

**THE DIGITAL HOLOCAUST MEMORY PROJECT
SUSSEX WEIDENFELD INSTITUTE OF JEWISH
STUDIES**

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR USING SOCIAL MEDIA FOR HOLOCAUST MEMORY AND EDUCATION

**PREPARED BY DR VICTORIA GRACE
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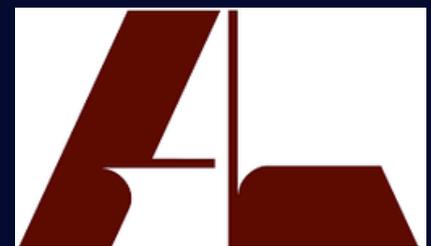
This project was generously supported by funding from the School of Media, Arts and Humanities, University of Sussex and the Economic and Social Research Council's Impact Acceleration Account.

In-kind support was also received from iRights.Lab, Germany for the wider project.

The social media thread of the project was also supported by the in-kind support of our project partners:

The Hebrew University, Jerusalem

University of Bern (supported by funding from the Alfred Landecker Stiftung).



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FOREWORD

The social media landscape is ever-changing as is its relationship to Holocaust memory and education. In the earlier days of Facebook and Twitter's dominance, there was a clear divide of opinions in the Holocaust sector. On one hand, some institutions were early adopters (notably the Auschwitz State Museum) and others experimented with the affordances of these platforms such as the team at Grodzka Gate, Lublin extending the analogue practice of school pupils sending letters to child Holocaust victim Henio Zytomirski onto Facebook and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's 'tweet-up' hybrid architecture tour. On the other hand, expressions of hesitance about these participatory spaces informed the need for the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance's Education Working Group to establish guidelines for using social media in this context (2014).

As practice grew, it also became somewhat formalised with most organisations predominantly focusing on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram for public engagement work, and most content presenting traditional curation of historical sources with additional narrative, promoting the organisation's offline (or elsewhere online) work, or behind the scenes access to curator and educator experiences. Whilst, one of the celebrated potentials about social media is their ability to help organisations to reach wider (global) audiences, little has changed online since Eva Pfanzelter's (2014) claim that the Holocaust institutions that dominated previously offline, also dominate on social media platforms. Few others attract much engagement with their posts.

TikTok has brought both new opportunities and challenges for the Holocaust sector - organisations and individuals who have taken to creating content on the platform are seeing far greater engagement than they had on previous ones. Yet, TikTok is also one of the most data-invasive and opaque platforms regarding researcher access. Many also encounter far more Holocaust denial, distortion and trivialisation on this platform. However, the social media landscape is also far larger than the Holocaust sector has really acknowledged and much of the coded hate content that appears on mainstream platforms has been cultivated at scale on others, from 8Chan to Telegram, and gaming and VR social spaces. It is imperative therefore that we bring together a wide range of stakeholders and experts to discuss what the sector needs to move forward with its work on social media. If Holocaust memory and education is to remain visible in the ever-expanding digital world, then it must be visible across a variety of digital spaces.

This report serves as an important first step in this work. It was created as part of the research project 'Participatory Workshops - Co-Designing Standards for Digital Interventions in Holocaust Memory and Education', which is one thread of the larger Digital Holocaust Memory Project at the University of Sussex.

The participatory workshops project have focused on six themes, each of which brought together a different range of expertise to discuss current challenges and consider possible recommendations for the future. The themes were:

- AI and machine learning
- Digitising material evidence
- Recording, recirculating and remixing testimony
- Social media
- Virtual memoryscapes
- Computer games

In this report, you will find the recommendations and a suggestion of who could bear responsibility to take each of these on; a summary of the workshop discussions; and a list of the participants who contributed to this work. There will also be a complementary action plan published alongside this report. The recommendations and discussion presented here summarise participant opinions, which might not reflect the opinions of project leads or any individual participant in full, or all participants in consensus. Whilst we have offered participants the opportunity to review and discuss the development of these guidelines, we have tried to retain differing perspectives rather than suggest there was homogeneity in opinion. The discussion presented is an aggregation of professional opinions informed by a diverse range of experiences and expertise. We present ideas collectively, rather than attributing specific points to participants. All participants are, however, acknowledged as contributors to this report.

This document does not claim to be the last word on Holocaust memory and education on social media, rather we recognise that this is very much the beginning of a longer conversation. We hope that the immediate recommendations suggested in these guidelines will help organisations and individuals to prioritise the work needed to work effectively with the difficult material related to the Holocaust in social media spaces.

Dr Victoria Grace Walden
Project Lead



RECOMMENDATIONS

For each of the recommendations we outline here, we also suggest who could take responsibility for this work. They are addressed at a wide range of stakeholders from the tech industry to Holocaust organisations, academic researchers to funding agencies. Where a recommendation is part of the project team's next steps action plan, we have noted 'Project Leads'.

01

01 — Project Leads

Create a 'living document' of examples of good educational tools and programmes that emerge on social media that can be shared with educators and invite commentaries by academics, users, content creators, platform experts, technological experts, and institutions on why they feel each is a successful example. Also include here examples of good institutional practice and existing social media strategies.

02

02 — Project Leads

Produce an easy digital workbook on 'getting started' with social media in Holocaust memory and education contexts to support new content creators and institutions plan social media strategies. Include 2-3-minute video tutorials / walk throughs.

03

03 — Project Leads

Maintain and improve contact between institutions, memorial sites, content creators and academics. Establish a hub where methodologies and contacts can be shared. The hub could be divided into local and transnational groups that organise to meet periodically. Social media changes very quickly and we need to stay up to date

04

04 — Project Leads pulling on both Education and Tech Sector Expertise

Develop digital literacies programmes and embed them within wider training courses that motivate educators to engage with social media as a tool to enhance (but not replace) their current approaches. Such programmes should introduce participants to the nuances of different platforms and their users. In this context, it should also provide information on data protection regulations and the different metrics for measuring exposure.

05

05 — Holocaust Organisations

Develop a comprehensive educational plans with outcomes/goals which takes seriously social media in and out of learning spaces for creators, educators, and students. Consider hybrid learning approaches as positive ways to incorporate social media as part of formal education. Enable researchers the opportunity to monitor the process and measure the outcomes and impact of such work by incorporating research partnerships and strategies from the outset.

06

06 — Funding and Transnational Bodies

Support academic research about the significance of Holocaust memory and education on social media as it continues to evolve across particular platforms and advocate for more possibilities for data collection from the side of platforms. Encourage long-term funding for interdisciplinary research that moves beyond the sector itself to explore the question 'how do people learn on social media?'

07

07 — Funding Bodies

Widen the scope of financial support / grants to better support content creators to be able to create enduring content online. Short-term, project-based funding schemes are not fit for purpose for social media work. What is needed is sustainable support for long-term management of social media accounts and support for collaborations between different sized organisations as well as individuals - Holocaust memory and education should not be competitive ventures.

08

08 — Content Creators

Be realistic and self-reflexive about the concerns and challenges of social media - create content that addresses the difficulties faced in doing this work online. Such content may create an open discussion and help change attitudes more widely.

09

09 — Transnational Bodies and Tech Companies

Further strengthen good relations between Holocaust organisations and social media platforms to ensure collaborative approaches to addressing denial, distortion, trivialisation and hate speech, whilst appropriately promoting Holocaust education and commemoration.

10

10 — Tech Companies

Be open to collaborative work with academic researchers and Holocaust organisations, supporting wider access to data for analysis and transparency about algorithmic practices.

If you are interested in working towards any of these recommendations, we would welcome you to contact Project Lead Dr Victoria Grace Walden (v.walden@sussex.ac.uk) with the Subject Line: Social Media Recommendations. We are keen to track the impact of the report after publication, support ongoing work in this area, and may also be able to put you in contact with other organisations interested in similar actions to support collaborative work.

DISCUSSION SUMMARY

The following pages summarise the workshop discussions which informed our recommendations. Each sub-section identifies one of the priorities agreed by participants at the beginning of workshop 1 (see the methodology that follows this section for more details on our approach).

1. Social Media Platforms and Accounts

The workshop discussions were framed around the theme of Holocaust memory and education on social media which inevitably raised questions regarding **who has responsibility for social media accounts, which platforms are being engaged with, and what is the role of the user**. The platforms identified as most prevalent for Holocaust memory and education were **Facebook, Instagram, Twitter** and **TikTok**. Youtube was also identified as an important platform for storing and streaming recordings of live events, and messenger services such as WhatsApp were also highlighted in the context of user agency and experience.

Participants agreed that it is important for (smaller) institutions and organisations to first consider why they are on social media and **to think carefully about their mission** in relation to educating about and commemorating the Holocaust. Once the mission has been agreed, then it becomes easier to identify the platform(s) which can best support its aims. For example, workshop participants identified that **Twitter** can be useful for short written announcements, which are often used in a formal and/or academic capacity and to engage in conversations with other stakeholders, whereas **TikTok** privileges fast-paced video content and generally reaches a younger demographic. It is important for organisations to think carefully about their target audience (e.g., teachers, the general public, students, researchers, stakeholders) and to match this against the shifts in user behaviour, for example we are seeing a preference for (live) video over photographs (reflected by recent changes made within the Instagram App due to the competition of TikTok).

Simultaneously, Holocaust organisations must be realistic about their internal/external management and the limits of what can be achieved through their institutional social media profiles. **They should define policies to both deal with, and protect colleagues/external professionals who create content and manage the accounts from the risks of hate speech, distortion, denial and trivialisation** (for more, see section four).

Moreover, whilst there is a tendency to focus on **quantity and analytics** (e.g., the number of followers, likes, shares) with social media discourse, it is crucial to also remain focused on **quality and meaningful impact** when creating and circulating Holocaust content online. While the long-term impact of online engagement is difficult to measure, social media lend themselves to “**snackable content**” which can act as a ‘hook’ or springboard into further research and sustained engagement. It is worth noting that while the physical actions and input from a user may seem similar, the ‘quality’ of those interactions varies across different platforms and algorithms. For instance, a ‘follow’ on TikTok could be the beginning of a longer relationship whereas a ‘like’ on Facebook does not necessarily result in deeper engagement with the material. **Evidencing the pedagogical and societal values of these interactions, however, remains a challenge.**

In particular, it was suggested that social media can be used productively to **zoom in on lesser-known histories and highlight individual stories or take up current viral socio-political topics and expand historical knowledge.** The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum’s social media accounts for example illustrate that survivor stories are of great interest to users who want to find ways to connect to human stories (statistically, these narratives achieve greater engagement levels than other content such as objects - see forthcoming research by Walden and Makhortykh). In this way, **social media platforms can be used to enhance traditional resources and educational methods without being reduced to them.**

The work of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (the USHMM) on social media can be viewed via the following links:

[Facebook](#)

[Twitter](#)

[YouTube](#)

[Instagram](#)

Nevertheless, forthcoming research by Walden and Makhortykh demonstrates that it is usually **popular tropes of Holocaust representation** that **attract the most interactions on social media**, thus their ability to highlight lesser-known histories may be overstated.

One of the key challenges for organisations and institutions is how to **manage, monitor and sustain** their social media account(s), to **catch up or keep up with the trends and changes** within the platform itself as well as within a **legal context**. With regards to the latter, it was noted that there are many **ambiguities regarding legislation** about handling data and content online and that there are global distinctions (this topic was covered in more depth in both our testimony, and digitising material evidence reports).

As this report goes to press, members of the IHRA Education Working Group have decided to remove their 2014 guidelines from the IHRA website.

For some, the IHRA guidelines produced in 2014 were a useful reference point to reflect and measure the major (ongoing) shifts within the current media climate. Participants noted that the original focus of these guidelines **emerged from hesitation and fear around new social media** and what institutions should and should not be doing online.

In contrast to those guidelines, this study launches as an interdisciplinary discussion about the affordances and possibilities of incorporating social media and fostering productive participatory practice. Indeed, participants from education and museum contexts expressed the need to move on from the era of suspicion and fear towards understanding Holocaust memory on **social media as both posing educational challenges and opportunities**. An updated report produced by the IHRA "Recommendations for teaching and learning about the Holocaust" and the recent "History Under Attack" report produced by the UN and UNESCO (July 2022) may be useful reference points in this context, as they not only address the issue of distortion on social media but provide guidance and recommendations for a series of different actors, educators and bodies.

Emphasis was placed on the need for **clearer guidelines and for the platforms to work alongside content creators to navigate these hurdles**. While Twitter and Instagram have reportedly been less responsive, TikTok has been supporting high profile accounts, for example, working with Dov Forman and his great-grandmother, survivor, Lily Ebert whose content on the app has surpassed 800 million views.

In another case, the account of survivor, Gidon Lev conducted a survey of 44 Jewish creators on TikTok which revealed that collectively, these accounts (in 60 days alone) generated 112 million views, 419,000 comments and 281,000 shares. While these figures reflect a high level of interest in engaging with the themes of Holocaust commemoration and combatting antisemitism, the survey also reported that **44 respondents (97.8%) have encountered antisemitism on TikTok**. Furthermore, **64% of respondents reported that they have been threatened on the platform. 75% feel reporting the issues does not work, which has led 25% to consider ceasing to produce content on TikTok**. The survey suggests an urgent need for individual creators to be supported and guided by institutions (both the corporations who develop social media platforms and Holocaust organisations).

The accounts of Lily Ebert and her great grandson Dov Forman, and of Gidon Lev and his girlfriend Julie Gray are examples of highly successful independent TikTok projects focused on Holocaust education and commemoration. They can be found on TikTok via the following handles:

[@lilyebert](#)

[@thetrueadventures](#)

Beyond the platforms, it was also highlighted that social media influencers do not receive enough institutional or financial support and may struggle to create enduring content.

In acknowledging the rise of successful TikTok accounts (particularly those which include survivor voices), the conversation turned to the possibility of individual content creators and influencers working more closely with Holocaust institutions and organisations. Not only would this enhance credibility for creators across other platforms ('retweeted' content on Twitter, historically, has been predominantly authored by official - and therefore trusted - organisations) and alleviate some of the pressures felt by institutions, but it would also **open the door for dialogue between platforms, content creators and organisations more widely**. Advanced users or influencers may also be able to advise, guide and help young volunteers (who are at the forefront of some organisations' social media accounts), particularly with how to **safeguard themselves and deal with negative backlash online**. **Working together to solve problems with best practices at the core and updated guidelines was considered essential - we must avoid silos.**

Participants also commented that while most of these platforms appear relatively user-friendly, **professionals are needed in house and/or to teach the staff and creators about deeper digital logics and literacies** (such as understanding how algorithms operate and managing security threats) and **also how to best handle negative responses and distortion**. Indeed, there can be **'hidden rules'** within these online spaces amongst the diverse range of communities that use them. A deeper understanding of how platforms function and how users engage with them for different purposes, can help professionals and creators **locate the appropriate channel for their content**. Comments were also made about **potential gatekeepers** within organisations who make decisions about what content goes online based on their own (in)experience of using some platforms over others (is there, for instance, a generational tension between Facebook and TikTok users?). In turn, this can have negative effects on younger professionals within an institute or organisation. Put differently, an open dialogue is needed to avoid dismissal or discouragement of young colleagues who may have different approaches to Holocaust memory and new ideas about how to engage with users of their age online. However, it is also important to recognise that social media are not just for young people – there can be an **overemphasis on the younger generations shrouded in ageism**. Older users have been very successful on platforms like TikTok as we have seen above.

2. Affordances and Possibilities

One of the most important shifts which shaped discussion regarding the affordances of social media was what academics are calling the move from the **'era of the witness' to the 'era of the user' in a post-survivor age** (Hogervorst 2019). This is also related to (limited) possibilities of personal experiences in the real world and encounters with places and people. We need to contemplate the **potential implications of moving away from face-to-face encounters** towards just virtual forms of communication and commemoration. Nevertheless, it is also worth questioning if 'the era of the user' may overstate the significance of individuals since user agency is still limited. We must also consider whether the current moment might best be understood as **'the era of the platform'** and the consequences of commercial entities shaping how we produce, share and upload Holocaust-related content online. **Agency is dispersed across the many human and non-human agents involved in producing digital spaces and cultures.**

The reliance on mediated, distant engagement via platforms became a reality during the global **COVID-19 pandemic** which forced Holocaust memorial sites and museums to transfer their activities and learning resources online. The social media platforms discussed above became **essential tools for organisations to mark important historical dates, to share memorial ceremonies and to continue to communicate and engage with audiences, from survivor testimonies streamed through Facebook or YouTube to virtual guided tours of memorial sites on Instagram.** [Victoria Grace Walden \(2020-21\)](#) and [Tobias Ebbrecht-Hartmann \(2020\)](#) have published research which investigates the ways Holocaust memory and education functioned on social media during the global lockdowns.

Participants identified the following as the key affordances of social media for Holocaust education and memory:

- Increased accessibility
- Potential for interactive, participatory experiences
- Potential for connective and (international) networked memory practice
- Ability to reach new audiences / younger demographic that use different platforms
- Potential for user-generated content and co-creation possibilities
- Potential for productive disruption which makes us (re)consider current ethical standards around good practice

Many of the workshop participants highlighted [Eva.Stories](#) on Instagram as a positive example of Holocaust commemoration on social media which is **helping to shift attitudes within the educational sectors**, although there was much public criticism of the project at the time of release. [Tobias Ebbrecht-Hartmann and Lital Henig \(2022\)](#) discuss the significance of communication strategies in Eva's Stories. The two analyse the project's remediation of a Holocaust diary on Instagram, which presents a re-enactment of some of the diary entries 'as if a girl in the Holocaust had Instagram'. By presenting events as if they occurred and were screened live, Ebbrecht-Hartmann and Henig claim that **new modes of "media witnessing"** were presented in the project, prompting a new practice of Holocaust commemoration on social media. This practice was mostly focused on the socially mediated experience of users and the responses the project evoked, **marking a shift in concern with the other to the self, and from an experience that mediates history to an experience focused on users' own recollection of that history on social media.**

One participant commented that while many Italian teachers tend to have a high level of expertise about the Holocaust, they do not know what they can do with social media and are unaware of existing content across platforms. As part of the IHRA project "Countering Holocaust distortion on social media. Promoting the positive use of internet social technologies for teaching and learning about the Holocaust" as many 'good' examples of social media use for Holocaust education were shared with teachers as possible. **Nominating and discussing some of these examples across industry professionals, academics and institutions and continuing to add to a live repository could be beneficial alongside guidelines for good practice.** This list of examples would need to be accompanied by commentary from those who selected the work to explain their justification for putting each example forward. Problematising this approach and reminding us of the **challenges in making value judgements on creative works**, however, one participant also shared an example of Ich bin Sophie Scholl as a German case study, which, like Eva.Stories gained more than 1 million followers and was given an authentication tick by Instagram, but, by contrast, received incredibly negative feedback from academics. One of the central tensions and differences between the two projects appeared to be that 'Sophie' was communicating with followers and responding to comments on Instagram whereas the virtual 'Eva' did not answer. It was therefore not clear which parts of the stories were 'authentic' and what was being added. It is worth highlighting that the debate emerged in relation to the participatory and interactive potentials of the projects - the very affordances that make Instagram a **social** media platform.

Another approach discussed was the potential to **create programmes that motivate educators to engage with social media more widely**, thereby increasing awareness about Holocaust memory. Memorial representatives emphasised the **interest in creating a direct dialogue with potential visitors** (even by bypassing classical mediators such as teachers and schools). Doing so could enhance the possibility of **transforming students from passive into active participants, turning them into co-creators or creators.** A model for this may be peer-to-peer communication (young volunteers creating content for users from their generation). This can also include creating user generated content (UGC) in school classes in preparation for, during and/or after a visit to a Holocaust memorial or museum.

3. Education and Commemoration

Across all of our discussions, the themes of **education and commemoration** were highlighted. Education was discussed in different forms such as **media and information literacy, historical knowledge, as well as the development of historical and critical thinking**. Under this broad definition, discussion spanned a variety of contexts which include:

- Social media as tools for **disseminating and circulating Holocaust research quickly** via blog posts first (rather than traditional publishing routes) (such as www.digitalholocaustmemory.com)
- A tool for **sharing materials with wider audiences** (photographs, documents, testimonies etc.)
- Social media as offering **interactive and/or engaging experiences** for remembering and educating about the Holocaust (from live Facebook, Instagram or TikTok tours at Holocaust sites to digital memorial ceremonies during the global pandemic)
- (Productive) tensions between social media and education ('**edutainment**') and fictionalisation
- **The different types of education** that may exist on social media from formal to casual
- Attracting **young learners** as audiences online
- **Digital literacies** for creators, professionals, and users
- **Measuring the impact** of education and the pedagogical approaches to social media
- Using social media to **combat fake news and misinformation online**
- **Comprehensive educational plans** which could embed social media
- **Preserving (archive) content** for future use (educational and research)
- Social media as **networking platforms**, via which Holocaust institutions and content creators can share practice, create campaigns around topics or dates, and learn from one another.

There is a tension between the logics of social media, understood in this context as fast paced, fluid and connective, versus our understanding of the Holocaust as an event in history which is extremely difficult to comprehend and is often framed through notions of fractures, silences, and absences. Our memory practices have placed emphasis on contextualisation and have traditionally relied on a slower pace of walking around former sites of Nazi or collaborator persecution, visiting museums and exhibitions, listening to survivors tell their testimonies and taking part in commemorative services.

A second strand was identified by participants who also noted that there is **friction between serious education and social media as platforms for entertainment**. Arguably these tensions are not entirely new, and play out within the education sector more broadly, as there is a lot of pressure on school teachers to teach the subject to students within a short time frame in a way that is both **engaging and interesting**, while also incorporating **traditional teaching methods**, and adhering to **ethical principles and practices**. Media and cultural studies participants, however, flagged that whilst entertainment content is popular on social media, we should be careful to assume this is all the platforms are for. **Social media have also been used for activism, democratic participation, and education** (indeed, the earliest content transferred across the internet were research papers and social media have been used as technology-enhanced learning environments for more than a decade).

Following this line of enquiry, participants debated the **potential for social media to mediate real world experiences**, both as exaggerated and/or enhanced experience versus the **dangers of replacing personal encounters**. The conversation arrived at the notion of **hybrid learning** and the possibilities to incorporate social media (and digital technologies more generally) into educational programmes and site-based learning. Ultimately, participants agreed that **social media will not (and should not) replace other ways of communicating and educating about the Holocaust, but that social media exist as significant social environments for contemporary generations**. They therefore need to become part of formal education and **complement** other educational tools. The central question is how to combine the existing educational expertise, pedagogies and successful approaches with the specific language and aesthetics of different social media platforms. Further sub questions emerged from this part of discussion:

- Do we need to (re)define what good practice is in this context?
- What do we want to disseminate?
- How do we respond to the fact that people are gaining information and knowledge from online media?
- How are social media also shaping offline communication and affecting 'traditional' forms of education?
- What are young people doing and how are they producing content?
- To what extent do we need to meet young people where they are?

4. Countering Denial, Distortion and Trivialisation

Despite the [UN General Assembly's 2022 resolution condemning Holocaust denial](#), which integrates [the IHRA's definitions of denial and distortion](#), there remains **no consensus about what constitutes trivialisation specifically**. Thus, the debate regarding political misuse or distortion remains controversial. This affects, for instance, comparisons between the Holocaust and other historical or contemporary events. Whilst some cases are clearly trivialisation, such as the adoption of yellow stars in protests about lockdowns during the Covid-19 pandemic, more nuanced historical comparisons (for example, attempts to consider whether a current conflict amounts to genocide by comparing it with (not 'to') the Holocaust are more productive).

Concerns were also raised about **regulation** (see the next section). What are the limits of Holocaust memory on social media in regards to **legal frameworks** (e.g., relating to digital services and digital markets) and **ensorship**? What is (and should be) the role of **artificial intelligence (AI) in moderating content**? And what could be the affect on Holocaust memory and education of increased **political pressure** on platform providers to **delete 'improper' content**? In general such political pressure was considered to be positive. However, who decides what is deemed 'proper' or 'improper' content, and how the latter is dealt with remaining challenges.

One example of a reactionary response which harmed rather than helped Holocaust memory and education work was when the word "Holocaust" was banned from TikTok posts in the immediate aftermath of the #HolocaustChallenge controversy. This led to legitimate users, invested in promoting Holocaust education, having to adopt the same coded language that deniers use to circumnavigate censorship on such platforms.

One conversation turned to the ways in which the platforms themselves could be seen as a form of trivialisation. For example, TikTok is seen as a playful and entertaining mode of communication, and some may think this is an inappropriate medium for serious engagement with the Holocaust (similarly to the backlash with video/computer games and new digital technologies more widely).

Beyond the partnerships already proposed between survivors, official institutions, and young content creators (enhancing legitimacy through association), it was suggested that these groups could think about **incorporating more content that is self-reflexive, directly addressing the issue of trivialisation through their posts.**

- Could they do videos with the staff at the museum or memorial site addressing this issue?
- Could they invite a school class to take part in the content creation?
- Can they create space for respectful debate integrating different generational voices on the platform itself?

UNESCO are looking beyond social media as a tool for disseminating information or creating content to **consider how education about the Holocaust can be built into online platforms at the level of policy and practice to counter the spread of Holocaust denial and distortion.** Their report, "History under attack: Holocaust denial and distortion on social media", identifies the roles and responsibilities of governments, online platforms, researchers, civil society, and educators to be active in this regard and provides a series of recommendations. It suggests that **online platforms should monitor and, when necessary, take action on content that denies or distorts the Holocaust in partnership with experts, civil society organisations, and international organisations in line with international standards on freedom of expression.** Actions may include adding fact-check labels that redirect to accurate and reliable information and/or sources; downranking and de-amplifying; placing warning labels or removing harmful content; disabling advertising revenue; and/or deactivating accounts of actors producing and spreading such content.

Examples of collaborative approaches:

1. UNESCO and the World Jewish Congress partnering with Facebook and TikTok to redirect users searching for terms relating to the Holocaust to verified information on the website [AboutHolocaust.Org](https://www.aboutholocaust.org).

2. The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's 14-week Holocaust education programme which specifically targets 14-18-year-olds in high school. Related to the permanent exhibition, the programme is very active on social media and is the only one outside of the official museum account that is publicly connected to the USHMM. It is hoped that the programme will create a community of young museum docents who will have engaged with social media as an integral tool in their learning from an early stage.

Integrating social media into formal educational programmes in this way may be a simple but effective method for helping young people gain experience of **'good' practice online** and help them to **navigate the online space**, becoming more aware of the denial and distortion that exists online and the way misinformation can spread. It was recognised that there is a **misconception that young people are 'digital natives'** – a term heavily disputed in academic literature. It is critical that we also recognise their **need for support with navigating digital spaces, cultures and logics**.

This also raised interesting questions around expectations being placed on the audience and **whether guidelines also need to be established for users** (those broadly defined as commenting on and caring about social media Holocaust discourse). Issues were raised for example about the role of asking followers to (re)share content online. One response offered in the context of defamation law in Israel noted that if you like the post, then you cannot be charged but if you share something, you can be. **Sharing is seen as an active and conscious decision**. More questions emerged about what happens when you share something on your Instagram stories for 24 hours versus retweeting on your Twitter profile, and **what liability (legal or ethical)** do official accounts have if they ask general users to share posts which subsequently lead to the users receiving backlash or hateful messages?

Several participants commented on the ways **algorithms operate in resharing and making posts visible, stretching further the questions around responsibility and agency for sharing content online**. Comments were also raised about the lack of faith in computational methods being used to search for and automatically delete hate speech and denial. UNESCO advocates that **improved transparency by online platforms** would provide more information to users, researchers, and educators about the effect of the companies' algorithms and policies on Holocaust memory and discourse, as well as their impact on democracy and free expression. It was recognised that cultural, historical, religious, and national contexts are extremely important when we share online, but...

- What happens when this context is diluted?
- Can an algorithm read or understand the nuance in these contexts?
- Can it understand sarcasm, irony, commentary?

5. Control, Agency and Responsibility

Participants noted that in their experience, **Holocaust institutions have generally been very positive about social media and the possibilities it offers to reach different audiences until they feel that they may lose control of the content.** Social media raises issues for consent - both the recording organisation and the content creator lose control when it is recirculated online. Neither can necessarily predict what will happen, how it will be repackaged and recirculated, and when/if it will reappear.

The discussion about agency and responsibility emerged particularly in relation to memorial sites (such as Bergen-Belsen, Mauthausen and Neuengamme) that started to create a presence on TikTok around the same time. One participant noted that they did not receive any backlash upon starting the account and the great amount of feedback from the media was mainly positive. They were surprised by the **quick rise in followers**, the **amount of feedback they received**, and how the **volunteers were able to reach the audience of their educational programmes in a much more direct way.** However, issues were raised regarding the **safeguarding** of volunteers and users.

The TikTok content of the concentration camp memorial sites mentioned here can be found via the following handles:

- [belsenmemorial](#)
- [neuengamme.memorial](#)
- [mauthausenmemorial](#)

Currently, it is down to staff to delete hate speech, personal attacks, and misinformation that arise in the comments. A discussion may take place between colleagues if the comment is unclear, but the person in charge of moderating at that specific time is responsible for making such decisions in a quick time frame and to judge the user, by checking their profile and username. In some instances, where the

comments have been challenged by other users and an interesting dialogue has already unfolded, colleagues have decided to leave them in place.

It is worth noting that it is harder to react to problematic posts when colleagues disagree on whether they are an issue or not; comments are left in languages the team does not speak; or when comments are left by international users during unsociable hours for the staff managing the account (it is not possible to keep an eye on responses 24/7). There also remains a **lack of training** for those

working in Holocaust organisations in relation to **moderation**, including what constitutes '**hate speech**' and how to create their own moderation policies which **uphold freedom of expression**. Give that challenges related to regulation on social media are embedded within broader debate on finding a balance between the commitment to free speech and ethical considerations, participants questioned whether **the Holocaust could be an exemplary indicator for the relationship between ethical responsibility and legal regulations online**.

In raising tricky questions about the purposes of content moderation and interpretation of negative comments, mixed responses were shared across the participants. While some participants indicated that there might be **generational differences** that affect positioning towards this, there was a general understanding that from an institutional perspective, **social media platforms should not enhance the visibility of Holocaust denial or distortion**. The lines begin to blur when the comments are less clearly defined and show a **lack of historical understanding**. Some argued that these comments offer an **opportunity to engage and educate**. Discussion also turned to the role of communities, the **possibility of sharing, gathering knowledge and talking back online**. There was an expression of hope that this form of '**commemorative community**' could develop more **active modes of memory practice** than posting a (virtual) candle on International Holocaust Remembrance Day.

- Are there new commemorative practices emerging on social media?
- Are new solidarities (and with them new moral, ethical actions) established through online commemoration?

In this context, participants agreed that **guidelines for standardisation and good practice should be created and shared across the sector** (being mindful of transnational activities, such as across the EU, as well as strong national memory cultures). It was proposed that a '**living document**' could also be created for moderation policies and to report experiences, issues, and to provide recommendations for using social media as they develop to help organisations and institutions stay up to date. Such documentation would also enable researchers to **study the data** and the responses as they unfold. **Increased budgets are needed for content moderation**, as staff are often managing social media profiles in their free time and **most deleted content is permanently lost** which hampers the ability for researchers to carry out long-term, extensive studies of the scale and trends of Holocaust denial, distortion, and trivialisation they receive.

METHODOLOGY

This report was formulated through a participatory workshop series, shaped by the following activities:

Participants were invited to introduce themselves and offer a brief position statement before the 1st workshop in the Padlet tool. Participants were encouraged to view each other's statements in advance of session 1.

In the 1st 2-hour workshop, participants were asked to agree on priority topics. Then they were divided into 'expertise' groups to explore these topics. Then into 'mixed' groups to share their ideas.

In each group, at least one of the project leads took on the role of minuter. These minutes were then thematically analysed and organised into a draft of the discussion section of this report. The themes were not imposed on the minutes, rather they emerged from the priorities selected by participants in the discussions.

The draft report was then circulated to participants before workshop 2.

In a 1.5-hour workshop, participants were then asked to provide feedback on the document to ensure it fully captured everyone's contributions.

The final document was circulated for review before dissemination.

As much as possible, recruitment for the workshop focused on seeking a wide variety of different expertise in relation to both Holocaust memory and education, and social media, with some participants knowledgeable about both and others more about one than the other.

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Please do get in touch if you would like to contribute to actioning any of the recommendations in this report.

Walden, Victoria Grace, and Kate Marrison, et al. (2023) Recommendations for using Social Media for Holocaust Memory and Education. Sussex: REFRAME. DOI: 10.20919/HVMK3781
