Nora describes,[3] museums can be considered "lieux de mémoire", symbolic elements of a community's memory and ethical projects that encourage visitors to learn from the past, fostering a common sense of guilt and responsibility that binds the nation together.[4] This is particularly true of memorial museums, which act as a form of public education and help community members remember and reflect on difficult events from the past. By engaging with these memories and understanding their significance, people can learn from the past and form a shared sense of responsibility for the future.

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1 Lacin Idil Oztig, "Holocaust museums, Holocaust memorial culture, and individuals: a Constructivist perspective," *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies* 22 (2023): 62–83. Note: All footnotes are references to additional literature/further readings, hence no particular page numbers are given.
2 Astrid Erll, "Cultural Memory Studies: An Introduction," in *Companion to Cultural Memory Studies,* ed. Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2010), 1–15.
3 Pierre Nora, "Between memory and history: Les Lieux de Mémoire," *Representations* 26 (1989): 7–24.
4 Victoria Grace Walden, *The Memorial Museum in the Digital Age* (REFRAME Books, 2022), accessed 20 March 2023, https://reframe.sussex.ac.uk/the-memorial-museum-in-the-digital-age/.

The digitalisation of Holocaust memorials and museums, like other cultural institutions, has evolved over time and ushered in new forms of remediation,[5] contributing to the development of a transcultural and global Holocaust memory.[6] The vast majority of museums representing World War Two and the Holocaust today are characterised by "transnational memory",[7] which refers to a wide range of historical phenomena that transcend national boundaries.[8] National memories continue to be significant and are simultaneously reconfigured under globalisation.[9] Contrary to popular belief, although Holocaust memories have become one of the strongest Western collective memories and identities,[10] the Holocaust is a profoundly geographical event rooted in specific geographical locations, times and spaces. Even in Western Europe, national memories are likely to differ and may focus more on a particular aspect of the Holocaust than others, thereby intertwining a local and transcultural memory of the Holocaust in different ways.[11] There is a strong connection between Holocaust memory and traumatic events in diverse nations that reflects the dominance of national perspectives.[12] This connection is evident in the effort to restrict standardisation of Holocaust

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5 Wulf Kansteiner, "The Holocaust in the 21st century: digital anxiety, transnational cosmopolitanism, and never again genocide without memory," in *Digital Memory Studies: Media Pasts in Transition*, ed. Andrew Hoskins, (London and New York: Routledge, 2017), 110–140.

6 Daniel Levy and Natan Sznaider, *The Holocaust and Memory in The Global Age* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006); Lothar Probst, "Founding Myths in Europe and the Role of the Holocaust," *New German Critique* 90 (2003): 45–58.

7 Aleida Assmann, "Transnational Memory and the Construction of history through Mass Media," in *Memory Unbound: Tracing the Dynamics of Memory Studies,* ed. Lucy Bond et al. (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2017), 65–82.

8 Ian Tyrrell, "Reflections on the Transnational Turn in United States History: Theory and Practice," *Journal of Global History* 4 (2009): 453–474.

9 Chiara De Cesari and Ann Rigney, *Transnational Memory: Circulation, Articulation, Scales* (Berlin, München, Boston: De Gruyter, 2014).

10 Małgorzata Pakier and Bo Stråth, *A European Memory? Contested Histories and Politics of Remembrance* (New York: Berghahn, 2010).

11 Stefania Manca et al., "Holocaust Remembrance on Facebook during the Lockdown: A Turning Point or a Token Gesture?," in *The COVID-19 Pandemic and Memory. Remembrance, commemoration, and archiving in crisis*, ed. Orli Fridman and Sarah Gensburger (London, UK: Palgrave McMillan, 2024).

12 Leah Angell Sievers, "Genocide and Relevance: Current Trends in United States Holocaust Museums," *Dapim: Studies on the Holocaust* 30 (2016): 282–295.

memory[13] as well as the recognition of the distinction between national memory projects and local commemoration practices.[14]

Although there has been a growing homogenisation of Holocaust memory, especially in Europe,[15] as a result of ever-increasing digital globalization,[16] recent research[17] indicates that museum and memorial presentation strategies are still affected by national preference. For example, during the COVID-19 lockdown in 2020, German Holocaust museums increased their use of language other than German in their Facebook communication, whereas Italian Holocaust museums tended to publish primarily in Italian, targeting the national community in general.[18] Despite the pandemic's impact on digital internationalisation and globalisation,[19] Holocaust institutions exhibit a broad range of digital accessibility and a clear preference for reaching a wider audience with their contributions.[20]

This chapter focuses on Italian Holocaust museums and memorials and their use of social media platforms to digitise Holocaust memory and bridge national and transnational memories. The study examines how these institutions promote Holocaust remembrance and education while combating distortions on social media. It also investigates how online users respond to the museums' content and what motivates them to seek out Holocaust-related information on social media platforms. By understanding these motivations, museums can tailor their offerings to better educate their audiences, combat misinformation and distortion.

13 Lea David, "Against Standardization of Memory," *Human Rights Quarterly* 39 (2017): 296–318; William Echikson, *Holocaust Remembrance Project: How European Countries Treat Their Wartime Past*, 2019, accessed 20 March 2023, https://archive.jpr.org.uk/object-eur216.

14 Thomas G. Vanderbeek, "Marginalization and Local Commemoration of Third Reich Victims in Germany," *The Journal of Holocaust Research* 36 (2022): 128–145.

15 Éva Kovács, "Limits of Universalization: The European Memory Sites of Genocide," *Journal of Genocide Research* 20 (2018): 490–509.

16 Pakier and Stråth, *A European Memory?*.

17 Stefania Manca, Marcello Passarelli and Martin Rehm, "Exploring Tensions in Holocaust Museums' Modes of Commemoration and Interaction on Social Media," Technology in Society 68 (2022): 101889.

18 Manca et al., "Holocaust Remembrance."

19 Tobias Ebbrecht-Hartmann, "Commemorating from a Distance: The Digital Transformation of Holocaust Memory in Times of COVID-19," *Media, Culture & Society* 43 (2021): 1095–1112.

20 Chiara Bartolini, "Internationalisation and Marketing Strategies for University Museums," *Les Cahiers de Muséologie, 1-Actes du Colloque "Les Musées Universitaires and Leurs Publics", Communications* (2015): 137–147.

2 Holocaust memorials and museums on social media

Over the past decade, museums and cultural heritage institutions have utilised digital technologies and social media platforms as a means of communication and providing educational content to their online audiences.[21] While archival curation and online access to collection catalogues and management systems are well-known digital services to museum stakeholders,[22] social media have primarily gained attention as an effective tool to attract virtual visitors to museums[23] and to identify content that is more likely to engage their interest.

This new scenario applies equally to Holocaust museums, which have experienced new modes of Holocaust commemoration and representation in recent years.[24] In response to the advancing age of Holocaust survivors and witnesses, digital technologies are becoming increasingly popular as a means of enabling audiences to experience immersive, simulative, or counterfactual memories of the Jewish genocide and other victims killed and persecuted by Nazi Germany and its collaborators.[25] Users are encouraged to choose from a wide range of testimonies and navigate the wide range of digitised resources available on the internet in the progression from the "era of the witness"[26] to the "era of the user".[27] As a result of digital technologies, new memory ecologies are emerging,[28] and social

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21 Elisa Giaccardi, *Heritage and Social Media. Understanding Heritage in a Participatory Culture* (London: Routledge, 2012).

22 Ion Gil-Fuentetaja and Maria Economou, "Communicating Museum Collections Information Online: Analysis of the Philosophy of Communication Extending the Constructivist Approach," *ACM Journal on Computing and Cultural Heritage* 12 (2019), Article 3.

23 Mi Chang et al., "Identifying Museum Visitors via Social Network Analysis of Instagram," *ACM Journal on Computing and Cultural Heritage* 15 (2022): 1–19.

24 Diana I. Popescu and Tanja Schult, *Revisiting Holocaust Representation in the Post-witness Era* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

25 Joanne Garde-Hansen, Andrew Hoskins and Anna Reading, *Save as . . . Digital Memories* /London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); Kansteiner, "The Holocaust in the 21st century."

26 Annette Wieviorka, *The Era of the Witness* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006).

27 Tobias Ebbrecht-Hartmann and Lital Henig, "i-Memory: Selfies and Self-Witnessing in #Uploading_Holocaust (2016)," In *Digital Holocaust Memory, Education and* Research, ed. Victoria Grace Walden (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2021), 213–236; Susan Hogervorst, "The Era of the User. Testimonies in the Digital Age," *Rethinking History* 24 (2020): 169–183.

28 Hoskins, ed., *Digital Memory Studies.*

media, with its participatory culture,[29] contributes to the emergence of new forms of Holocaust remembrance.[30]

Holocaust remembrance on social media has reached a new level with the widespread adoption of TikTok by Holocaust organizations and users. The TikTok platform has established itself as one of the most popular online platforms for younger generations,[31] and a growing number of Holocaust organizations, museums, and memorials are entering the market with the specific purpose of reaching this target audience, providing information to combat misperceptions, misinformation and distortion.[32]

The explosive growth in TikTok and social media more generally coincided with the outbreak of COVID-19 and the restrictions imposed by various lockdowns. As a result of the pandemic, museums and cultural institutions, including Holocaust museums, have experienced a variety of disruptions in their daily operations.[33] Simultaneously, the pandemic has boosted the willingness of Holocaust memorials to explore and utilize social media, leading to an increased opportunity for experimentation with digital media and further intensifying the ongoing operational changes of these memorials.[34]

Nevertheless, analysing the actual use of these social platforms has yielded mixed results. An investigation of the attitudes towards social media by a sample of 69 Holocaust museums across the world revealed an overall positive attitude,

29 Henry Jenkins, Sam Ford and Joshua Green, *Spreadable Media: Creating Value and Meaning in a Networked Culture* (New York: New York University Press, 2013).

30 Victoria Grace Walden, *Digital Holocaust Memory, Education and Research* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2021).

31 Emily A. Vogels, Risa Gelles-Watnick and Navid Massarat, *Teens, Social Media and Technology 2022* (Pew Research Center, 2022).

32 Tom Divon and Tobias Ebbrecht-Hartmann, "#JewishTikTok. The JewToks' Fight against Antisemitism," in *TikTok Cultures in the United States*, ed. Trevor Boffone (London: Routledge, 2022), 47–58; Tobias Ebbrecht-Hartmann and Tom Divon, "Serious TikTok: Can You Learn About the Holocaust in 60 seconds?," *MediArXiv* (2022).

33 Deborah Agostino, Michela Arnaboldi and Antonio Lampis, "Italian State Museums During the COVID-19 Crisis: From Onsite Closure to Online Openness," *Museum Management and Curatorship* 35 (2020): 362–372; Myrsini Samaroudi, Karina Rodriguez Echavarria and Lara Perry, "Heritage in Lockdown: Digital Provision of Memory Institutions in the UK and Us of America During the COVID-19 Pandemic," *Museum Management and Curatorship* 35 (2020): 337–361.

34 Ebbrecht-Hartmann, "Commemorating from a Distance"; Victoria Grace Walden, "Understanding Holocaust Memory and Education in the Digital Age: Before and After COVID-19," *Holocaust Studies* 28 (2022): 257–278.

although concerns were expressed by smaller institutions.[35] Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube are the most commonly used platforms by museums, with a focus on sharing educational content and information about the museum's activities. Other studies suggest that Facebook is preferred for more detailed historical narration, while Instagram is more suitable for live events and sharing visual content, such as pictures, stories and videos.[36] However, larger institutions are more active on Twitter than on other platforms, with the Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum and Memorial occupying a prominent position in Twitter discourse due to its over 1.3 million followers.[37] Twitter is primarily used for engaging with other institutions, promoting online resources such as virtual tours and educational materials, and participating in political conversations both locally and internationally. As noted by Walden,[38] the use of social media has transformed commemoration practices and allowed for alternative memory work as local and institutional initiatives have gained global reach.[39] However, traditional approaches to remembrance and education, which are entrenched in memorial museum practices, continue to hold sway both online and offline.[40]

This study aims to analyse the attitudes of a group of Italian Holocaust museums and memorials towards social media and digitisation. Additionally, we will investigate how users perceive social media's potential to acquire knowledge of the Holocaust and engage in commemoration and remembrance practices. This research offers valuable insights into the current state of Holocaust education and remembrance in Italy and sheds light on how digital technologies and platforms can preserve the memory of the Holocaust for future generations.

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35 Manca et al., "Exploring tensions in Holocaust museums' modes of commemoration and interaction on social media".

36 Imogen Dalziel, "Becoming the 'Holocaust Police'? The Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum's Authority on Social Media," in *Digital Holocaust Memory, Education and* Research, ed. Victoria Grace Walden (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2021), 179–212.

37 Stefania Manca, "Digital Memory in the Post-Witness Era: How Holocaust Museums Use Social Media as New Memory Ecologies," *Information* 12 (2021): 31; Manca, "Digital Memory," 31.

38 Walden, *The Memorial Museum*.

39 Tracy Adams and Sara Kopelman, "Remembering COVID-19: memory, crisis, and social media," *Media, Culture & Society* 44 (2022): 266–285.

40 Walden, *The Memorial Museum*.

3 The case of Italian museums and memorials

Our study focuses on Holocaust commemoration practices through social media in Italy, an area that has received relatively little attention compared to other countries.[41] Italy has struggled to reconcile its collective memories of World War Two and the Holocaust, with the public memory of the Resistance movement portraying Italy as a victim of a war waged by Mussolini and Hitler, while anti-Communist sentiments have given rise to an alternative memory opposing antifascist rhetoric. Despite more than 70 years passing since the war, Italian government-led commemoration and remembrance events continue to mostly focus on German rather than Italian responsibility for the persecution and deportation of Jews, while also highlighting the role of the Italian resistance movement and Nazi Germany's massacres of civilians.[42] The complex interplay between national and transnational memories related to Holocaust remembrance is also reflected in the national calendar of commemorations and celebrations,[43] raising questions about the relationship between history, memory and the present.[44]

This study focuses on Holocaust commemoration through social media in Italy,[45] where the history of Holocaust commemoration has been complex and marked by a lack of nationally representative museums.[46] However, the four se-

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41 Dalziel, "Becoming the 'Holocaust Police'?"; Tomasz Łysak, "Vlogging Auschwitz: New Players in Holocaust Commemoration," *Holocaust Studies* 28 (2022): 377–402; Stefania Manca, "Holocaust Memorialisation and Social Media. Investigating How Memorials of Former Concentration Camps Use Facebook and Twitter," Paper presented at *the 6th European Conference on Social Media – ECSM 2019,* Brighton, United Kingdom, June 13–14, 2019; Manca, "Digital Memory."

42 Aline Sierp, "Italy's Struggle with History and the Europeanisation of National Memory," in *Erinnerungskulturen in Transnationaler Perspektive*, ed. Ulf Engel, Matthias Middell and Stefan Troebst (Leipzig: Leipziger Universitätsverlag, 2012), 212–234.

43 Italy has two significant national commemorations: Liberation Day [Festa della Liberazione] on 25 April, marking the end of the Nazi-Fascist occupation and of the Second World War in Italy, and Holocaust Remembrance Day [Giorno della Memoria] on 27 January, commemorating the liberation of Auschwitz and emphasising the role of the German Nazis in the deportation of Italian and foreign Jews, but not the responsibility of fascism and Mussolini. Additionally, the National Memorial Day of the Exiles and Foibe [Giorno del Ricordo], established in 2004, is celebrated on 10 February, to remember Italian victims in border conflicts between Italy and Yugoslavia.

44 Michele Sarfatti, "Notes and Reflections on the Italian Law instituting Remembrance Day. History, Remembrance and the Present," *Quest. Issues in Contemporary Jewish History. Journal of Fondazione CDEC* 12 (2017): 112–134.

45 In Italy, the term "Shoah" is preferred over "Holocaust." See Dan Michman, "Why Is the Shoah Called 'the Shoah' or 'the Holocaust'? On the History of the Terminology for the Nazi Anti-Jewish Campaign," *The Journal of Holocaust Research* 35 (2021): 233–256.

46 After almost 20 years of planning and negotiations, funding for the Italian Museum of the Shoah has finally been approved. The museum is expected to be located on the grounds of Villa

lected memorials and museums, including Fondazione Fossoli,[47] Fondazione Museo della Shoah,[48] Memoriale della Shoah di Milano,[49] and Museo Nazionale dell'Ebraismo Italiano e della Shoah (MEIS)[50] are among the most significant cultural heritage agencies in Italy and serve as reference points for Holocaust memory. They have education centres that are frequently visited by schools and students and are active on at least two social media platforms among Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube.[51] A recent study by Manca[52] examined the social media presence of these four museums and memorials across Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube. The study found that these institutions primarily target a national audience while also including transnational themes related to Holocaust remembrance. While the social media profiles examined demonstrate that these institutions are reliable sources of historical information and contribute to shaping memory ecologies, they tend to adopt a conservative attitude towards their use. Specifically, they prefer to target audiences over the age of 25, as evidenced by their choice of platforms and one-way communication approach.

3.1 Methods

In July 2021, a series of semi-structured interviews were conducted with social media managers, including directors, heads of communication departments, and social media managers from the four memorials and museums under study. The

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Torlonia, a historically significant site that includes catacombs dating back to the third and fourth centuries and was once the residence of Benito Mussolini. The establishment of this museum is a significant step towards enhancing Holocaust education and remembrance in Italy, particularly in the capital city of Rome. By situating the museum in a historically significant location and highlighting the role of Italy in the Holocaust, the Italian Museum of the Shoah has the potential to play an important role in shaping national and transnational memories related to Holocaust commemoration. See: https://moked.it/international/2023/03/20/new-holocaust-museum-in-rome-italys-government-gives-its-approval-lets-keep-the-memory-alive/.

47 https://www.fondazionefossoli.org/.

48 https://www.museodellashoah.it/.

49 https://www.memorialeshoah.it/.

50 https://meis.museum/.

51 As TikTok was not yet a widely popular platform at the time of the study, it was not included among the social media platforms analysed. Therefore, the study did not cover the initial attempts by one of the four museums to use TikTok (https://www.tiktok.com/@museoshoahroma), as they predated the period during which the study was conducted.

52 Stefania Manca, "Digital Holocaust Memory on social media: How Italian Holocaust museums and memorials use digital ecosystems for educational and remembrance practice," *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 28 (2022): 1152–1179.

interviews aimed to gather information on their organisations' missions, identities, communication strategies and responses to the COVID-19 pandemic's constraints. They also aimed to understand their educational policies and future plans.

Between February and July 2021, we conducted a survey aimed at social media users of the four museums and memorials under study. Our goal was to assess the type of information typically contained in social media profiles of organisations of this kind, drawing on the work of scholars such as Isaac and Çakmak,[53] Isaac et al.,[54] and Kansteiner.[55] The survey comprised 36 questions divided into three sections. The first section collected information about respondents' socio-demographic characteristics, such as gender, age, location, occupation and educational qualifications. The second section explored respondents' personal experiences and interests in Holocaust issues. The third section examined how users engage with social media content published by Holocaust museums on their profiles/pages and how they perceive social media use by these museums.

Overall, the survey received 276 responses. The majority of respondents (80%) reported using Facebook as their preferred social media platform for following a museum or memorial, while 14 percent reported using YouTube. The respondents were predominantly women with an average age of 52.3 years and higher education qualifications. The survey had a diverse group of respondents, representing various professional backgrounds. The largest group of respondents were teachers and educators, followed by retired individuals and clerical employees. Scholars, academics and cultural operators also represented a significant proportion of the respondents. Additionally, a small group of students participated in the survey.

It is also noteworthy that the majority of the respondents resided in northern regions of Italy, while only a small percentage did not reside in Italy. This information could potentially impact the generalisability of the survey results, as the perspectives and interests of individuals residing in different regions or countries may differ.

53 Rami Khalil Isaac and Erdinç Çakmak, "Understanding visitor's motivation at sites of death and disaster: the case of former transit camp Westerbork, the Netherlands," *Current Issues in Tourism* 17 (2014): 164–179.

54 Rami Khalil Isaac et al., "Understanding Dutch visitors' motivations to concentration camp memorials," *Current Issues in Tourism* 22 (2019): 747–762.

55 Kansteiner, "The Holocaust in the 21st century."

3.2 The perspective of museums and memorials

According to the findings of the study, the four museums and memorials primarily aim to target younger audiences such as school children, teachers, university students and researchers. However, the actual audience is composed of school students aged between 10 and 18 years and women between 50 and 60 years of age, who possess high levels of education. All institutions place a strong emphasis on Holocaust education and offer a variety of activities, including workshops, exhibitions, school projects and training courses for teachers. Some activities are also conducted in collaboration with external partners, particularly in response to the rise of Holocaust distortion and hate speech on social media.

Despite the museums' strong emphasis on Holocaust education, the study found that limited resources, including human and financial resources, hinder the implementation of digital strategies. Due to budget constraints, those responsible for digital communication also manage traditional communications. The museum website is considered a highly significant means of disseminating information, announcing exhibitions, and presenting educational goals. However, all four social media managers highlighted the importance of using social media platforms, mainly Facebook (Figure 1) followed by Instagram (Figure 2) and YouTube. Twitter is considered less relevant and is only occasionally used by some of them.

Figure 1: The four museums' Facebook pages.

The museums' primary objective of social media postings is to convey historical information, provide details about activities and symbolic dates, and give access to in-depth background posts, videos and podcasts of meetings and workshops. Posts are usually published according to a pre-set schedule, with some museums
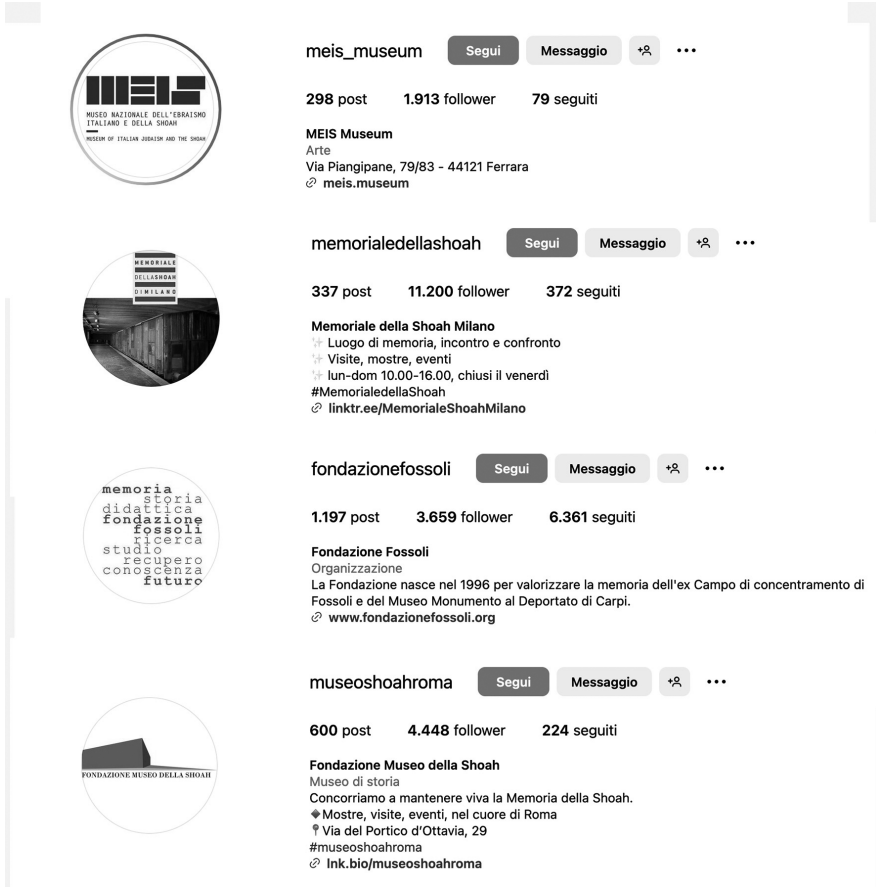
Figure 2: The four museums' Instagram profiles.

utilising specific digital tools to prepare their own output. Outside services are rarely used for this purpose.

The issue of Holocaust distortion and how to address it received particular attention during the interviews. However, the experts emphasised that problems related to Holocaust distortion and denial, as well as hate speech on social media channels, were mostly considered low-level. The handling of this phenomenon is assessed on a case-by-case basis, with obvious denials or hate speech being deleted, while critical voices are tolerated to a certain extent. The interviewees emphasised that such critical voices should fall within a specific range.

It is clear that the COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on the operations of museums and their activities on social media. With the closure of physical

spaces, museums had to find alternative ways to engage with their audiences and continue to provide educational opportunities. The use of digital technologies and social media platforms was instrumental in enabling museums to reach audiences and maintain engagement during this challenging time. Virtual tours, digital exhibitions and online guided tours were some of the ways that museums adapted to the pandemic's restrictions. The educational dimension received significant attention in the implementation of these alternative service delivery strategies and many museums launched new online courses and conferences. Despite the challenges, social media managers reported a high level of interest and willingness to collaborate during the pandemic. This positive response highlights the importance of maintaining and strengthening existing collaborations and developing new ones in the future.

Looking ahead, it is clear that museums would continue to use digital technologies and social media strategies developed during the pandemic. However, it is also important to emphasise the value of in-person events and maintain a balance between online and on-site activities. Overall, the pandemic has highlighted the importance of flexibility and adaptability in the museum sector, and it is likely that many of the changes implemented during this time would continue to shape the sector's future.

3.3 The perspective of users

The survey covers a range of topics, including participants' interests in specific themes related to the Holocaust, such as antisemitism and human rights, as well as their personal motivations for following museum/memorial social media pages. The survey also investigates participants' motivations for following a museum/memorial page, such as the quality of comments by followers/fans or the frequency of new content published. Additionally, it examines the frequency of specific actions taken on the page, such as posting a comment or mentioning/tagging other users/accounts/pages. Finally, the survey investigates participants' satisfaction with certain aspects of the page, such as administrator interaction and feeling safe in the followers/fans community. Overall, it aims to provide insights into various aspects of participants' engagement with museum/memorial pages related to the Holocaust, which can help inform strategies for improving engagement and outreach in the future.

Regarding experiences related to Holocaust education and informal learning activities, the most prevalent experience reported was visiting Holocaust museums and places, followed by participating in events, courses, initiatives, competitions and educational trips. Additionally, a significant number of respondents

reported having experience teaching in schools or museums for educational activities and trips. Although fewer respondents reported experience organising or planning school or museum educational activities and trips, a substantial proportion still reported having such experience.

Table 1 presents a summary of the findings pertaining to users' interest, motivation, actions typically taken on museums' and memorials' social media pages, as well as their satisfaction with their social media experience.

Table 1: Distribution of responses across the several topics of investigation.

Category	Item	M±SD
Interest	Antisemitism	4.28 ± 0.73
	Cultural heritage	4.25 ± 0.72
	Dark tourism	4.13 ± 0.92
	Fascism and other Nazi accomplices' ideology	4.10 ± 0.89
	Heritage from the Holocaust: Hope, Faith and Resilience	4.10 ± 0.88
	Historical events	4.31 ± 0.71
	Holocaust denial and distortion	4.15 ± 0.91
	Human rights	4.36 ± 0.75
	Jewish culture	4.07 ± 0.98
	Nazi ideology	3.50 ± 1.06
	Other genocides	3.79 ± 0.87
	Personal stories of victims or survivors	4.23 ± 0.84
	Racism	4.01 ± 0.91
	Refugees and immigration	3.88 ± 0.91
	Remembrance and commemoration	4.08 ± 0.84
	The Righteous among the Nations	4.09 ± 0.88
	Totalitarian regimes	3.83 ± 0.93
	Trauma psychology	3.75 ± 1.05
	Wars and conflicts	3.57 ± 0.95
Personal motivation	I feel responsible for the coming generations	4.18 ± 0.77
	I feel empathy for the victims	4.27 ± 0.73
	I want to be informed about expositions/evidence/artefacts of the museum	4.26 ± 0.71
	I want to expand my study/professional network of contacts in the field of the Holocaust	3.51 ± 1.17
	It is a part of my history/heritage that I want to know more about	3.87 ± 1.10
	I want to expand my personal network of contacts in the field of Holocaust	3.38 ± 1.14
	I want to speak for those who no longer can, but also for humanity more generally	3.87 ± 1.03
	I want to share personal opinions/ideas on the topic with others	3.65 ± 0.96
	I want to commemorate the victims	3.99 ± 0.90
	It's a way of coming to one's senses and thankfulness	3.81 ± 1.08

Table 1 (continued)

Category	Item	M±SD
	I want to learn more about the Holocaust/Second World War	4.16 ± 0.81
	I want to be able to tell the story further to next generations	4.31 ± 0.82
	I want to understand what happened during the Holocaust	4.35 ± 0.72
	I want to share my study/professional interests with others	3.51 ± 1.19
	I am curious to know what happened during the Holocaust	4.06 ± 0.89
	I want that such a horrific occurrence may never happen again	4.78 ± 0.56
	I am afraid that something can happen in the future again	3.91 ± 0.98
Motivations related to the page	Direct knowledge of the administrator/s of the page/profile	2.50 ± 1.23
	Quality of the comments by followers/fans	2.70 ± 1.02
	Reputation of the Institution in the field	3.89 ± 0.92
	Accuracy of the information published on the page/profile	4.44 ± 0.72
	Relevance of the posts and comments	3.98 ± 0.94
	Frequency with which new content is published	3.65 ± 0.93
	Popularity of the page/profile (e.g., number of "likes", number of followers)	2.30 ± 1.11
Actions	Like a content	3.46 ± 1.21
	Like comments	2.67 ± 1.21
	Post a comment	2.03 ± 0.81
	Reply to a comment	1.94 ± 0.83
	Reply to a content/comment with new content (e.g., comment with text/photo/video/link)	1.75 ± 0.80
	Post new content (e.g., text, photo, video)	1.60 ± 0.80
	Retweet/share a content	2.55 ± 1.16
	Mention or tag other users/accounts/pages	1.91 ± 1.01
	Use direct or private message to interact with other users	1.75 ± 0.97
	Use direct or private message to interact with the administrators	1.61 ± 0.77
	Use page/profile hashtags in my posts	1.73 ± 0.96
	Participate to donation campaign organised by the page/profile	1.88 ± 0.92
Satisfaction	I am satisfied with how the administrator interacts with fans/followers	3.86 ± 0.88
	I am satisfied with how the administrator interacts with me	3.69 ± 0.88
	I am satisfied with how other fans/followers interact with me	3.48 ± 0.72
	I am satisfied with how the fans/followers interact with each other	3.59 ± 0.76
	I think something in the way administrators handle communication with fans/followers should change	2.85 ± 0.93
	I think the way in which the content is communicated by the administrators is consistent with my expectations	4.17 ± 0.87
	I think that the administrators censor the discussions	2.16 ± 1.11
	I think administrators filter hate messages properly	4.11 ± 0.93
	I think administrators filter fake news properly	4.20 ± 0.96
	I feel safe in the follower/fan community	4.10 ± 0.90
	I feel that administrators respond to fan/follower questions and comments in a timely manner	3.95 ± 0.87

To measure interest, a list of 19 items covering significant topics related to Holocaust history and memory was used (Interest). The results showed that the respondents were most interested in topics related to human rights, historical events, cultural heritage and antisemitism, all with a similar level of interest. Personal stories of victims or survivors and Holocaust denial and distortion were also of great interest. On the other end of the spectrum, trauma psychology, wars and conflicts, and Nazi ideology were among the least interesting topics to respondents.

Items related to "Personal motivation" and "Motivations related to the page" were used to assess the motivations for following the selected social media profile or page. The first group of items pertains to reasons related to the importance of being a witness and the desire to perpetuate the memory of the Holocaust. The most important motivation is "I want that such a horrific occurrence may never happen again", followed by "I want to understand what happened during the Holocaust", "I want to be able to tell the story further to next generations", "I feel empathy for the victims", and "I want to be informed about expositions/evidence/ artifacts of the museum". On the other hand, motivations such as "I want to share personal opinions/ideas on the topic with others", "I want to expand my study/ professional network of contacts in the field of the Holocaust", "I want to share my study/professional interests with others", and "I want to expand my personal network of contacts in the field of the Holocaust" are less important.

The second group of items relates to specific reasons to follow that particular page or profile. The most important reason to follow the page is "Accuracy of the information published on the page/profile", while factors such as popularity (e.g., number of "likes", number of followers) are much less important.

The activities carried out on the social media page or profile were assessed by examining the frequency of access reported by participants (Actions). Almost half of the respondents reported accessing the page or profile when they receive a notification. Weekly usage was reported as the most common frequency, followed by daily usage. Results show that the most frequently executed activities are "Liking content", "Retweeting or sharing content", and "Liking comments". On the other hand, activities such as "Posting new content (text, photo, video)" or "Using direct or private message to interact with administrators" are much less common.

In the end, satisfaction was evaluated using a set of items that aimed to assess the behaviour of page or profile administrators and their relationship with other online users (Satisfaction). The results indicate that users appreciate how administrators filter out fake news and hate speech, how they communicate content and how they interact with fans and followers. However, users express less interest in interactions with other users on the platform.

4 A convergence of perspectives

The objective of this study was to advance the comprehension of social media practices employed by Holocaust museums and memorials in Italy, by investigating the outlooks of both museums and memorials and their users. Unlike previous studies that focused on internationally relevant Holocaust institutions or large sets of Holocaust memorials in other countries,[56] this study specifically examined the memory landscape of Holocaust-oriented cultural institutions located in Italy.

Based on conversations with museum staff, it was found that Facebook and Instagram are the most frequently used social media platforms, while Twitter is the least used. This partially contradicts previous studies which suggested that larger institutions tend to use Twitter more frequently, especially for political and civic engagement.[57] In this sense, the Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum and Memorial demonstrates a strong commitment to social and civil issues such as combating Holocaust denial and antisemitism on Twitter.[58]

The four Italian museums in question seem to prefer the slower-paced communication style of Facebook and Instagram. They target two specific groups – young adults and middle-aged people (45–70 years) and younger audiences (25–45 years). This is reflected by the demographics of users' survey, which indicates a majority of women, an average age of around 50 years, higher levels of education, and a preference for Facebook and YouTube. Demographics found in similar survey conducted in other countries, such as Germany, demonstrate a diverse profile in term of age, gender and social media preferences.[59]

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56 Imogen Dalziel, "'Romantic Auschwitz': Examples and Perceptions of Contemporary Visitor Photography at the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum," *Holocaust Studies* 22 (2016): 185–207; Meghan Lundrigan, "#Holocaust #Auschwitz: Performing Holocaust Memory on Social Media," in *A Companion to the Holocaust*, ed. Simone Gigliotti and Hilary Earl (Hoboken: John Wiley and Sons, 2020), 639–654; Manca, "Holocaust Memorialisation and Social Media"; Manca, "Digital Memory"; Manca, Passarelli and Rehm, "Exploring Tensions"; Alexander Craig Wight, "Visitor Perceptions of European Holocaust Heritage: A Social Media Analysis," *Tourism Management* 81 (2020): 104142.
57 Dalziel, "Becoming the 'Holocaust Police'?"; Stefania Manca, "Digital Memory."
58 Dalziel, "Becoming the 'Holocaust Police'?"; Ewa Manikowska, "Museums and the Traps of Social Media: The Case of the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum," *Santander Art and Culture Law Review* 2 (2020): 223–250.
59 Stefania Manca and Marcello Passarelli, "Social media as lieux for the convergence of collective trajectories of Holocaust memory. A study of online users in Germany and Italy," *Heritage* 6(9) (2023): 6377–6396.

Recent studies[60] have shown how pandemic-related lockdowns acted as a catalyst for digital transformation in the museum and memorial sector. This is evident in the ways in which our sample of museums and memorials engaged with the public during closures, such as through virtual tours, online seminars, and increased activity on social media platforms like Facebook and Instagram. The study also indicates that cultural institutions are influenced by proximity linked to geographical proximity,[61] as demonstrated by the geographical distribution of survey participants and the formation of digital spaces. This implies that while virtual tours and seminars are effective means of engaging with audiences, it is crucial to consider the geographical and cultural context of each digital space. Therefore, the creation of digital spaces should be customized to meet the needs of both local and global audiences.

The results of the survey indicate that visiting Holocaust museums and places is the most prevalent experience reported by respondents in terms of educational or informal learning activities on Holocaust topics. This finding highlights the importance of physical spaces in Holocaust education and commemoration. Furthermore, the fact that a significant number of respondents reported having experience related to teaching in schools or museums educational activities and educational trips suggests that educators and professionals are actively engaging with Holocaust education and incorporating it into their teaching and programming. Overall, these findings underscore the importance of providing diverse opportunities for Holocaust education and informal learning activities to engage different audiences and promote greater understanding and awareness of the Holocaust.

Besides, as nearly half of the individuals in the sample are teachers, educators, academics, or cultural operators, there is a predominant interest among professionals in Holocaust education and remembrance policies, but also a broader interest among citizens who are not actively involved in these areas. The ability to create a community of interest among diverse groups who share a common concern reflects the general tendency of history museums to foster social cohesion and consolidate the identity of their audiences.[62] Therefore, this result is relevant to understanding participants' formal and informal educational experiences and highlights the potential for different groups to come together around shared historical events.

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60 Ebbrecht-Hartmann, "Commemorating from a Distance"; Manca et al., "Holocaust Remembrance."

61 Lisa K. Pennington, "Hello from the other side: museum educators' perspectives on teaching the Holocaust," *Teacher Development* 22 (2018): 607–631.

62 Tracy Jean Rosenberg, "History Museums and Social Cohesion: Building Identity, Bridging Communities, and Addressing Difficult Issues," *Peabody Journal of Education* 86 (2011): 115–128.

Analysis of respondents' interests and motivations indicates a primary focus on Human Rights, historical knowledge, antisemitism, and cultural heritage, all of which are recognised as key topics in Holocaust education.[63] These preferences align with the theoretical and practical traditions of Holocaust education, which emphasise individual experiences over ethically oriented collective memory and strive to humanise statistics.[64] The cosmopolitan memory of the Holocaust, along with the intensification of global memories, has led to the emergence of a shared European cultural memory that highlights the connection between human rights and this historical event.[65] Our respondents' interests also reflect the tendency of memorial museums to convey collective memory through the perspectives of victims.[66] Specifically, they focus on the Righteous Among the Nations' rescue of Jews.[67] The content analysis of the social profiles of the four museums considered indicated that respondents' interests reflect the interweaving of transnational and national memories.[68] This trend is evident in the topics that garnered the most interest from the users. For example, it appears that topics such as Nazi ideology have not generated much interest among the respondents, possibly due to a perception that they are disconnected from the historical context specific to Italy.

The motivation for following the social media profiles of Holocaust museums and memorials is rooted in a sense of civic responsibility for preserving the memory of the Holocaust.[69] This is reflected in the emphasis on individual experiences over ethically oriented collective memory, as well as the focus on topics such as human rights and cultural heritage. The use of social media to expand one's network or share common interests has received little attention, and there is a tendency for one-way communication. However, respondents trust the institutions managing the profiles and recognise them as important educational and informational agencies for preserving Holocaust memory.

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63 Michael Gray, *Contemporary Debates in Holocaust Education* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

64 Stuart Foster, Andy Pearce and Alice Pettigrew, *Holocaust Education. Contemporary Challenges and Controversies* (London: UCL Press, 2020); Stuart Foster, Andy Pearce and Alice Pettigrew, *Holocaust Education.*

65 Daniel Levy and Natan Sznaider, "Remembering a sociology of Human Rights," *Culture & History Digital Journal* 3 (2014): e013.

66 Oztig, "Holocaust museums."

67 Susan M. Yelich Biniecki and Sarah Donley, "The Righteous Among the Nations of the World: An Exploration of Free-Choice Learning," *SAGE Open* 6 (2016): 1–11.

68 Manca, "Digital Holocaust Memory."

69 Manuela Achilles and Hannah Winnick, "Memory, Responsibility, and Transformation: Antiracist Pedagogy, Holocaust Education, and Community Outreach in Transatlantic Perspective," *The Journal of Holocaust Research* 35 (2021): 123–138.

Finally, respondents value communication with page administrators and the ability to filter fake news and hate speech to ensure safety on social media. Interaction with other users is considered less important. The importance of museums creating safe online spaces for visitors is emphasised, and social media communication staff is committed to protecting online spaces from hate content, creating a safe environment for participants to connect with one another.

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