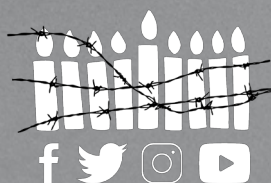




# COUNTERING **HOLOCAUST DISTORTION** ON SOCIAL MEDIA

## WHITE PAPER



COUNTERING HOLOCAUST DISTORTION  
ON SOCIAL MEDIA

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This publication was made possible through financial support from the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA Grant Strategy 2019-2023, line 2 “Countering distortion”, IHRA Grant #2020-792).

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Design and layout: Antonio Raga

How to cite this report: Manca, S., Rehm, M., Haake, S., & Guetta, S. (2022). *Countering Holocaust Distortion on Social Media. White Paper*. IHRA Project Report.

# ABOUT THE PROJECT

This publication has been developed in the framework of the project “Countering Holocaust distortion on social media. Promoting the positive use of Internet social technologies for teaching and learning about the Holocaust” (IHRA Grant Strategy 2019-2023, line 2 “Countering distortion”, IHRA Grant #2020-792), <https://holocaust-socialmedia.eu>.

The aim of the project is to provide insights and recommendations on how Holocaust museums and memorials can play a key role in safeguarding the historical record of the Holocaust and provide factually correct information. In this sense, rather than focusing on how social media can amplify distortion, antisemitism and hate speech, we have adopted a perspective according to which social media is a positive technology that may contribute to expanding Holocaust knowledge and memory especially among the younger generations.

The project team is composed of the following members and institutions: Stefania Manca (Institute of Educational Technology, Italian National Research Council; Project coordinator), Martin Rehm (Institute of Educational Consulting, University of Education Weingarten), Susanne Haake (Department of Media Education, University of Education Weingarten), Silvia Guetta (Department of Education, Languages, Intercultures, Literatures and Psychology, University of Florence), Donatella Persico (Institute of Educational Technology, Italian National Research Council), Davide Capperucci (Department of Education, Languages, Intercultures, Literatures and Psychology, University of Florence).

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Three participating organisations provided support and guidance: Yad Vashem, Mémorial de la Shoah de Paris, Mauthausen Memorial.

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Editors of this publication are Stefania Manca (Institute of Educational Technology, Italian National Research Council), Martin Rehm (Institute of Educational Consulting, University of Education Weingarten), Susanne Haake (Department of Media Education, University of Education Weingarten), Silvia Guetta (Department of Education, Languages, Intercultures, Literatures and Psychology, University of Florence).

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We are very grateful to the following organisations, which offered their advice and expertise to the project team and actively collaborated in collecting valuable data: Fondazione Fossoli (Italy), Fondazione Museo della Shoah (Italy), Memoriale della Shoah di Milano (Italy), Museo Nazionale dell'Ebraismo Italiano e della Shoah – MEIS (Italy), Gedenkstätte Buchenwald (Germany), Gedenkstätte Bergen-Belsen (Germany), KZ-Gedenkstätte Dachau (Germany), KZ-Gedenkstätte Neuengamme (Germany), Mahn- und Gedenkstätte Ravensbrück (Germany). Without them, this project would not be possible.

Special gratitude is expressed to Aurora Fino for her organisational support.

For the language proofing of this publication, particular thanks are extended to Stella de Robertis.

Members of the International Advisory Board responsible for guiding the publication's production are: Prof. Ilya Levin (Tel Aviv University), Dr. Michael Gray (Hereford Cathedral School, UK), Dr. Dietmar Sedlaczec (KZ-Gedenkstätte Moringen).



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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## THE CONTEXT

Abuse, excuse, misrepresentation and manipulation of the history of the Holocaust are far from a fringe phenomenon. They have an international dimension and considerable weight (e.g., governments that seek to minimize their historical responsibility, conspiracy theorists who accuse Jews of exaggerating their suffering for financial gain, and online users who make use of imagery and language associated with the Holocaust for political, ideological, or commercial purposes unrelated to its history). As for social media, while their rise has enabled individuals and groups to connect on a global level and to gain instant access to information and knowledge, they have also allowed dissemination and spread of hateful content, including antisemitism and Holocaust denial and distortion, at an unprecedented rate.

## THE PROBLEM

Although agencies and institutions concerned with Holocaust education and remembrance are well aware of the growing role of digital communication, there is little understanding of how small- and medium-sized Holocaust museums and memorials use social media to disseminate knowledge and memory of the Holocaust to the general public and to counter manipulation and distortion of Holocaust history. Both academic research and stakeholders have so far focused on the mission and practices of major Holocaust agencies, while neglecting to investigate the potential and critical issues that small and medium-sized museums and memorials face in both disseminating historical content and dealing with the phenomenon of distortion on social media.

## THE CONTRIBUTION

This project focuses on a group of Holocaust museums and memorials located in two countries – Italy and Germany – in order to investigate their use of the main social media - Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube - for the purposes of disseminating historical content, carrying out commemorative practices and countering the spread of Holocaust distortion. The project adopts an approach that conceives social media as a positive technology both for detecting good practices and for exploring critical issues in the very use of social media themselves. The approach is based on an investigative method that employs a range of quantitative and qualitative research tools. The idea is to analyse how museums and memorials use social media to expand Holocaust knowledge and memory, especially among the younger generations, and to activate groups of users and co-creators involved in user-generated content to protect the facts about the Holocaust and mitigate the challenges of distortion.

## THE RESULTS

The various analyses carried out in the project have revealed a number of good practices and limitations that can currently be found in the social media profiles of the surveyed museums and memorials. Furthermore, although Holocaust remembrance has become a global, transcultural phenomenon, especially within European countries, national differences also exist between different local environments. The results achieved have made it possible to identify a number of current limitations, such as a mismatch between scholarly debates and public knowledge, limited bi-directional interaction with social media users, and the provision of materials that are not generally suitable for younger generations. A number of recommendations and guidelines have also been produced, such as further expanding historical knowledge of the Holocaust, investigating users' preconceptions and biases, promoting the digital culture of remembrance, actively involving the follower/fan communities, and networking between entities with limited resources to share good practices and plan joint activities. These are all measures that Holocaust museums and memorials may adopt to encourage the development of forms of Holocaust knowledge and remembrance that are participatory, innovative and critical.

# INTRODUCTION

This White Paper presents the main results of the project “Countering Holocaust distortion on social media. Promoting the positive use of Internet social technologies for teaching and learning about the Holocaust”. The aim of the project was to provide insights and recommendations on how Holocaust museums and memorials can play a key role in safeguarding the historical record of the Holocaust and in providing factually correct information, while also receiving help to limit the phenomena of antisemitism and Holocaust distortion on social media through implementation of a number of targeted strategies.

Memorials and museums are increasingly important bulwarks against Holocaust distortion: they have manifold opportunities for safeguarding the historical record of the Holocaust and need help to face the challenges posed by those who distort the truth. In this sense, rather than focusing on how social media can amplify distortion, antisemitism and hate speech, the project has adopted a perspective according to which social media are a positive technology that may contribute, on the one hand, to expanding Holocaust knowledge and memory especially among the younger generations, and, on the other hand, to activating groups of users and co-creators involved in user-generated content in order to protect the facts about the Holocaust and mitigate the challenges of distortion.

Social media such as Twitter, Facebook, TikTok, YouTube and Instagram have become the preserve of an increasing number of users, who are exposed to thousands of different types of textual and visual information on a daily basis. As of January 2022, 3.96 billion total social media users across all platforms have been counted, with an average person bouncing



between seven different social networks per month and with 95 minutes per day as the average amount of time that adults spend on social media across all platforms. Among the various platforms, TikTok was found to be the fastest-growing social network, with a staggering 105% user growth rate in the US over the past two years (SproutSocial, 2022). This figure is particularly important considering that TikTok has become the platform of choice for children and young adults and that a growing number of Holocaust organisations, museums and memorials are entering the scene with the clear intention of reaching this target group. Despite an increase in hate speech and the alarming presence of antisemitic messages in the various media formats supported by the platform (video clips, songs, comments, texts, and pictures) (Weimann & Masri, 2021), experts have started to analyse ways of seriously dealing with the complex history of the Holocaust and with antisemitism on TikTok (Divon & Ebbrecht-Hartmann, 2022; Ebbrecht-Hartmann & Divon, 2022).

While social media have enabled individuals and groups to connect on a global level and gain instant access to information and knowledge, they have also allowed the spread and dissemination of hateful content, including antisemitism and Holocaust denial and distortion at an unprecedented rate due to the potential virality of content (Nahon & Hemsley, 2013; Wetzel, 2017). It is nevertheless important to emphasise that antisemitism and Holocaust distortion are more likely to surface on some platforms than others. Platforms like TikTok, for instance, until recently were less open to regulation, public pressure and measures to defend users from hateful content or did not apply their own Terms of Service regarding hate speech or other offensive content. However, on Holocaust Remembrance Day in 2022, UNESCO and the World Jewish Congress launched a new partnership with the platform to tackle Holocaust distortion and denial online<sup>1</sup>. Users searching for terms relating to

<sup>1</sup> *TikTok joins forces with UNESCO and the WJC to combat denial and distortion of the Holocaust online*, <https://en.unesco.org/news/tiktok-joins-forces-unesco-and-wjc-combat-denial-and-distortion-holocaust-online>

<sup>2</sup> For more information about policy actions taken by social media companies to address online antisemitism, see *Online Antisemitism: A Toolkit for Civil Society* (ISD, 2022).

the Holocaust will be redirected to verified information. In January 2021, Facebook had already reached an agreement with UNESCO and the World Jewish Congress to redirect users searching for terms related to the Holocaust or Holocaust denial to the website AboutHolocaust.Org ([www.aboutholocaust.org](http://www.aboutholocaust.org)). The website provides factual answers to fundamental questions about the Holocaust, presents the facts of the Holocaust, educates readers on the historical roots of the genocide, its

processes and consequences, and now comprises 19 languages for social media users around the world. Today, both Facebook and TikTok users searching for terms related to the Holocaust, such as 'Holocaust victims' or 'Holocaust survivor', will see a banner at the top of their search results which invites them to visit the AboutHolocaust.Org website<sup>2</sup>.

Another important initiative to address Holocaust denial and distortion as contemporary forms of antisemitism was promoted by UNESCO, the UN, the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance and the European Commission, which launched the campaign #ProtectTheFacts (<https://www.againstholocaustdistortion.org>) in January 2021. This international campaign, which is available in six languages, is aimed at raising awareness of Holocaust distortion and suggesting measures to recognise and counter it. Besides, The IHRA Toolkit Against Holocaust Distortion (<https://againstdistortiontoolkit.holocaustremembrance.com/>) was designed to help policy and decision makers as well as civil society take steps towards recognizing and countering Holocaust distortion. It provides leaders with practical tools, guidance and sample activities to empower them as ambassadors for change – in their institutions, governments, and communities.

Among the recommendations developed to help address Holocaust distortion, the most significant are those contained in the IHRA Report “Recognizing and Countering Holocaust Distortion. Recommendations for Policy and Decision Makers”<sup>3</sup>. However, while the IHRA report addresses countering Holocaust distortion as a broader phenomenon, this project concentrates on guidelines and recommendations specifically focused on how museums and memorials can address Holocaust distortion on social media.

Holocaust museums<sup>4</sup> are among the main agents for Holocaust education, awareness-raising and memorialisation. Through online and on-site exhibitions, conferences and seminars, educational activities and social media strategies, Holocaust museums play a key role in disseminating awareness and knowledge of the Holocaust among broad segments of the population (Oztig, 2022). One reason for their prominence is that they do not act as isolated actors but are embedded in Holocaust memorial cultures (re)constituted through the practices of international organisations, ceremonies and personal stories of survivors.

Memorials and museums are also increasingly crucial in contrasting Holocaust distortion. Since they can reach large sections of the population, their commitment to both commemoration and education may prove to be a major pillar against distortion. From this point of view, their role as gatekeepers in digital communication may become increasingly prominent in promoting educational and counter-distortion actions. As recently stressed by Elisabeth Ungureanu, Director of Communications and Administration at the “Elie Wiesel” National Institute for the Study of the Holocaust<sup>5</sup>, museums and memorials can play an essential role in safeguarding the historical record of the Holocaust and making accessible artifacts and documents which they hold in trust for society (*Preserving history*) and can continue to be physical and digital places of learning for the diverse sectors of civil society (*Educating society*). Additionally, museums and memorials can counter Holocaust distortion by engaging their social media followers: they can use the potential of communication not only to build up a passive following, but also to activate a group of co-creators involved in user-generated content - thus moving on from being gatekeepers to gameplayers or part of a community learning together (*Building community*). Distortive narratives are more unlikely to enter the mainstream, and distortion will be detected more easily, if all the following actions are combined: making historical evidence available to all, educating people to critically reflect on their own role in preventing distortion, and providing digital spaces for people to explore complex stories for learning and inspiration.

The core aim of this project was to raise museums and memorials’ awareness of the potential of social media channels for Holocaust education and for countering Holocaust distortion. In this way, they can engage their public not only for promoting their cultural activities and initiatives, but also by producing good practices of social media adoption as a means for disseminating accurate historical information and for community building in order to minimise trivialization and distortion. In order to achieve this objective, it was necessary to first carry out an investigation of social media practices enacted both by museums and memorials, and by users. This provided the background for a fan/follower questionnaire and for interviews with those responsible for social media communication in order to gain further in-depth insights into the handling of Holocaust distortion on social

<sup>3</sup> *Recognizing and Countering Holocaust Distortion. Recommendations for Policy and Decision Makers*, <https://www.holocaustremembrance.com/resources/reports/recognizing-countering-holocaust-distortion-recommendations>

<sup>4</sup> In this report, from time to time we will use the term “Holocaust museum” for brevity to refer to both museums and memorials, as defined by the Encyclopaedia Britannica: “any of several educational institutions and research centres dedicated to preserving the experiences of people who were victimized by the Nazis and their collaborators during the Holocaust (1933–45)” (Parrott-Sheffer, 2019: n.a.).

<sup>5</sup> *What is the role of museums and memorials in countering distortion?*, <https://www.againstholocaustdistortion.org/news/museums-and-memorials-countering-distortion>

media channels. Besides, it was also important to analyse the range and quality of content usually provided on social media by museums and memorials. This investigation was conducted in line with global recommendations for countering Holocaust distortion, such as the #ProtectTheFacts campaign<sup>6</sup>, which aims to promote awareness of Holocaust history. In order to offer further guidance and suggestions to combat distortion, it was therefore important to understand to what extent disseminating historical facts on social channels is standard practice in museums and memorials, and to what extent this is reflected by users. Once this investigation had been carried out, it was possible to draft further suggestions more specifically aimed at containing the phenomenon of distortion and considering other measures, such as those recommended by the IHRA.

<sup>6</sup> #ProtectTheFacts,  
<https://www.againstholocaustdistortion.org>

<sup>7</sup> "Holocaust Distortion: A Growing Threat",  
<https://youtu.be/ovdF4pGhew8>

In addition to the reported activities, a number of focus groups were set up with museums and memorials, and with stakeholders from secondary target groups (policy makers and media specialist), with the aim of assessing knowledge and effectiveness of the IHRA recommendations (e.g., the use of specific hashtags, such as #SayNoToDistortion,

participation in the #ProtectTheFacts campaign, the use and promotion on social media of the short video "Holocaust Distortion: A Growing Threat"<sup>7</sup>, etc.) and identifying further measures to combat distortion.

Specifically, research activities involved two specific countries which were partners in the project – Italy and Germany – and focused on analysing the use of four social media platforms: Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube<sup>8</sup>. Nine museums and memorials collaborated in the investigation, carried out through a number of activities: Fondazione Fossoli (Italy), Fondazione Museo della Shoah (Italy), Memoriale della Shoah di Milano (Italy), Museo Nazionale dell'Ebraismo Italiano e della Shoah - MEIS (Italy), Gedenkstätte Buchenwald (Germany), Gedenkstätte Bergen-Belsen (Germany), KZ-Gedenkstätte Dachau (Germany), KZ-Gedenkstätte Neuengamme (Germany), Mahn- und Gedenkstätte Ravensbrück (Germany).

This White Paper adopts a mixed-method research approach and is based on a review of academic literature, current media reports, public-oriented government documents, active involvement of museums and memorials and on input from various stakeholders in secondary target groups (e.g., media professionals, educational policy makers).

The main results of the project are presented below, through a brief description of the main activities that have been performed. A section is devoted to the implications of the various results for the drafting of guidelines and recommendations for museums and memorials to counteract Holocaust distortion on social media.

<sup>8</sup> At the time the proposal was submitted and received a grant, TikTok had not yet had the relevance for Holocaust issues that it has today. Moreover, none of the museums and memorials that collaborated in the project had an active profile on this platform.

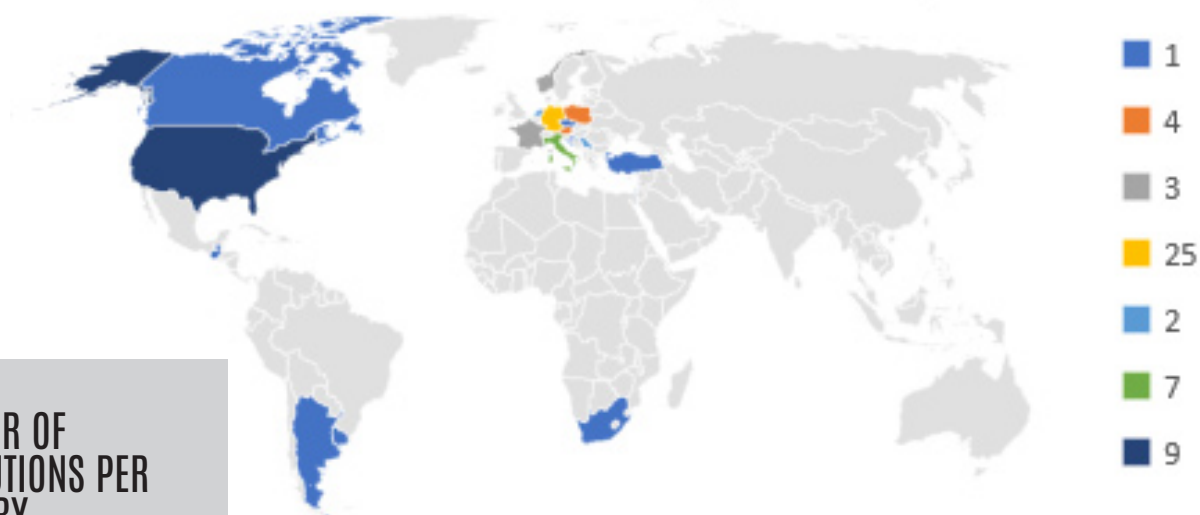
# USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA BY HOLOCAUST MUSEUMS AND MEMORIALS AN INTERNATIONAL ANALYSIS

An initial investigation was conducted in the first half of 2021 with the aim of revealing the perspective of Holocaust museums and memorials on their social media use. The survey explored attitudes, benefits, challenges and modalities of social media usage and also focused on how the COVID-19 pandemic affected modes of commemoration and education on social media<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> For a complete report on the results, see Manca (2021c).

The study involved 69 Holocaust memorials and museums across different countries, of which 61 use at least one social media platform as a communication channel. More than half have used social media for over three years. The institutions were analysed in terms of “size” (small, medium, or large) to inspect how they differ in their attitudes towards digital and online practices, and to what extent they circulate Holocaust memory on social media.

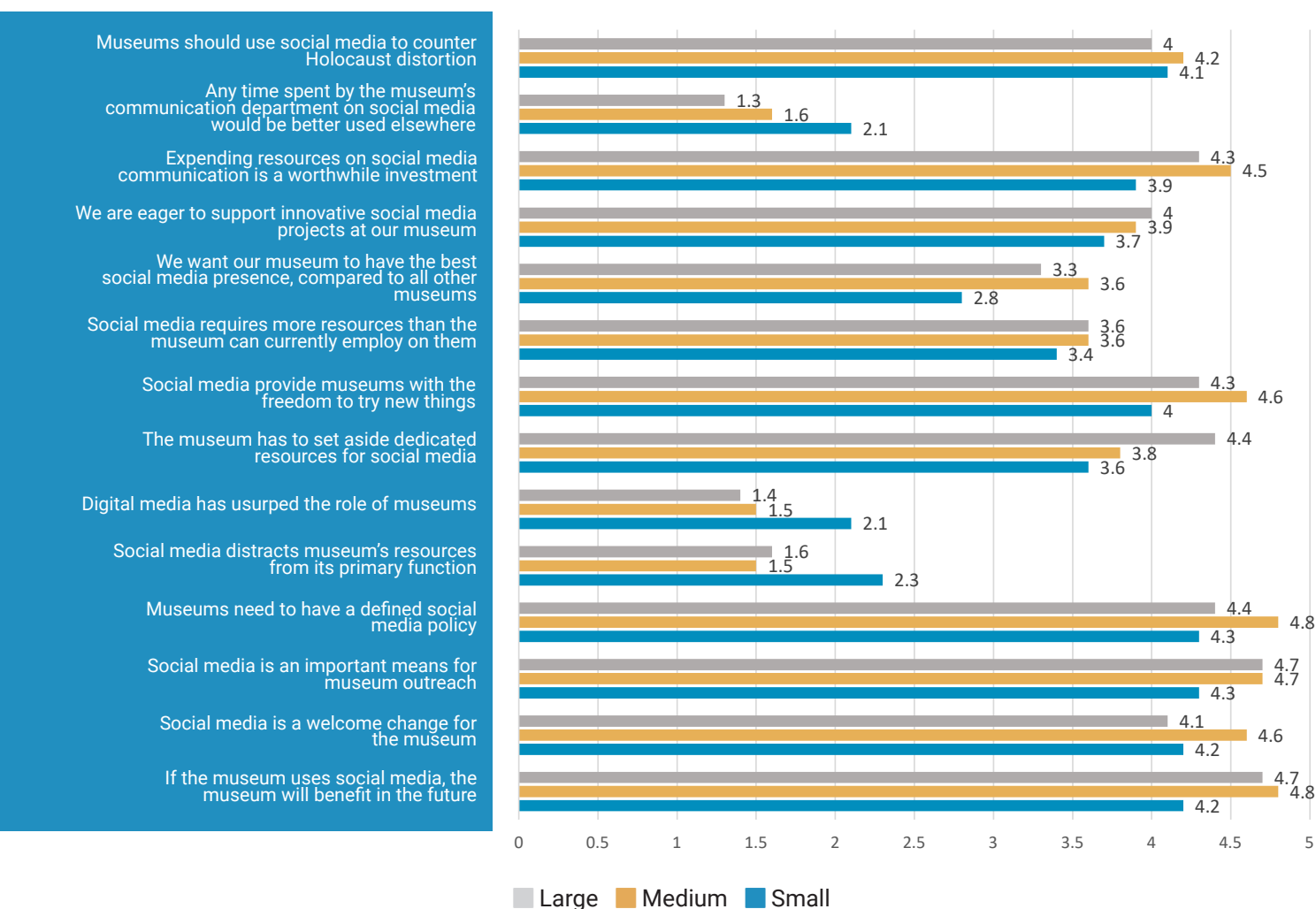
NUMBER OF  
INSTITUTIONS PER  
COUNTRY





Memorials and museums have an overall positive attitude towards social media, with large and medium-sized institutions that tend to view social media more positively, although some concerns were expressed mostly by smaller institutions, especially due to lack of resources. This is because these institutions often have limited staff, a highly localised audience and possibly low technological and digital skills, which are essential for social media communication. As stressed in similar studies (see Agostino & Arnaboldi, 2021), lack of social media competencies may prevent museums from offering real-time data for visitor entertainment and interaction, as well as dialogue between the museum and its online visitors. On a positive note, use of social media to counter Holocaust distortion was rated high by all three subgroups of organisations.

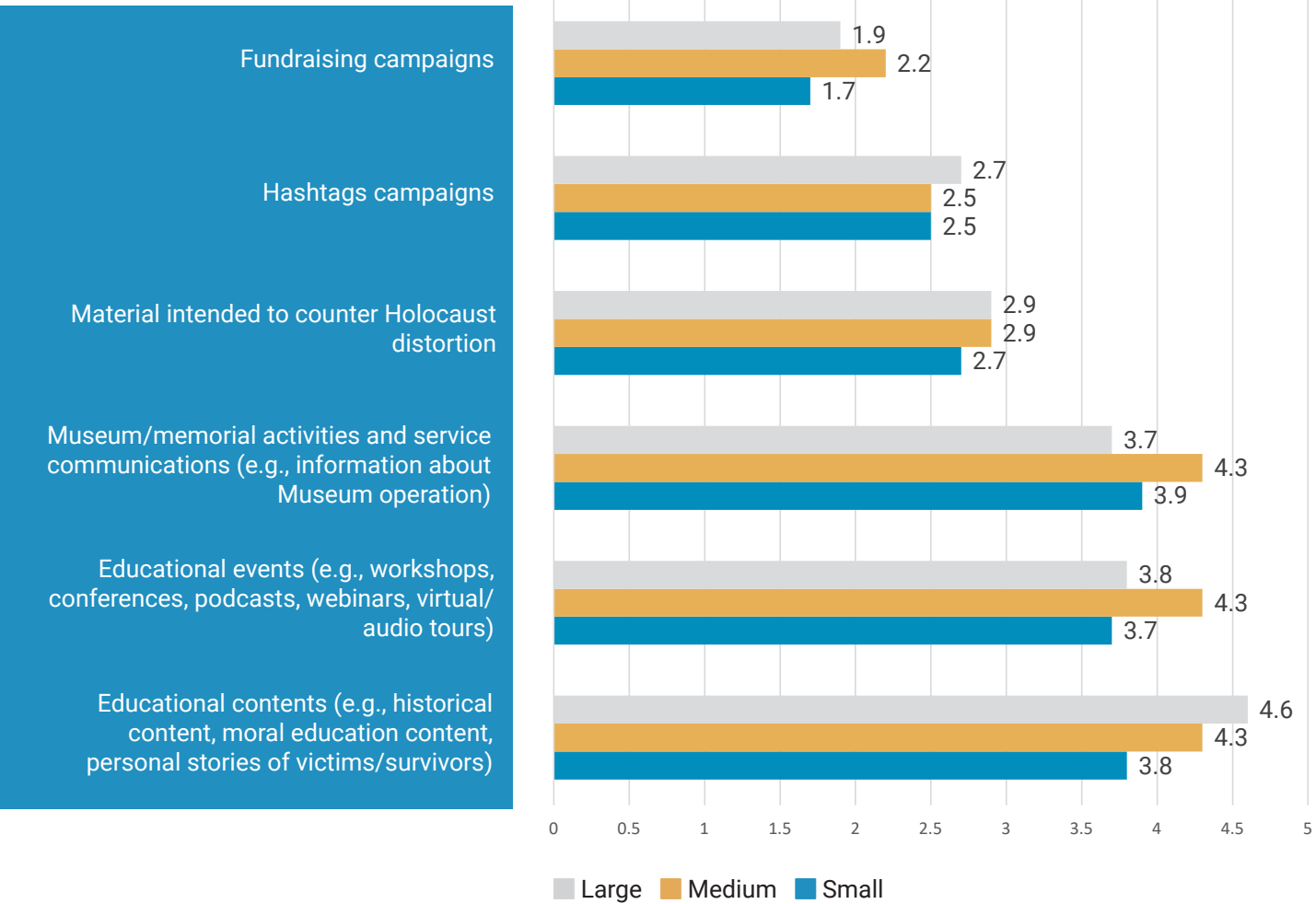
## ATTITUDES TOWARDS SOCIAL MEDIA



Overall, museums and memorials tend to concentrate on a few platforms only. Facebook is the most frequently used, followed by Instagram and Twitter. As for social media staff, almost half of the institutions have an internal social media manager, while in one third of cases the Director is in charge of social media profiles. Respondents also declared that just over one third of those in charge of social media profiles have specific expertise in social media management or marketing.

As for the type of content that is being published, respondents report that educational content, information regarding educational events and information regarding institutional activities are the most frequently posted types of content, consistently with museums' role as providers of education and awareness regarding the Holocaust. Hashtag campaigns, which are commonly used on Twitter and Instagram but not so much on Facebook, are not very frequent in postings, probably for the very reason that their prevalent platform is Facebook. However, it is expected that this mode of communication may increase in the future, as underlined by other initiatives in the field of cultural heritage (Uimonen, 2020) and in recent initiatives by Holocaust organisations (Ebbrecht-Hartmann & Henig, 2021; Walden, 2021a). Fundraising campaigns are also rarely posted, although they are expected to grow in the near future as they can also be seen as a powerful outreach mode (see Barnes, 2019).

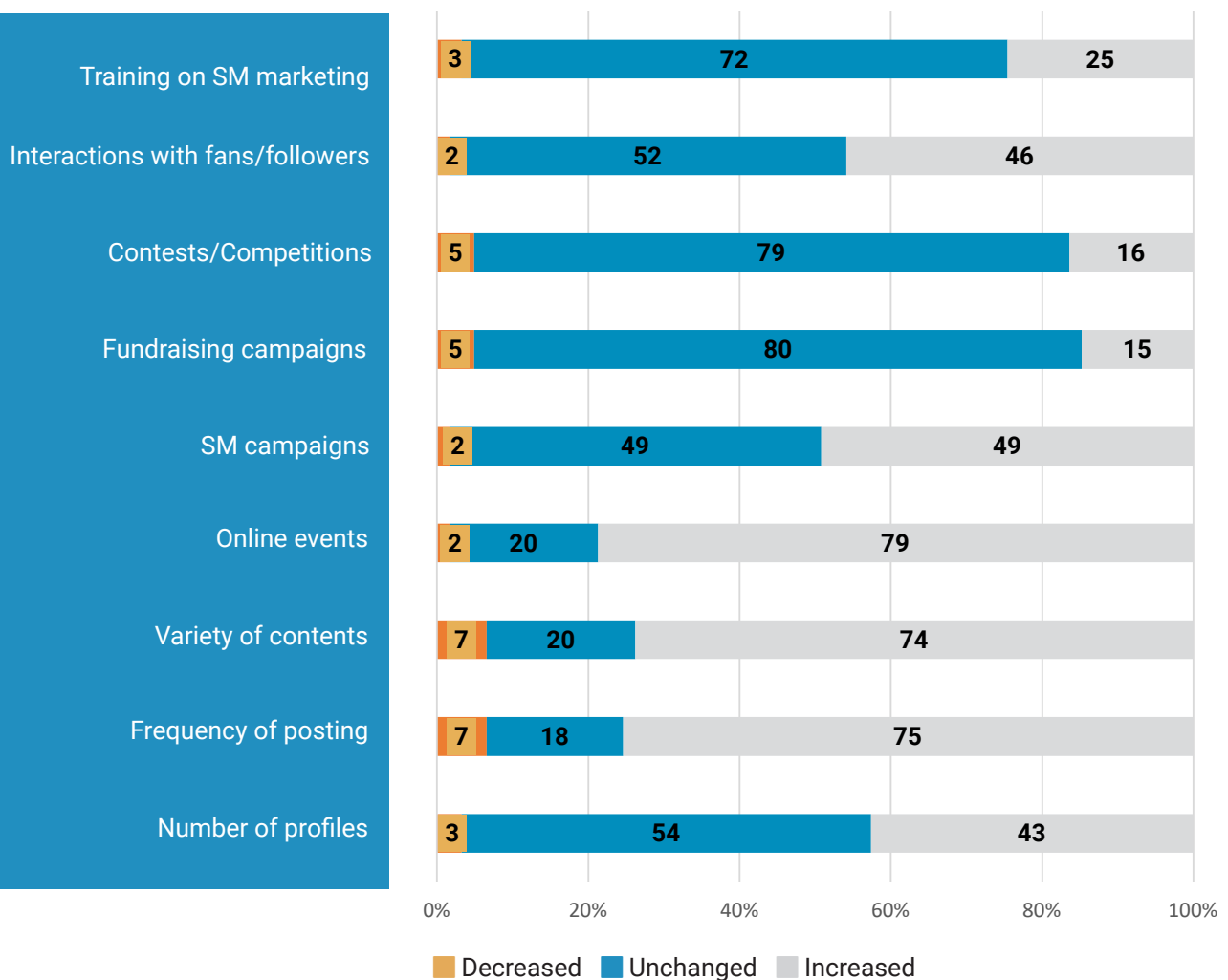
### TYPES OF CONTENT



Networking is an important activity for most museums and memorials, with almost all respondents reporting that their institution follows the social media profiles of other museums/memorials and more than half declaring they draw inspiration from those profiles.

As for changes induced by the COVID-19 pandemic, a very large majority reported pandemic-induced changes in various activities. Most institutions have increased the number of online events, the frequency of posting, and the variety of contents. Other activities such as fundraising campaigns and contests/competitions have remained constant, while training on social media marketing has only increased in a limited number of cases.

## TO WHAT EXTENT THE MUSEUM/MEMORIAL HAS INCREASED OR DECREASED THE FOLLOWING ACTIVITIES DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC (%)



The results of the survey were further complemented with data from the metrics usually employed to measure engagement and outreach on social media in order to inspect levels of activity, interaction and popularity in the museums' Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube profiles<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> For a detailed report of this study, see Manca, Passarelli & Rehm (2022).

The amount of content published on the three most interactive platforms (Facebook, Twitter and Instagram) shows similar trends, except for activity on Twitter, which is more intense for larger institutions. This difference can be explained not only by the more dynamic nature of Twitter, which provides a quick way to disseminate information, but also by the greater “political” and civic engagement that large institutions tend to have on this platform, such as in the case of the Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum and its intense activity in conducting Twitter campaigns against Holocaust denial and antisemitism (Dalziel, 2021).

In terms of interaction, Facebook posts tend to receive more reactions than Twitter posts, while post interaction was found to be higher on Instagram than on the other three platforms. On Instagram, user experience is enhanced by widespread use of pictures, short videos and stories, contributing to a higher rate of engagement than on Facebook and Twitter and, on average, greater interaction per post.

Large museums are a “high card” that tends to aggregate most of the interest. With the exception of the Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum’s Twitter profile, which accounts for over one million followers, most of the following takes place on Facebook. For Instagram and YouTube, the amount of content does not promote page popularity, but it does increase the amount of interactivity (although, as noted, for YouTube interactivity is usually very low). In the case of Facebook, readership is relatively more passive as it is easier to engage on a superficial level (subscribing to the page), but harder to engage on a deeper level (having conversations).

Overall engagement and interaction remain low on all analysed platforms, and the percentage of comments and reactions from Facebook pages with respect to user comments is equally low. Comments and interactions were found to be particularly scarce on YouTube, where comments are often disabled, and users are far less likely in general to leave comments.



# USERS' INTEREST AND PERSPECTIVES IN TWO COUNTRIES: ITALY AND GERMANY

The nine Holocaust museums and memorials that took part in the project (based in Italy and Germany) distributed a specific survey on their social media channels (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube) so that a study could be conducted into user interaction with their social media profiles.

The objective was to collect information about users' experience and interest in Holocaust issues, their use of social media to access content posted by Holocaust museums on their profiles/pages, and opinions/satisfaction with the use of social media by these museums.

The survey took place between February and December 2021 and resulted in 530 useful responses (276 from Italy and 254 from Germany).

<sup>1</sup> A significant portion of German users (39.0%) indicated Instagram as the social media they referred to in their answers, against only 2.5% of Italian respondents.

<sup>2</sup> Twitter was selected by 13.8% of German respondents against only 2.9% of Italian respondents.

<sup>3</sup> The German sample had a higher proportion of students (12.2% vs 4.0%), while there were more teachers in the Italian sample (28.3% vs 3.9%).

The majority of respondents were Facebook users (80.4% in Italy and 46.1% in Germany), although in Italy more participants selected Facebook and YouTube as the social platforms they referred to in their answers and in Germany more participants selected Instagram<sup>1</sup> and Twitter<sup>2</sup>. Respondents were predominantly women (75.4% in Italy and 56.7% in Germany) with an average age of 47.9 years (52.3 years in Italy and 42.4 in Germany) and a higher education qualification (a university degree was held by 73.2% of respondents in Italy and by 67.7% of respondents in Germany). Respondents had a variety of professional backgrounds, including teachers, clerical staff, retired people and students<sup>3</sup>.

64.0% RESPONSES FROM FACEBOOK USERS,  
20.2% RESPONSES FROM TWITTER USERS

66.4%  
FEMALES

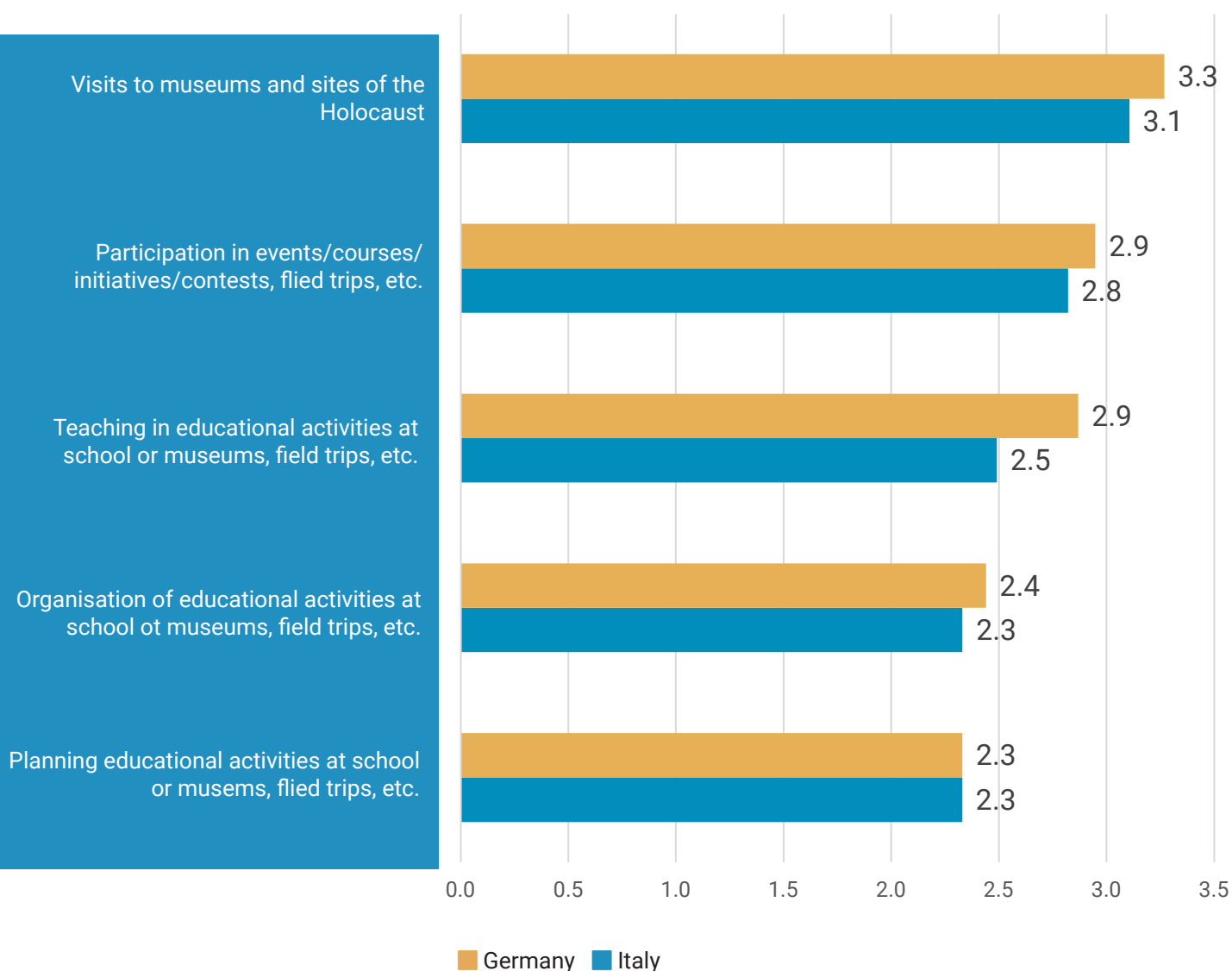
47.9  
YEARS

70.6 % HIGHER  
EDUCATION  
QUALIFICATION

16.6% TEACHERS  
12.6% RETIRED  
10.2% CLERICAL STAFF  
7.9% STUDENTS

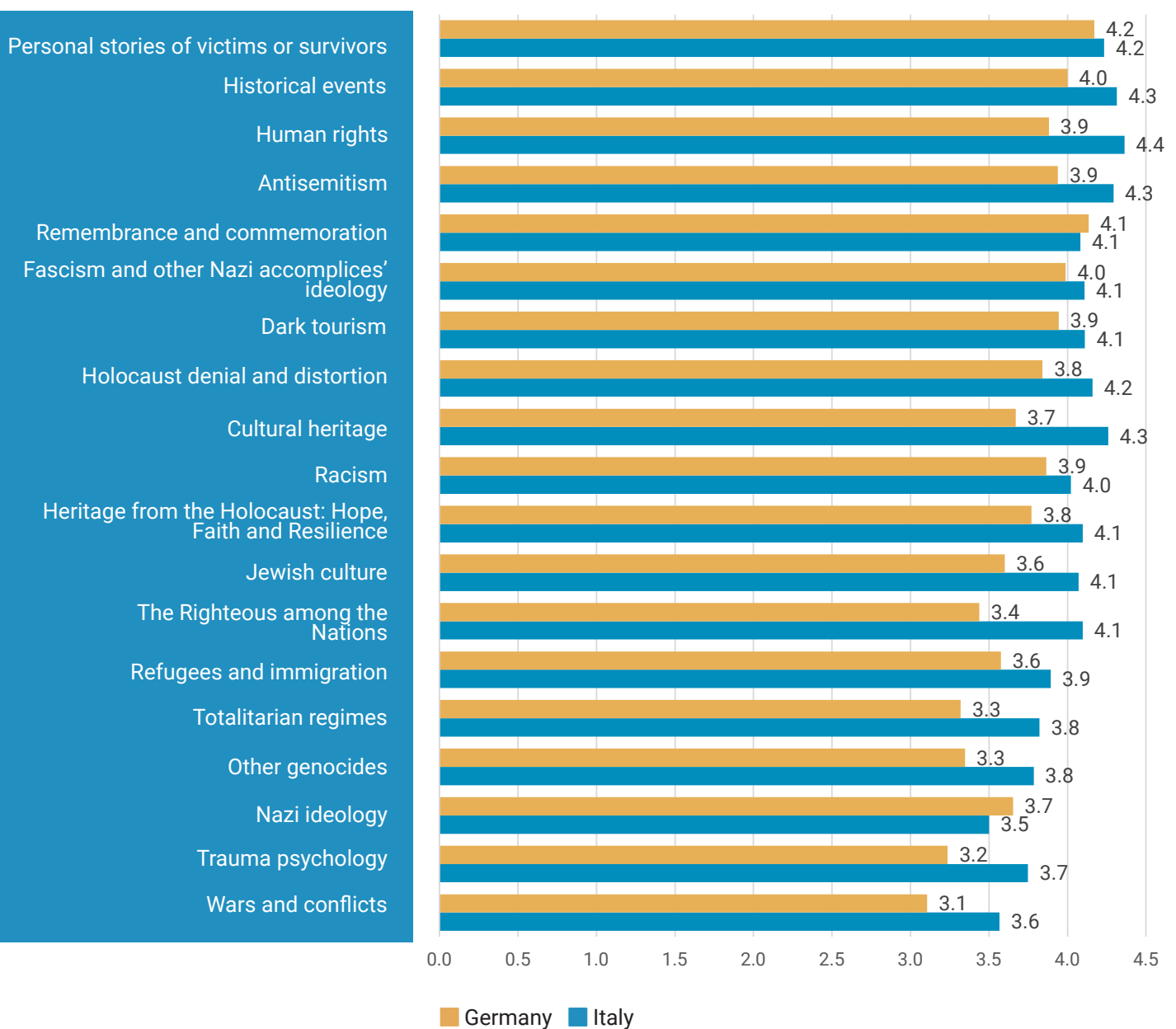
When investigating users' experience in a number of activities related to Holocaust education, it was found that "Visits to museums and sites of the Holocaust" was the most frequent activity, especially for the German respondents, followed by "Participation in events/courses, initiatives/contests, field trips, etc.", and by "Teaching in educational activities at school or museums, field trips, etc.", with the latter activity more frequent in the German sample.

## EXPERIENCE



If we look at the issues that appeal to users the most, at the top of the list we can see “Personal stories of victims or survivors”, “Historical events”, but also “Human Rights” and “Antisemitism”, as well as “Remembrance and Commemoration” and “Fascism and other Nazi accomplices’ ideology”. Less attention seems to be paid to issues such as “Wars and conflicts”, “Trauma psychology”, “Nazi ideology” and “Other genocides”. In almost all cases, averages in the Italian sample were statistically higher than in the German sample.

## INTEREST OF USERS



In terms of usership, half of the respondents have followed the page or profile for 1 to 3 years, and a quarter either for less than one year or for over three years respectively. Almost half started following the page or profile on the basis of a personal search. More than half follow at least one other museum from the same country and at least one international museum<sup>4</sup>. Finally, almost half only access their page or profile when they receive a notification of new content.

<sup>4</sup> More German users tend to follow international museums than Italian users (68.1% vs. 41.3%).

49.6% have been following the page or profile for 1 to 3 years, 26.4% for less than a year, 24.0% for more than 3 years

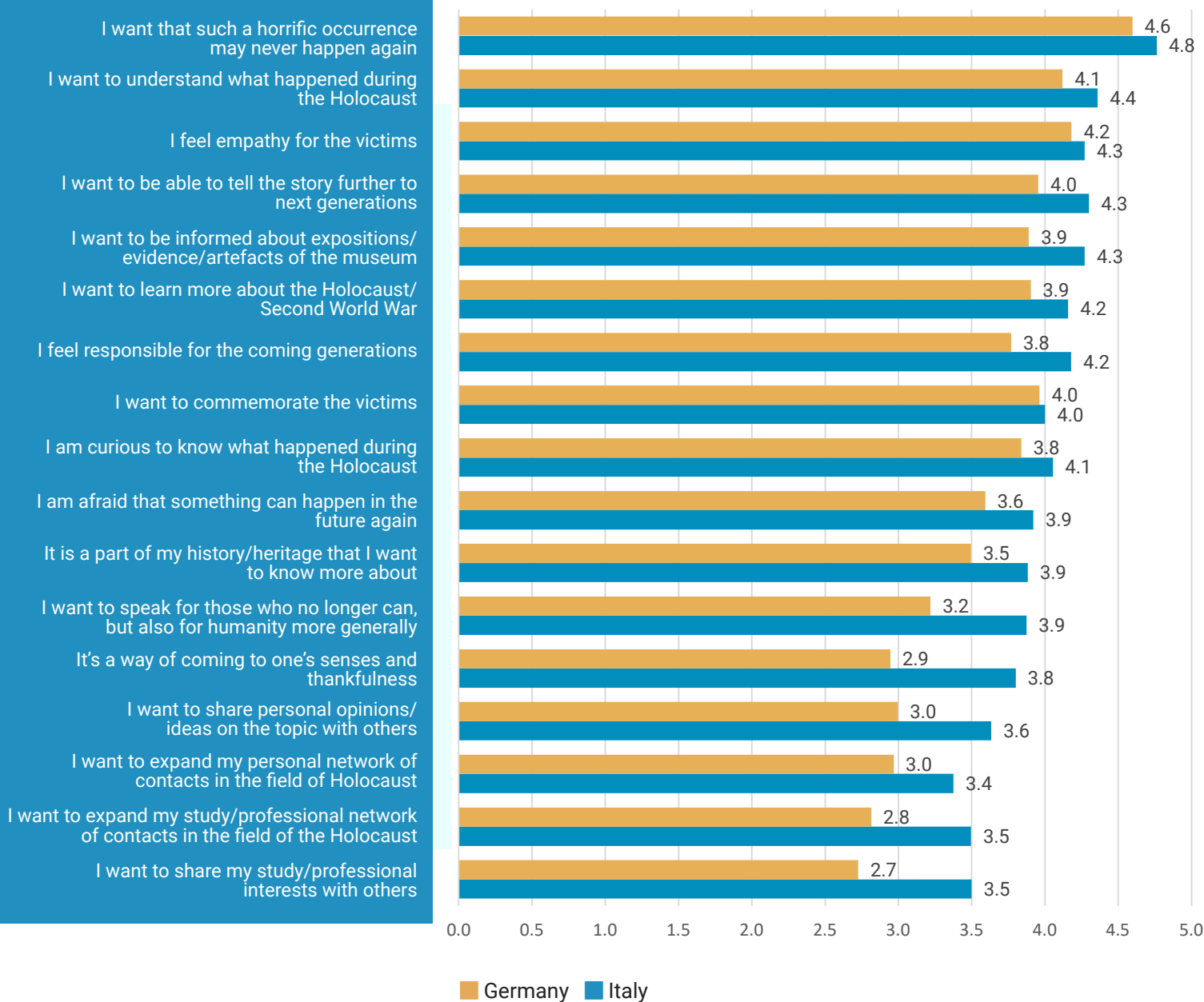
44.7% decided to follow the page or profile on the basis of a personal search, 15.2% saw the link on another page or profile

53.4% follow the pages or profiles of at least another Holocaust museums/memorials in their own country, 54.2% follow the social media profiles of at least one international museums (e.g., Yad Vashem, Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum, USHMM, etc.)

39.9% access their page or profile only when they receive a notification, 27.5% weekly and 18.2% daily

The most important reasons given for following a page/profile are the desire for such events not to happen again, the need to understand the historical facts leading up to the Holocaust, empathy for the victims, etc. Less important are factors such as the desire to expand one's network of personal and professional contacts and the need to share with others. Also, for these items, in almost all cases average values in the Italian sample were statistically higher than in the German sample.

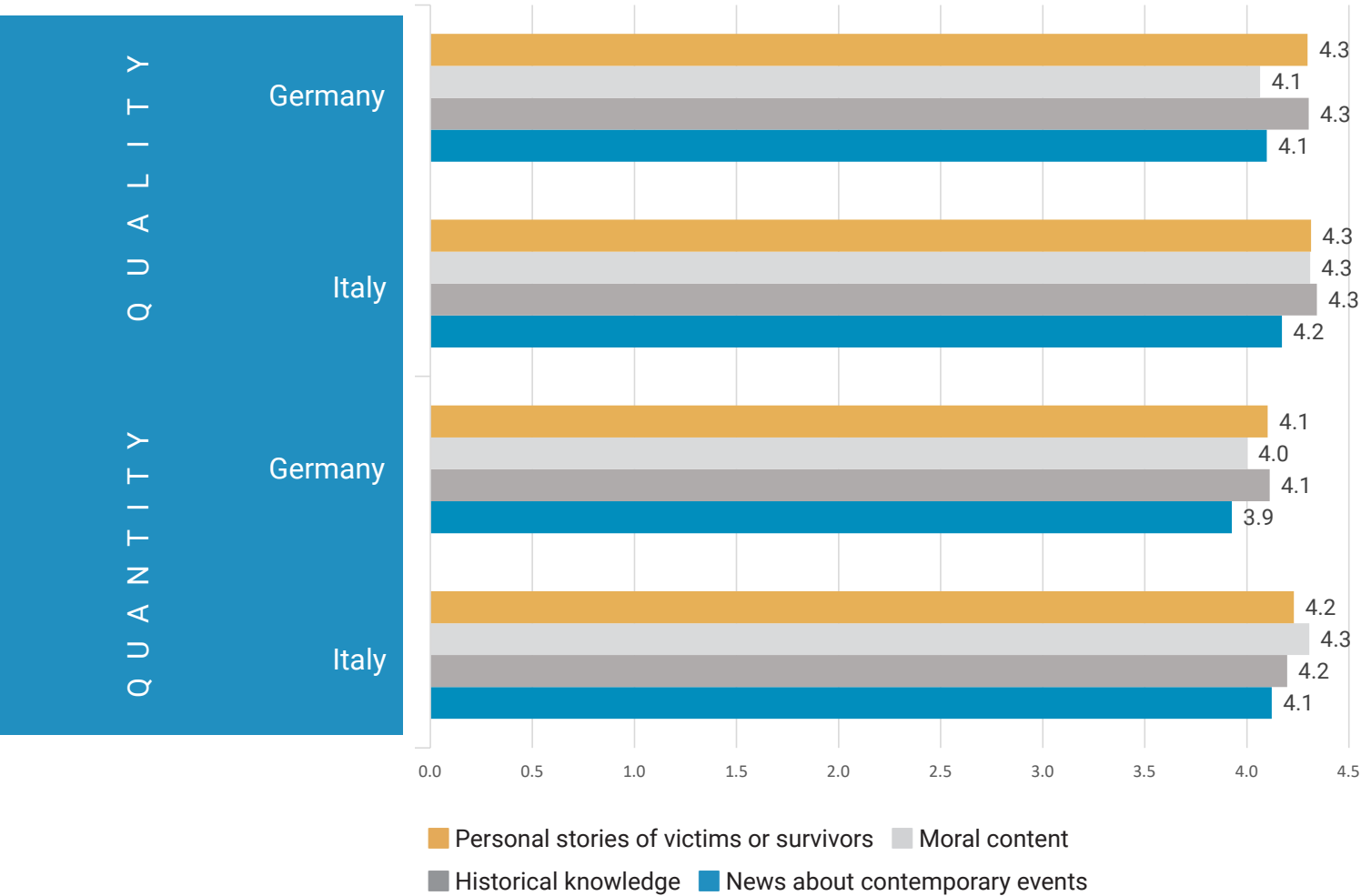
## MOTIVATION TO FOLLOW THE PAGE OR PROFILE



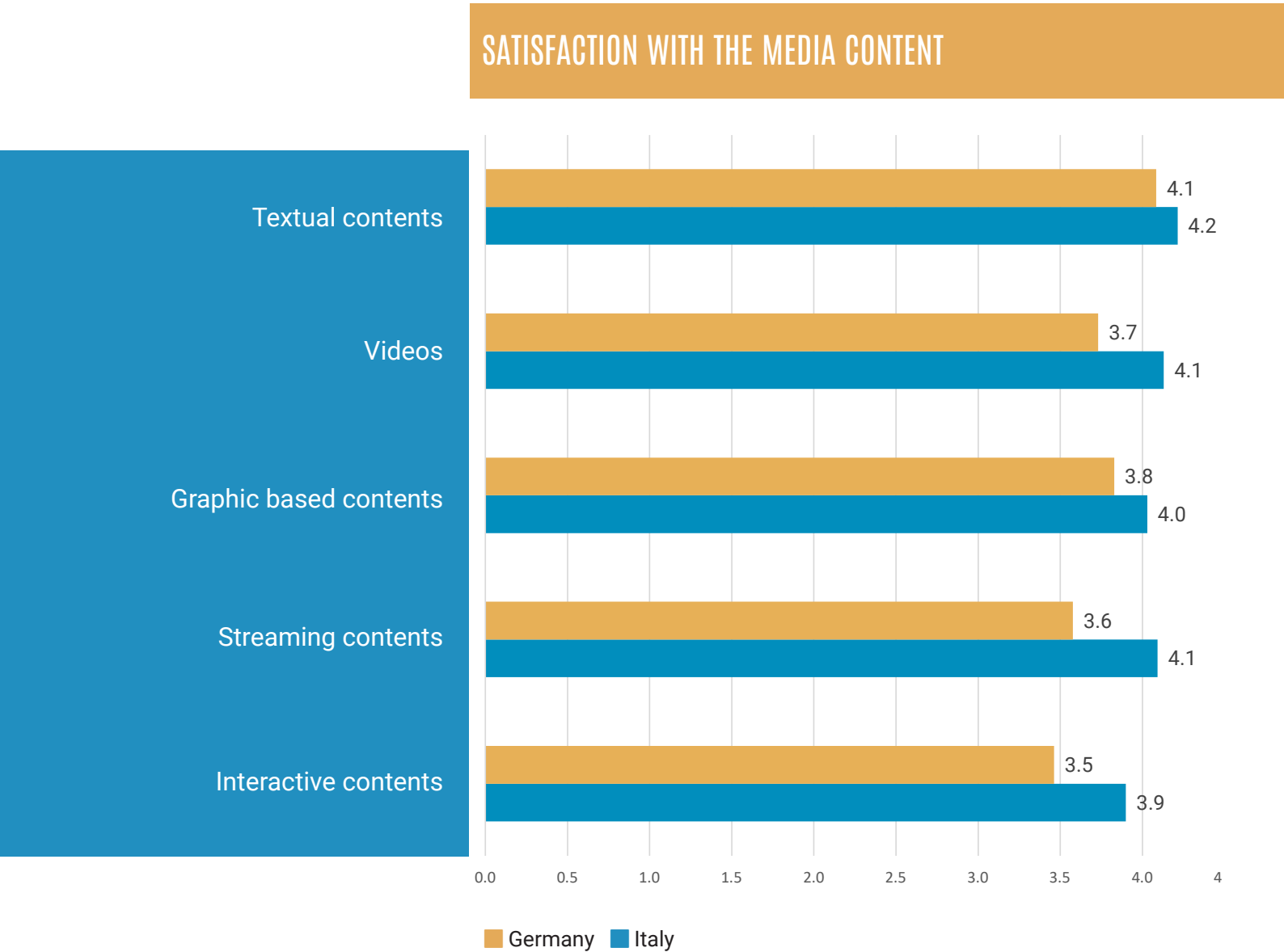


On the whole, users are satisfied with the quantity and quality of content related to historical knowledge, the ethical and moral message, and the personal stories of victims and survivors, but a little less so with the information provided about contemporary events. Overall, satisfaction with quantity and quality of “Moral content” was found to be statistically higher in the Italian sample.

### SATISFACTION WITH QUANTITY AND QUALITY OF CONTENT

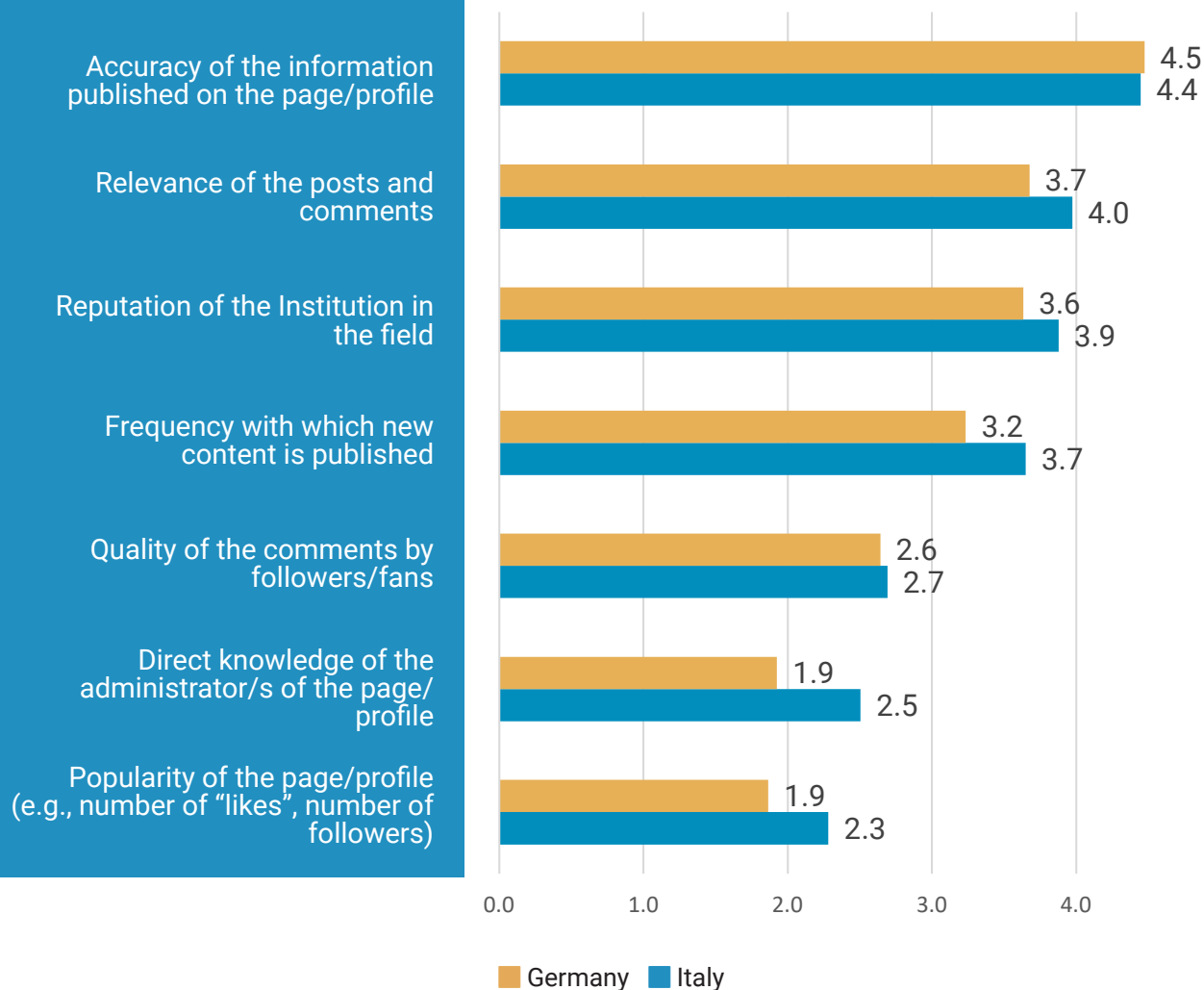


In terms of satisfaction with media content, textual content is the most appreciated, while interactive content is the least appreciated, with overall statistically higher values in the Italian sample.



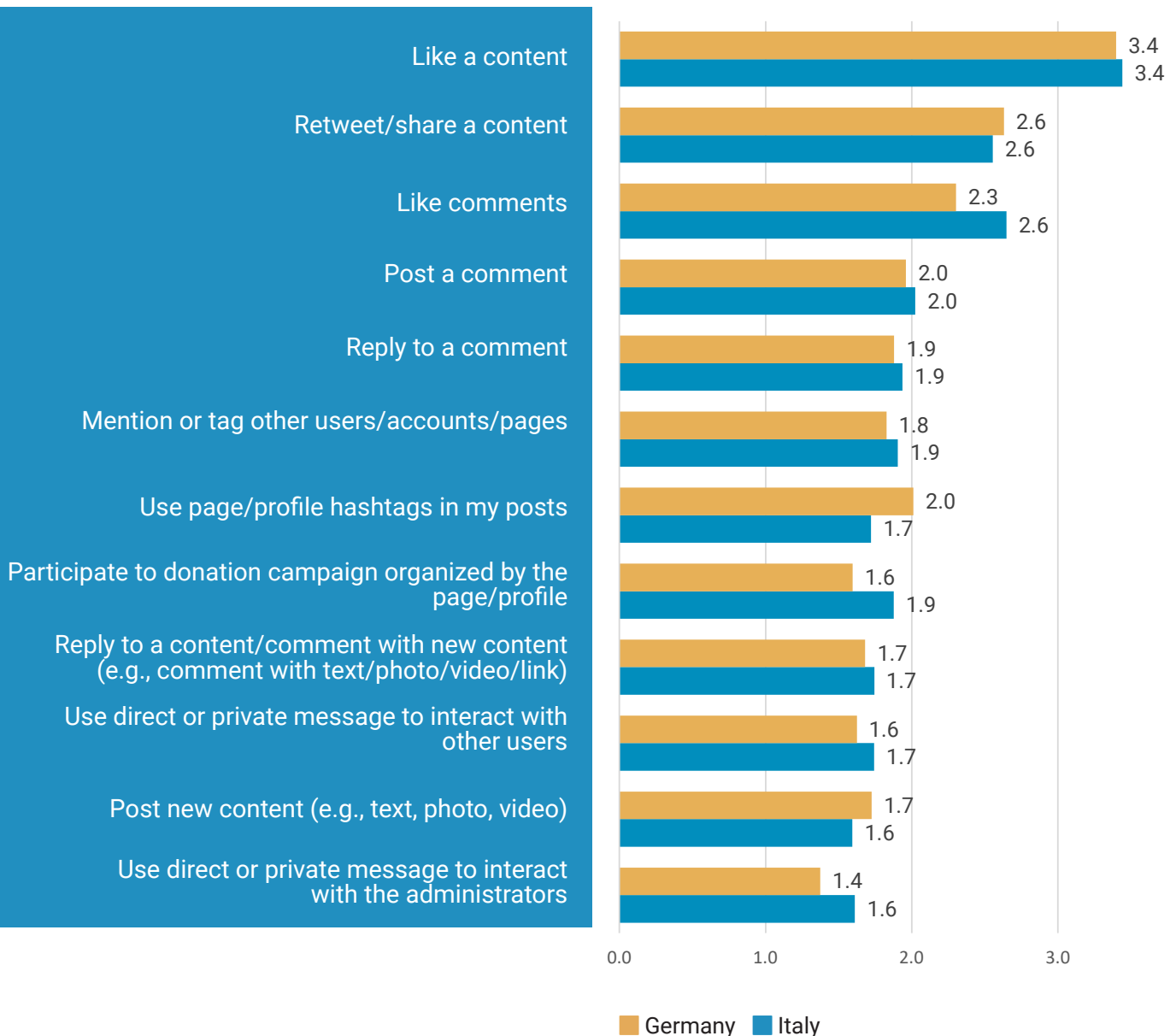
Among the factors that motivate people to follow a page or profile, the accuracy of the available information comes first, which underlines that the reputation of museums as reliable content providers is recognized, while the involvement of other users or the popularity of the page or profile in terms of number of likes or followers are less important. Except for the item “Accuracy of the information published on the page/profile”, in almost all cases, all factors determining the “value” attributed to a page/profile were rated higher in the Italian sample than in the German sample.

## FACTORS DETERMINING THE VALUE ATTRIBUTED TO A PAGE/PROFILE



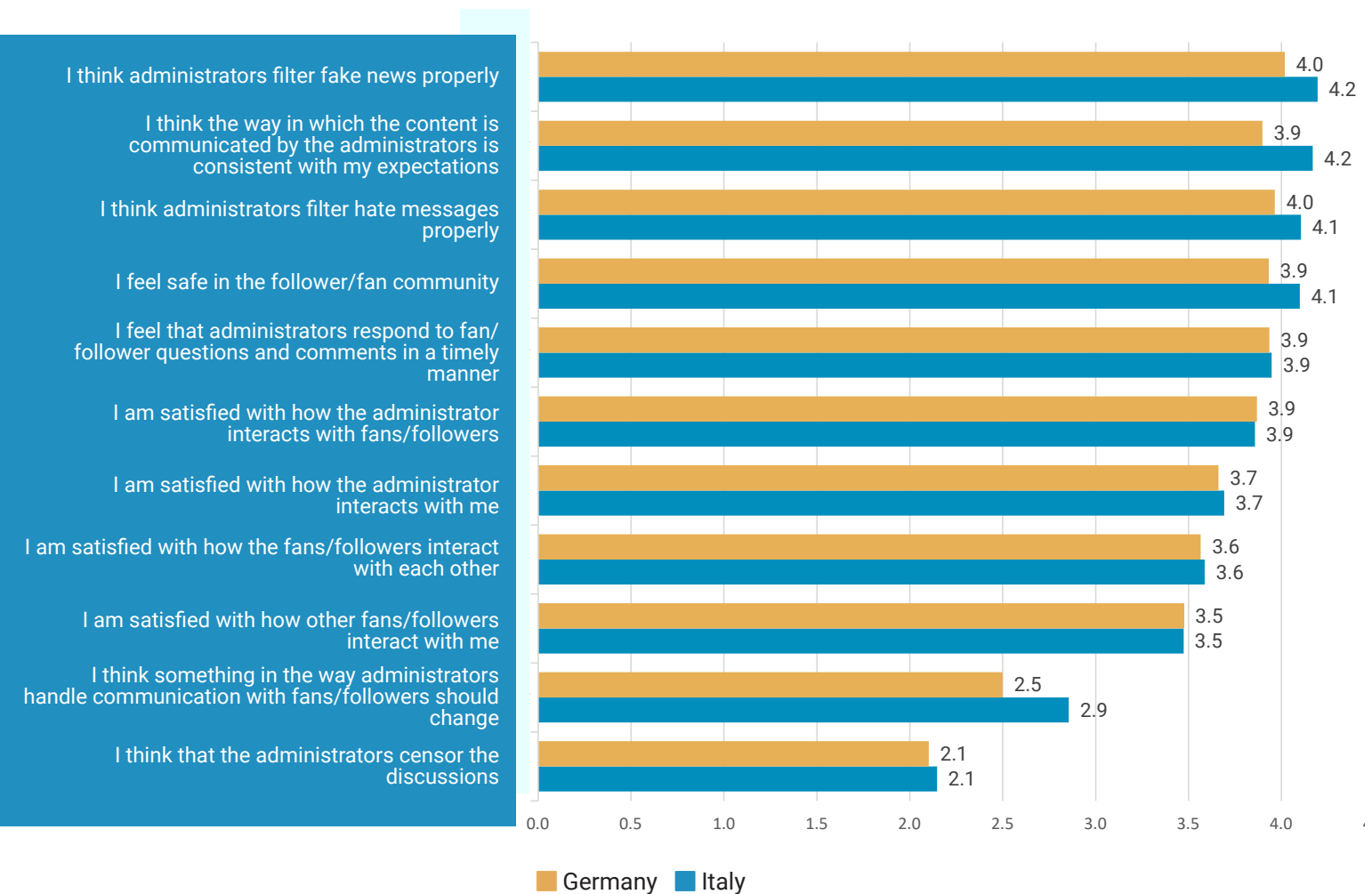
The situation is less positive if we look at the actions that users take most frequently. Users mainly limit themselves to liking content or comments and sharing or retweeting content. Activities such as posting or replying with new content or interacting directly with other users are very limited and infrequent. Comparison between the two samples shows that the frequency of “Like comments”, “Use direct or private message to interact with the administrators”, “Participate in donation campaign organized by the page/profile” is higher in the Italian sample. Frequency related to “Use page/profile hashtags in my posts” is higher in the German sample, where answers are associated with greater Twitter and Instagram use.

## WHAT ACTIONS USERS PERFORM MOST OFTEN



Finally, in terms of satisfaction, users appreciate how the pages filter out fake news and hate messages, as well as how the page managers interact with users. Interaction between peers seems to be less satisfactory. Agreement related to “I think something in the way administrators handle communication with fans/followers should change” and “I think the way in which the content is communicated by the administrators is consistent with my expectations” was found to be higher in the Italian sample.

## SATISFACTION



Overall, these results illustrate that users are interested in the various topics expressed through the social channels of museums and memorials, that they express appreciation for the management practices of the different channels considered, and that their usage habits mainly concentrate on basic activities such as liking, adding comments and re-sharing/retweeting content. However, it is important to keep in mind that these results reflect the interests of the target group we identified and those of the users in the two countries considered. It is therefore possible that the same survey might produce different results if it were conducted in other countries.

# THE POINT OF VIEW OF GERMAN AND ITALIAN MUSEUMS AND MEMORIALS

The nine memorials and museums from Italy and Germany that took part in the project acted as experts of the remembrance culture with their perspectives on Holocaust distortion and their countermeasures. As part of the project, qualitative interviews were conducted with social media managers (e.g., director, head of the communication department, social media manager, etc.) from the participating museums in both countries and subsequently analysed.

They can provide a well-defined insight into the museum/memorial's communication policies and strategies. In the interviews, the following three categories were examined in detail:

- Information about the organisation and its mission and identity
- Communication and social media strategies
- The COVID-19 pandemic and plans for the future

The interviews were also aimed at collecting information about the organisations' mission and their educational policy, the results of which were incorporated into the guidelines. The results of the interviews are summarised in the following. Differences and similarities between Italian and German perspectives are also discussed.



<sup>1</sup> In particular, the *Fondazione Fossoli*, which was established in January 1996 by the Municipality of Carpi and the Associazione Amici del Museo Monumento al Deportato, has among its objectives the dissemination of historical memory through the conservation, recovery and enhancement of the former concentration camp of Fossoli. The camp of Fossoli was a concentration camp established during World War II and located in the village Fossoli, Carpi, Emilia-Romagna. It began as a prisoner of war camp in 1942, later becoming a Jewish concentration camp, then a police and transit camp, a labour collection centre for Germany and, finally, a refugee camp, before closing in 1970. It is estimated that 2,844 Jews passed through this camp, 2,802 of whom were then deported. *Fondazione Museo della Shoah - Onlus* was established in July 2008 by the Committee promoting the Shoah Museum project, which was formed at the end of 2006. The mission of the Fondazione Museo della Shoah is to give impetus to the construction of the National Museum of the Shoah in Rome, which will allow the Italian capital to join the great cities in the world (Jerusalem, Washington, Berlin, London, Paris) that have museums dedicated to the Holocaust. At the moment, the Fondazione Museo della Shoah has a small exhibition space located in the area of the former Roman ghetto (the Portico d'Ottavia) which hosts temporary themed exhibitions. The *Memoriale della Shoah di Milano* is located deep within the city's Central Station on a sublevel below the main tracks. It was here that deportees arriving from San Vittore prison were loaded onto livestock cars. Originally used for loading and handling mail cars, in the years 1943–1945, this place was where thousands of Jews and political opponents were loaded onto livestock cars, which were then lifted to the track level above and joined together into trains headed for Auschwitz–Birkenau, Mauthausen, and other death camps or concentration camps, both abroad and on Italian soil, such as the deportation camps at Fossoli and Bolzano. Of all the places in Europe that had been theatres of deportations, the Memorial is the only one that has remained intact. Finally, the *Museo Nazionale dell'Ebraismo Italiano e della Shoah – MEIS* (National Museum of Italian Judaism and the Shoah) was founded with the mission to recount over two thousand years of Jewish history in Italy. It is a public history museum in Ferrara opened in 2017, which traces the history of the Jewish people in Italy starting from the Roman empire through the Holocaust of the 20th century. Chartered by the Italian government in 2003, MEIS contains over 200 artefacts and exhibits that chronologically span across Jewish history in Italy. The museum has continued to expand through 2021.

The nature and identity of the nine museums and memorials are affected by the history of the events that took place during the Second World War and the process of commemoration that followed. In particular, while the five German memorials were all established on the grounds of former concentration camps, the four Italian museums have varied backgrounds<sup>1</sup>. These differences are reflected in the educational and commemorative practices of the two groups of memorials and museums, as well as in the memory policies that distinguish the two countries.

## THE POINT OF VIEW OF GERMAN MUSEUMS

All museums appeal to a broad target group, ranging from contemporary witnesses, family members (2nd and 3rd generations) and schoolchildren (above a certain age) to tourists and the local population. Depending on which victims were imprisoned in the concentration camps, further specific target groups emerge, e.g., surviving Jews, Sinti and Roma, etc. According to the type of activities related to Holocaust education, the museums' offerings are adapted to specific target groups. The interviewees mentioned studies and guided tours, exhibitions and digital formats that mainly focus on information presenting the specific history of the memorial place and take into account all categories of victims. One important aim mentioned in the interviews is to raise awareness of what happened in the past and convey a multi-perspective view of history. And presenting historically correct facts is precisely the way in which museums deal

with Holocaust distortion. The museums present videos, pictures and text-based facts to support people in drawing the right conclusions and open up discussion. In the interviews, it was emphasised that there is no general or standardised way of dealing with distortion, each

case is specific, and it is important to pinpoint the context in which distortion appears and who expresses it. In general, the interviewees underlined that education plays an important role in all German museums, also in terms of activities aimed at countering Holocaust distortion.

The interviews also closely focused on communication and social media perspectives. All interviewed experts work in small to medium-sized organizations, with professional teams having experience in technology and digital communication from an interdisciplinary background (management, curators, educators, etc.), and all with extensive experience in Holocaust education. In the digital context, museum websites play an important role. The interviewees mentioned that this is the traditional way to present the memorials with regard to general information (like opening hours, visit instructions, etc.), but also to present their historical content and provide materials. From the museums' perspective, website presentation remains an important output channel. The importance attributed to social media is considered by the social media managers as medium to high, with an upward tendency. All five museums use Twitter, Facebook and Instagram. For video content, they use the YouTube platform in particular, except for Memorial Neuengamme, which uses Vimeo for presenting audio-visual material. The possibilities offered by the TikTok platform began to arouse interest in several museums in 2021 and the first attempts were made in this field, e.g., by the Neuengamme Memorial and at the beginning of 2022 by the Bergen-Belsen Memorial. This platform opened a discourse about possibilities and forms of remembering in the museum context. It is important to emphasise here that the interviewees stressed that each platform addresses different target groups and therefore has its justification in the museum context.

The COVID-19 pandemic posed major difficulties to all organizations involved in this study, as it did for other cultural and public institutions. Interviewees reported that activities such as reaching their target groups and hosting visits to memorial sites drastically declined in many areas. Dynamic changes and official restrictions made the work of museums very difficult, also in view of the fact that little planning was possible in advance. By resorting to social media and websites, the museums started to generate alternative ways of using the service and timeframe for activation of visitors. With regard to education in combination with the use of social media, live tours and online readings were mentioned in addition to pure sharing of historical knowledge. To enable the public to visit the closed museum in a digital way, 360°-tours were also made available. In addition to making use of the actual social media channels, the museums created their own digital formats, such as webinars, online workshops, apps and internal, restricted-access wikis. Regarding tools for monitoring digital communication in a professional way, some social media managers reported for instance on using the standard metrics from Facebook or Matomo or Google Business. However, several limitations were encountered in this respect, especially financial limitations and data protection considerations. To conclude, the level of attention paid to the educational dimension in the implementation of alternative service delivery strategies could mainly be described medium to high. All interviewees stressed the importance to continue using digital technologies and social media strategies developed during the pandemic in the future as well. In this context, a considerable need for international cooperation was also emphasised. From the perspective of the interviewed German memorial experts, increasing collaboration and networking with other museums and memorials is one of the important steps to take in the future.

## THE POINT OF VIEW OF ITALIAN MUSEUMS

The main target group for Italian museums is constituted by younger people, with school children and their teachers playing a particularly important role. Further target groups mentioned in the interviews are teachers, university students and researchers, or women between 50 and 60 with a higher education qualification. All museums pay great attention to activities related to Holocaust education, i.e., workshops, exhibitions, school projects and training courses for teachers. Some activities in this area are also carried out in cooperation with external partners. If we look at activities that are specifically designed to address the issue of Holocaust distortion, the situation seems to be more mixed. The weight attributed to these activities could be classified as medium to high, mainly due to lack of time and personnel. One museum directly offers training courses addressing Holocaust distortion and hate speech on social media.

In terms of communication and social media, the size and experience of the technology and digital communication team was mainly rated as low, but the person in charge has extensive experience in using social media. Two out of the four museums consider the museum website as highly significant, as it is used for information, presenting exhibitions and educational aims. All interviewed social media managers mentioned the considerable importance of using social media, mainly Facebook, followed by Instagram and other social media channels. However, the interviewees emphasised that the target group varies depending on the adopted social media channel. It was stated that Facebook targets more middle-aged people, whereas other channels such as Instagram also target younger audiences. The main purpose of museums' postings is described as that of conveying information. Other types of content usually published on social media were also mentioned, such as information about activities and symbolic dates, in-depth posts and videos, podcasts of meetings and workshops. Frequency of post publication is usually scheduled, and some museums use tools to prepare them. Paid services are rarely used. The occurrence of Holocaust bias and how to deal with it were considered with particular attention. However, problems encountered on social channels in the area of Holocaust distortion and denial as well as hate speech were mainly rated as low-level. The way this phenomenon is handled must be on a case-by-case basis, as the experts stressed. They delete obvious denials or insults. However, the interviewees mentioned that critical voices are also tolerated in individual cases, if they are within a certain range.

As for the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the work of museums and their activity on social media, museums were forced to close over most of the year 2020, except for the arena of Museo Nazionale dell'Ebraismo Italiano e della Shoah. The museums started implementing alternative events, like lectures, virtual tours, digital exhibitions and online guided tours. Furthermore, some memorials organised conferences and developed educational courses, like the Fondazione Fossoli, which launched a course in "Digital Citizenship Education"<sup>2</sup>. The level of attention paid to the educational dimension in the implementation of alternative service delivery strategies was mentioned as mostly high. Activities that were originally

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.fondazionefossoli.org/it/progetti\\_view.php?id=52](http://www.fondazionefossoli.org/it/progetti_view.php?id=52)

planned in presence were transferred to digital formats, i.e., online projects<sup>3</sup>, exhibitions and book presentations. The remarkable importance of events in presence was also emphasised: maintaining existing online formats in combination with on-site events was mentioned as a meaningful option by the experts. Nearly all museums strongly expect to continue using digital technologies and social media strategies developed during the pandemic in the future. Finally, the social media managers were asked whether they felt a need for greater collaboration. Here, strong willingness was noted for the most part. Existing collaborations should be strengthened, and new ones added.

## SUMMARY

The interviews conducted in Italy and Germany with experts from the nine memorials and museums revealed detailed perspectives and practices adopted by these organizations in dealing with social media. In both countries, the management of social media channels is in the hands of a small number of experts who have to contend with a limited amount of time and resources. The target groups they address vary between the two countries: the Italian museums mainly focus on younger audiences and teachers, while the German museums have a more diversified range of visitors, besides school children and teachers.

Different target groups are also addressed on social media channels. While Facebook, for example, tends to appeal to middle-aged people, other channels such as Instagram are aimed at younger audiences. Recently, the TikTok platform has been discussed on the German side and initial steps in this direction were taken by the memorials of Neuengamme and Bergen Belsen<sup>4</sup>. In Italy Fondazione Museo della Shoah has also started using TikTok<sup>5</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> See the projects "Storia in Viaggio" and "Storia in Viaggio 2.0", [https://www.fondazionefossoli.org/it/overview\\_view.php?id=171](https://www.fondazionefossoli.org/it/overview_view.php?id=171)

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.tiktok.com/@neuengamme.memorial> and <https://www.tiktok.com/@belsenmemorial>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.tiktok.com/@museoshoahroma>

In addition to social media channels, the website also plays an important role for most museums. Overall, it was reported in the interviews that the level of Holocaust denial or distortion directly encountered by museums on their social media channels is very moderate, although the recent pandemic increased this tendency and gave rise to comparisons and distorting analogies. Clear insults and denials are usually deleted and reported by the museums to the various platforms. In addition, critical posts are also discussed publicly or privately with users and among users themselves.

The Covid-19 pandemic posed particular challenges for museums. The museums were closed for a long time and new ways had to be found to get in touch with target groups. Strategies have been developed to make the historical sites and online exhibitions digitally accessible (e.g., live tours, 360° tours, etc.). In terms of plans and strategies to further or improve and enhance the services offered by museums and memorials, some differences between Germany and Italy were found. In both countries, a desire was expressed for greater networking and exchange to support each other in dealing with the culture of remembrance on social media, especially towards certain common objectives.

# A GLANCE AT CONTENT POSTED BY MUSEUMS AND MEMORIALS ON THEIR SOCIAL MEDIA CHANNELS

## METHODOLOGY

Both quantitative and qualitative research approaches were adopted to investigate the type of content and level of interaction that museums and memorials exhibit on their social media channels. In particular, social media metrics were used to identify activity patterns and users' interaction, while a qualitative framework was developed to analyse contents of posts and tweets.

Social media analytics were employed to investigate the way in which the nine institutions use the four different social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube). The activity around these social media profiles was analysed in terms of (1) content (e.g., post frequency and format, and type of information), (2) interactivity (e.g., user response and engagement), and (3) popularity (e.g., number of fans/followers, shares, etc.). This approach is derived from an analysis framework that distinguishes between content and relational communication strategies and that measures the effectiveness of fan pages and posts (see Manca, 2021b).

A framework to analyse Holocaust-related content published on the social media profiles of Holocaust museums was designed and validated through a Delphi Study which involved a comprehensive panel of 22 international Holocaust experts (Manca, 2021a). The framework serves the purpose of providing guidance on how to classify information pertaining to three major domains: *Historical content of the Holocaust*, *Contemporary issues related to the Holocaust*, and *Museum activities and communication*. Each domain comprises a set

of macro and micro categories, for each of which a definition and examples are given. The framework may also be considered as a pedagogical tool for teachers to provide orientation for conducting their own analysis or research and detect best practices to navigate the various materials available on social media for studying and teaching about the Holocaust.

Data analysis covered one year of activity from 1 September 2020 to 31 August 2021. Content analysis was applied to a subset of 10 posts, selected on the basis of the highest post interaction value, for each museum on each of the four platforms, for a total of 281 posts. In some cases, the number of posts or videos considered was less than 10 because fewer were available. In particular, for Italy, our analysis took into consideration only 2 videos on YouTube for Fondazione Museo della Shoah, only 8 tweets for Museo Nazionale dell'Ebraismo Italiano e della Shoah, and no tweets for Fondazione Fossoli and for Memoriale della Shoah di Milano<sup>1</sup>. For Germany, there was no Twitter profile available for Dachau Memorial; Buchenwald and Dachau Memorials do not have an Instagram profile; only one YouTube video was available for Buchenwald Memorial, while Neuengamme Memorial uses Vimeo instead of YouTube.

<sup>1</sup> While the former, despite having a Twitter profile, had no activity during the time period considered, the latter had no Twitter account.

## RESULTS

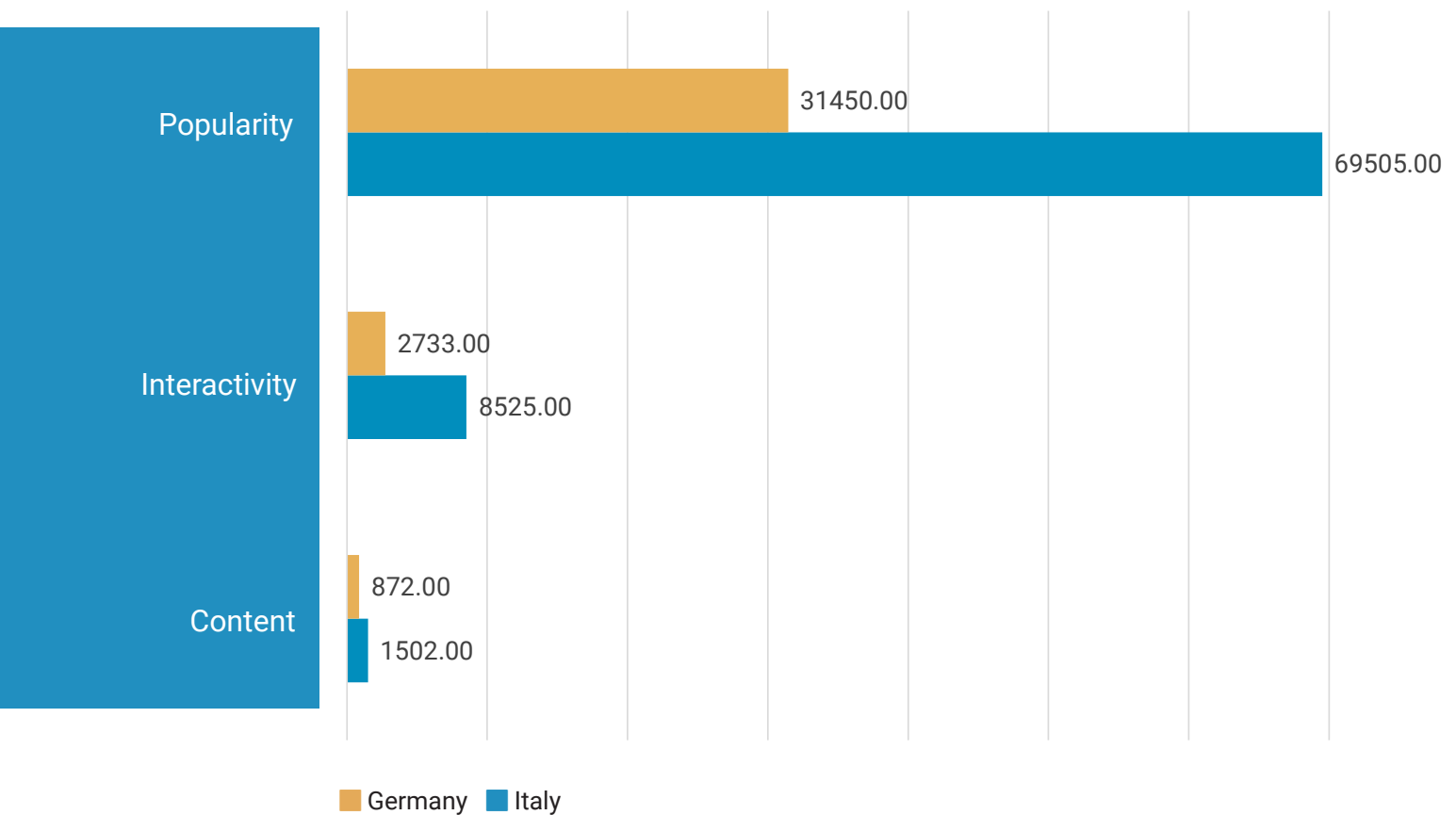
The figures provide a cross-country comparison starting with frequency distribution across all social media platforms and focusing on the following categories:

- i) popularity (e.g., number of fans),
- ii) interactivity (e.g., amount of comments), and
- iii) content (e.g. amount of posts).



## FACEBOOK

Although Facebook is used by museums and memorials in both countries, it is evident that this particular platform is more widely used in Italy. Not only are popularity and content more than double in the Italian institutions, but also their posts have led to significantly more interactivity with their audience.



The wordclouds provide some preliminary insights into the content that was shared. In Germany the event “otd1945” appears to have created traffic. Moreover, the sampled posts indicate that popular posts are related to remembrance events that deal with the Holocaust, but also with concepts such as antisemitism and homophobia. The Italian posts are centred on Italian places of memory, Jews, exhibitions and references to Germany.

## GERMANY



## ITALY





## Buchenwald Memorial | Gedenkstätte Buchenwald

27 January 2021 · 🌐

„Lichter gegen Dunkelheit“: 76 Jahre nach der Befreiung der nationalsozialistischen Lager sind wir überzeugt denn je, dass für Ausgrenzung, Hass und Verfolgung in unserer Gesellschaft kein Platz sein darf. Keinen Fußbreit werden wir denen geben, die Menschen aufgrund ihrer Herkunft, ihrer Hautfarbe, ihres Geschlechts, ihrer sexuellen Orientierung oder ihrer selbstgewählten Religion beleidigen, verletzen oder zu entwürdigen versuchen. Die zentrale Konsequenz aus den Verbrechen des Nationalsozialismus ist: Menschenrechte müssen für alle Menschen gelten.

Die bundesweite Beleuchtungsaktion "Lichter gegen Dunkelheit" setzt ein Zeichen dafür, dass wir keine isolierten Gedenkstätten sind, sondern ein Netzwerk von Engagierten, denen die Unantastbarkeit der Würde eines jeden Menschen Auftrag und Verpflichtung ist.

[www.lichter-gegen-dunkelheit.de](http://www.lichter-gegen-dunkelheit.de)



## Fondazione Museo della Shoah - Onlus

13 agosto 2021 · 🌐

#accaddeoggi

"Non dicano, oggi come allora, che non sapevano. Vedevano ad Auschwitz il fumo dei crematori, l'odore di carne bruciata è stato nell'aria per anni. Ci vedevano, miserabili relitti umani, lungo le strade del loro paese. Molti campi di sterminio erano vicini a città importanti. Abbiamo lavorato da schiavi nelle loro fabbriche, in quelle famose allora e famose ancora oggi. Hanno indossato i nostri vestiti, hanno camminato con le nostre scarpe, guardato l'ora sui nostri orologi, scritto con le nostre penne...sapevano, tutti sapevano. I miei genitori, i miei nonni, i miei fratelli, cugini, zii. Tutti sono andati in fumo. E quanto e quale potrebbe essere il risarcimento per la mia adolescenza rubata, per le mie sofferenze. Per la mia salute minata, per le mie notti insonni, per il furto dei miei sogni, per il regalo dei miei laceranti incubi.

Perché ogni notte io torno a Birkenau.

C'è anche chi afferma che è giunto il momento di perdonare.

Io non posso perdonare. Non perdonerò mai."

Ida Marcheria

Nasce 92 anni fa, il 13 agosto 1929 a Trieste, Ida Marcheria.

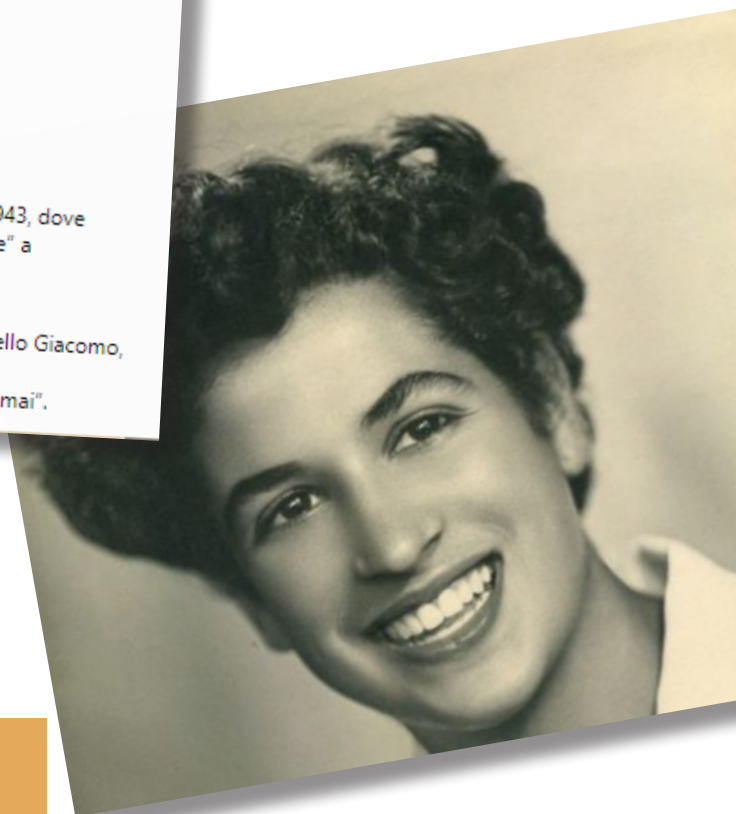
Figlia di Ernesto e Anna Nacson ha tre fratelli, Giacomo, Raffaele e Stella.

Viene deportata ad Auschwitz-Birkenau insieme all'intera famiglia il 7 dicembre 1943, dove rimane fino al 18 gennaio 1945; trasferita attraverso la terribile "marcia della morte" a Ravensbruck e poi a Malchow.

Viene finalmente liberata, insieme alla sorella Stella, il 1 maggio 1945.

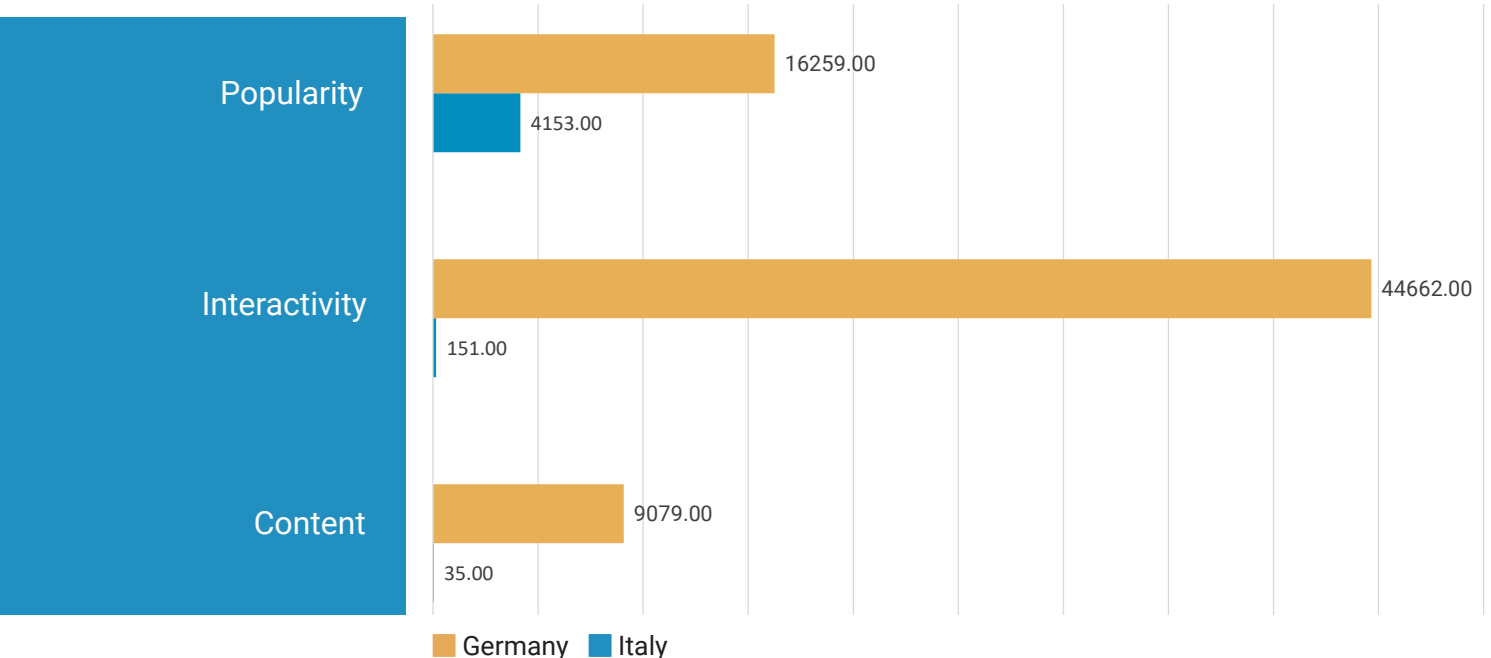
Riescono a tornare a casa nel settembre del 1945, dove ritrovano solamente il fratello Giacomo, sopravvissuto anch'esso ai campi.

Muore nel 2011 dopo aver raccolto la sua testimonianza nel libro "Non perdonerò mai".



## TWITTER

In contrast with the situation described for Facebook, Italian institutions are largely inactive on Twitter, while their German counterparts are seemingly using this platform as their main social media channel. Interestingly, the German memorials and museums are also able to attain a sizable amount of interactivity.



This might in part be explained by the Tweet that is provided by way of example. The content of this Tweet specifically deals with Holocaust distortion and how the German Anti-COVID-19-Movement has continuously tried to instrumentalize Holocaust remembrance for their own purposes.

Stiftg. Gedenkstätten Buchenwald u. Mittelbau-Dora  
@Buchenwald\_Dora

Wiederholt wurden wir in letzter Zeit von "#Querdenker":innen, "Montagsspaziergängern" und anderen Gegner:innen der #Corona-Schutzmaßnahmen aufgefordert, in #Buchenwald Diskussionsrunden mit ihnen zu veranstalten.

Nein, das werden wir nicht tun. Weitere Anfragen sind zwecklos.

Traduci il Tweet

Sehr geehrter Herr [REDACTED]

selbstverständlich kann man nicht alle Gegner:innen der Corona-Schutzmaßnahmen über einen Kamm scheren. Viele sind sicherlich vernünftig und viele, vor allem in der Gastronomie und im Einzelhandel, leiden ökonomisch unter den pandemiebedingten Schutzmaßnahmen. Das muss man ernst nehmen. Und Grundrechte zu schützen (übrigens auch das Grundrecht auf körperliche Unversehrtheit) ist prinzipiell immer unterstützenswert. Ihre "Montagsspaziergänge" wie auch "Querdenken" und Co. sind nach meiner festen Überzeugung aber keine "Grundrechtsbewegung", sondern resentimentgeladene rechtsoffene Veranstaltungen, die antisemitische Verschwörungslügen transportieren, mit geschmacklosen NS-Gleichsetzungen den Holocaust verharmlosen und dessen Opfer verhöhn - und offenkundige Rechtsextreme und Neonazis auf ihren Veranstaltungen mindestens dulden (mir wegzugehen, wenn ein extrem Rechter wie Häußner spricht, ist m.E. falsch; er hätte gar nicht erst sprechen dürfen). Hier wird der Mindestabstand in mehrfacher Hinsicht nicht eingehalten.

Haben Sie bitte Verständnis dafür, dass wir solchen Haltungen, die unserem Stiftungszweck widersprechen und die Opfer des Nationalsozialismus verhöhn, in der Gedenkstätte Buchenwald kein Podium bieten werden.

Mit freundlichen Grüßen

Jens-Christian Wagner

MEIS Museum  
@meis\_museum

Il programma delle attività del #MEIS per il #giornodellamemoria  
[meisweb.it/meisnews/news/...](https://meisweb.it/meisnews/news/...)

**MEIS**  
MUSEO NAZIONALE DELL'ERASSIMO ITALIANO E DELLA SHOAH  
MUSEUM OF ITALIAN JEWRY AND THE SHOAH

**Il giorno dopo. I testimoni del futuro**

28 gennaio 2021 ore 10.00  
EVENTO ONLINE

**Saluti di:**  
Dario Diaghi - Presidente MEIS  
Roberto Jarsch - Presidente Fondazione Memoriale della Shoah di Milano Ortus  
Anna Quarta - Presidente Ispoc  
Mario Venezia - Presidente Fondazione Museo della Shoah di Roma

**Introduce:**  
Amedeo Spagnoli - Direttore MEIS

**Intervengono:**  
Talia Bidussa - Responsabile Eventi e Mostre del Memoriale della Shoah di Milano  
Simone Santoro - Presidente UGEI  
Prenderanno la parola anche quattro studenti di Roma e Ferrara che hanno affrontato il Viaggio della Memoria

**Moderatore:**  
Amedeo Osti Guerrazzi

I posti sono limitati, l'evento è indirizzato agli studenti delle scuole secondarie di secondo grado.  
Per informazioni e prenotazioni: [meisweb.it](https://meisweb.it)



GERMANY

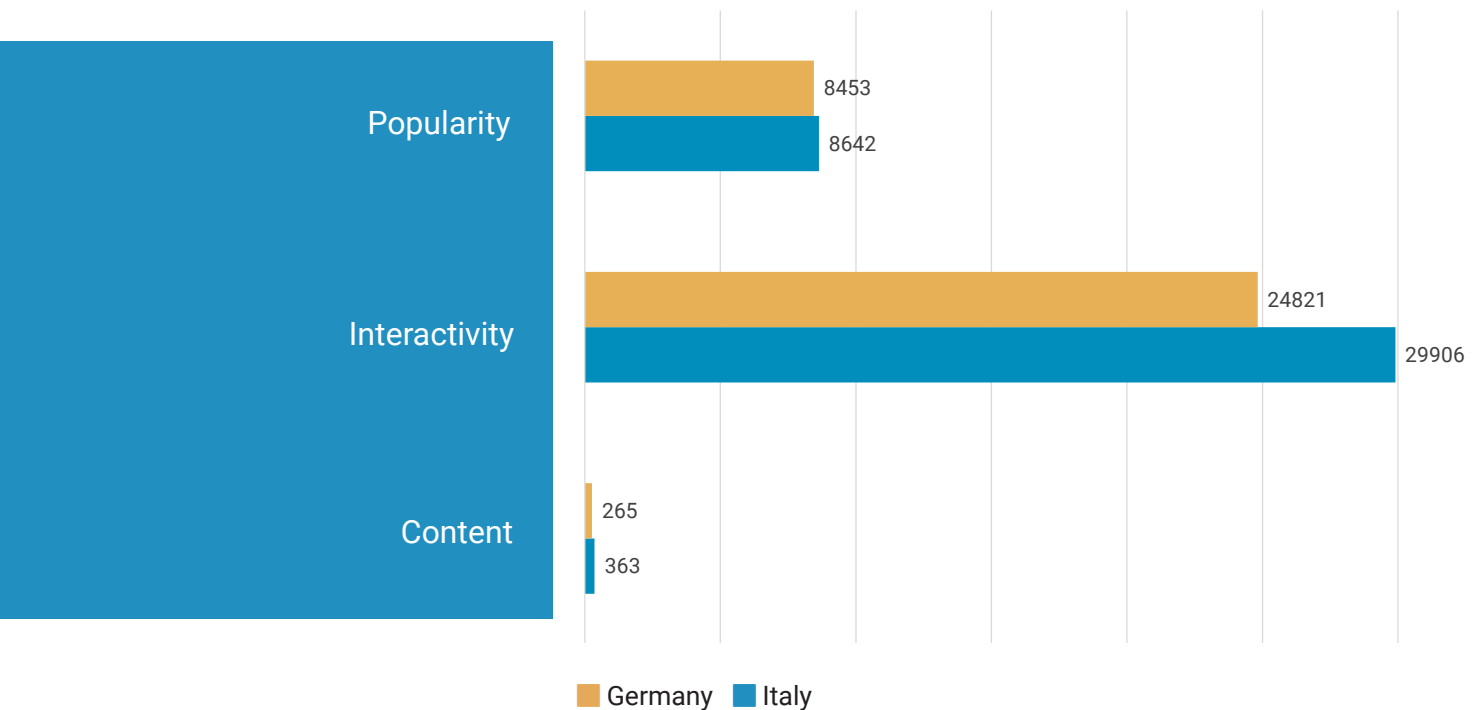


ITALY



## INSTAGRAM

Here, the differences between Italy and Germany are the least pronounced. Institutions from both countries appear to have only started out on this platform and are taking tentative steps to expand their portfolio there. Again, the exact reasons remain unknown at face value. However, this data, in terms of comparatively low overall figures, fits the general notion and discourse about social media usage for countering Holocaust distortion. There is an open debate as to whether visual representations (e.g., re-enacted scenes) are disrespectful towards Holocaust survivors in that the terrors of the Holocaust are trivialized.





# GERMANY

# ITALY

[illegible]

41



**belsenmemorial** • Follow  
Bergen/Belsen Memorial

...



**belsenmemorial** This year, both in Britain and Germany there were campaigns to mark #HMD with a similar name: [#lightagainstdarkness](#) [#lichtergegendunkelheit](#)  
The photo was taken a few days ago by our volunteer Magnus.

68w



782 likes

JANUARY 28, 2021



**fondazionefossoli** • Segui già

...



**fondazionefossoli** "Coltivare la Memoria è ancora oggi un vaccino prezioso contro l'indifferenza e ci aiuta, in un mondo così pieno di ingiustizie e di sofferenze, a ricordare che ciascuno di noi ha una coscienza e la può usare" - Liliana Segre

Sentiti auguri di buon compleanno alla Senatrice Liliana Segre, con stima e affetto, da parte della Fondazione Fossoli, conservando vivo il ricordo della sua conferenza a #Carpi

[#farememoria](#) [#pernon dimenticare](#)  
[#auguri](#) [#fondazionefossoli](#) [#storia](#)  
[#lilianasegre](#) [#memoria](#)  
[#amicidellafondazionefossoli](#)



Piace a [anedmilano](#) e altri

10 SETTEMBRE 2020

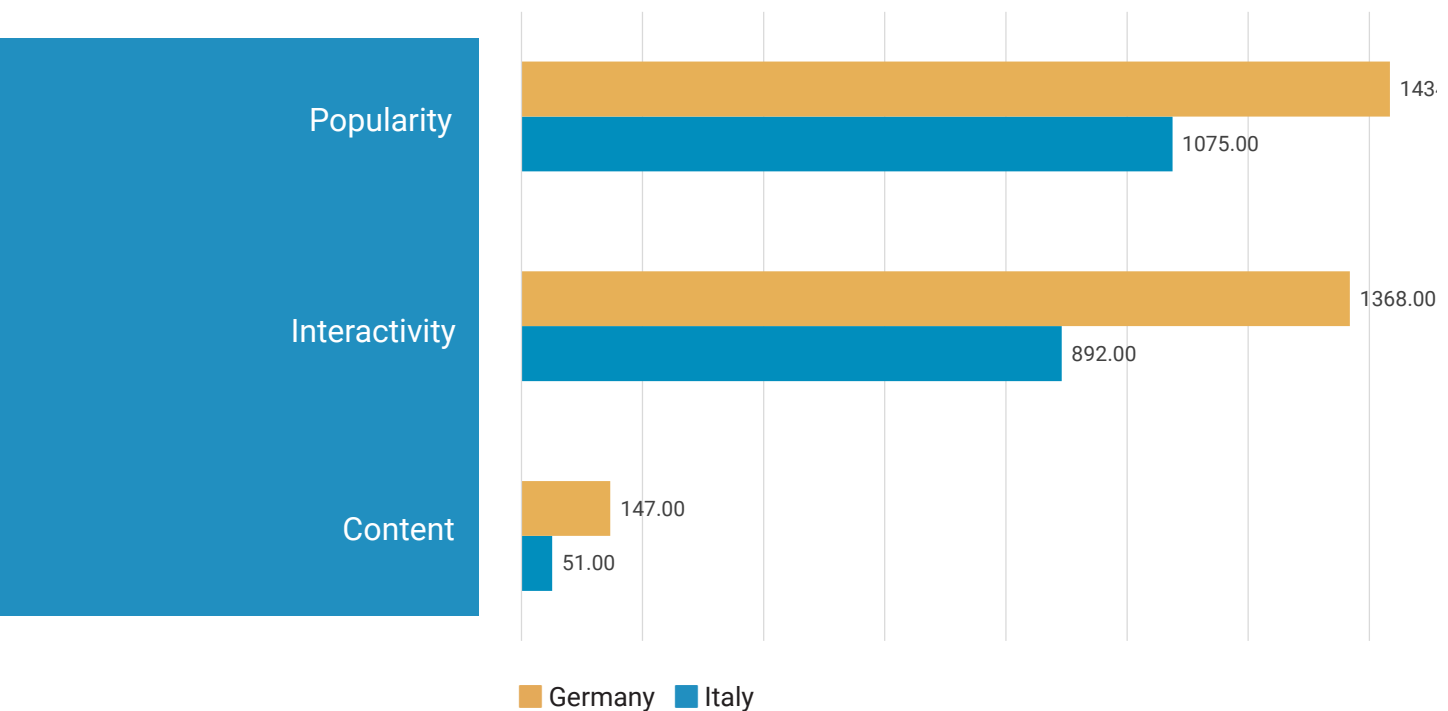


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## YOUTUBE

Finally, the data from YouTube indicates that German memorials are actively using this platform to share visual artefacts. More specifically, a closer look suggests that generally YouTube was used, particularly during COVID-19 lockdowns, to share videos of events that would otherwise have taken place on location, or to stream guided tours.



GERMANY



ITALY





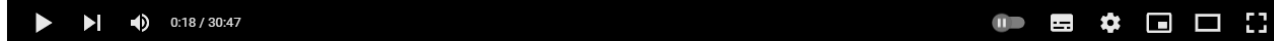
# Zentrale Gedenkveranstaltung zum 76. Jahrestag der Befreiung des Frauen-Konzentrationslagers Ravensbrück – Erinnerung teilen



Gedenkveranstaltung zum 76. Jahrestag der Befreiung des KZ Ravensbrück

Il Memoriale della Shoah di Milano viene inaugurato il 27 gennaio 2013.  
Dal 2015 ha iniziato ad essere sempre più conosciuto, specialmente dalle scuole,  
che hanno abitato i suoi spazi in questi anni durante innumerevoli visite guidate.

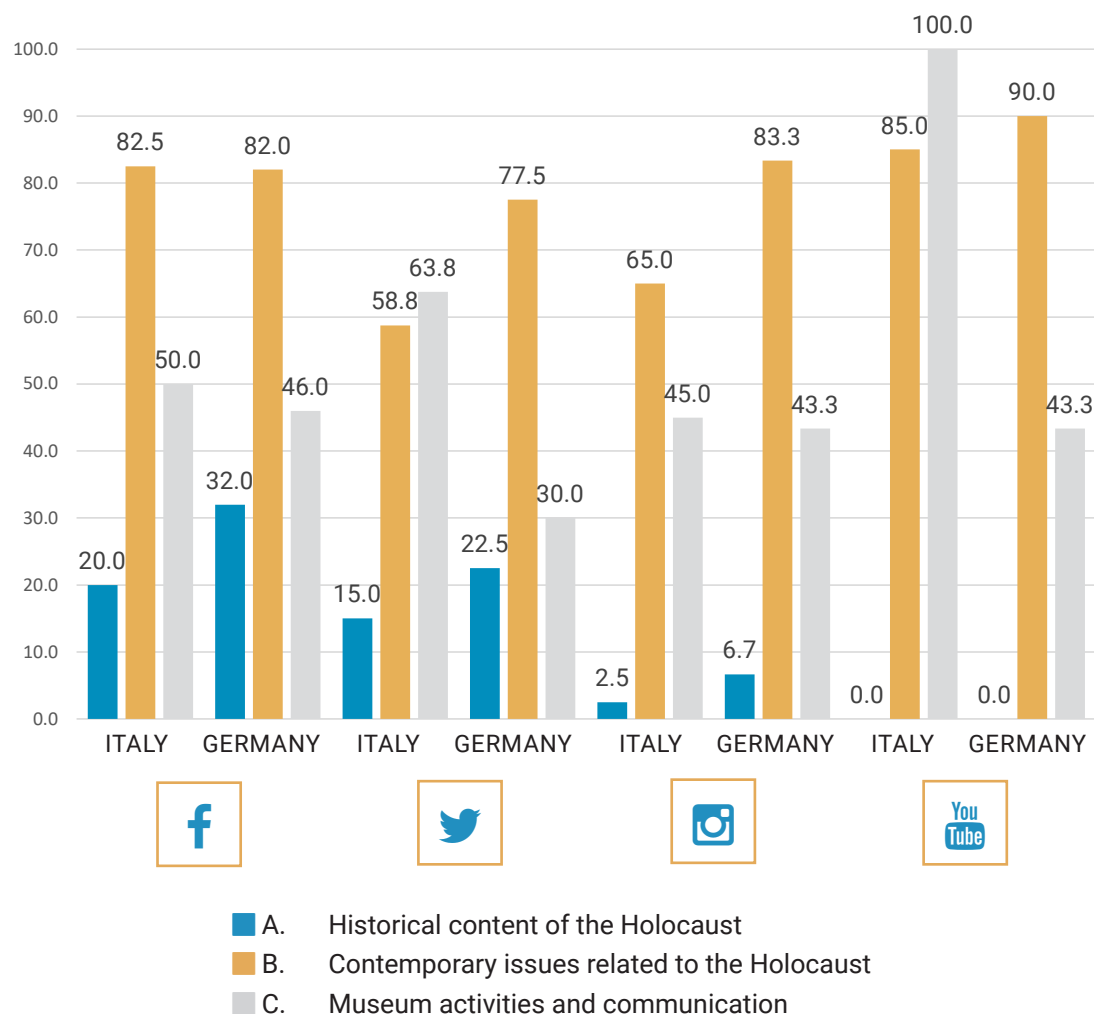
Ad oggi, ha ospitato più di 130.000 studenti, e decine di migliaia visitatori curiosi di saperne di più.  
Al momento della registrazione del video il Memoriale è chiuso al pubblico a causa dell'emergenza COVID,  
ma noi volevamo comunque poter riprendere quel filo rosso che ci lega ormai da molti anni,  
e aprirvi, come possibile, le porte di questo luogo.



FONDAZIONE MEMORIALE DELLA SHOAH DI MILANO ONLUS  
Visita Guidata al Memoriale della Shoah di Milano

Qualitative analysis was applied to the ten posts that generated more interaction. The results show that there is a tendency to publish more content focused on “Contemporary issues related to the Holocaust” (macro-category B) and “Museum activities and communication” (macro-category C) than content focused on “Historical content of the Holocaust” (macro-category A). However, the prevalence of these three types of content changes across the four platforms: Facebook and Twitter seem to focus more on historical content (macro-category A), while Instagram and YouTube seem to favour content related to contemporary aspects of the Holocaust (macro-category B). YouTube, in particular, is mainly used to convey content belonging to macro-category C, i.e., events such as conferences, book presentations, virtual tours, etc. In terms of differences between the two countries, there is a slight difference in provision of content related to macro-category A on Facebook and Twitter for the benefit of German memorials, while for Twitter German memorials publish more content related to macro-category B than Italian ones, which seem to prefer publicising events and initiatives organized by the museum or memorial. Finally, on YouTube, Italian museums tend to use the platform more for sharing editorial initiatives than the German memorials.

## RESULTS OF QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS PER PLATFORM





Neuengamme  
@GedenkstaetteNG

...

The new issue of Memoria (05/2021) magazine has been published by [@AuschwitzMuseum](#)

We are happy to announce that in an article you can learn more about our storytelling webpage „Objects Carry Memories“

[joom.ag/LVNI](https://joom.ag/LVNI)

[Tweet übersetzen](#)

PAGEFLOW

## Objects carry memories

A project of the Neuengamme Concentration Camp Memorial on the occasion of the 80th anniversary of the end of the war and liberation of concentration camps

SCROLL DOWN TO CONTINUE

For our storytelling we used Pageflow – an open-source software and publishing platform for multimedia storytelling developed for digital journalism. The tool enables the creation of web reports that receive interactive elements in text, image, video and audio. This so called "scrollytelling" is an online storytelling characterised by audio, video and animation effects triggered by simply scrolling the page. With the help of an agency, we created a visual virtual storytelling in three languages (German, English and French). We believe that the merging of various multimedia elements in an easily accessible way, combined with interactive elements, gives virtual visitors an immersive experience and helps to rise interest for stories of survivors and their family members.

Memories are connected to people or places, events or personal encounters and often to objects, like an old suitcase. In the storytelling "Objects Carry

Memories", Martine Letterie explains in a short video, what the suitcase in her father's studio is all about. Martine Letterie is the President of the Amicale Internationale KZ Neuengamme and granddaughter of Martinus Letterie, who died in Neuengamme. We learn that Martinus took the suitcase with him when he was deported.

*All of these objects are of immeasurable value. A tiny window into my father's life before the war.*

Ewa Żelechowska-Stolzman, daughter of Andrzej Żelechowski, who died as a prisoner of the Neuengamme concentration camp

In the course of our digital narrative, we sorted the objects sent to us into five chapters: Imprisonment and Liberation, Stories Passed down through Generations, Encounters with the Past, Remembering Together and Hopes for the Future.

0:07 17.401 Mal angezeigt

# IMPLICATIONS FOR ADDRESSING ISSUES OF HOLOCAUST DISTORTION ON SOCIAL MEDIA

The strategies adopted by Holocaust museums and memorials to address Holocaust distortion through social media have revealed a few limitations which need to be considered when thinking about possible (practical) implications for further developments.

## LIMITATIONS

### MISMATCH BETWEEN SCHOLARLY DEBATES AND PUBLIC KNOWLEDGE

Studies have shown that there is a gap between historians' knowledge, which includes recent developments in the field of both local and international historical research, and widespread knowledge in the general population (see Lawson, 2017). In particular, it has been stressed that younger generations and students have very limited and partial, if not distorted, knowledge of the main events that marked the history of the Holocaust from 1933 to 1945. For example, it was found that in the UK students have a very limited grasp of the victims of the Holocaust, a limited understanding of its perpetrators and a compromised sense of its geography (Lawson, 2017). Despite a plethora of Holocaust remembrance initiatives, parts of the young generations tend to consider Adolf Hitler as the sole agent and express a general lack of knowledge about other concentration and extermination camps besides Auschwitz-Birkenau. Misconceptions in the general public, including the adults, encompass the idea that there were gas chambers to exterminate Jews within every concentration camp, the Holocaust only happened in Germany and Poland, that German Jews were a large proportion of Germany's population, that Jewish people were the only victims of Nazi persecution, or that all Jews were killed by gas<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> <https://holocaustlearning.org.uk/latest/holocaust-myth-busting-challenging-the-misconceptions/>, <https://mchekc.org/holocaust-history/misconceptions/>



## LACK OF BASIC COMMON KNOWLEDGE OF HISTORICAL EVENTS AND FACTS ACROSS DIFFERENT COUNTRIES

Although Holocaust education has become a concern in the school curriculum of many countries (Carrier, Fuchs, & Messinger, 2015; Eckmann, Stevick, & Ambrosewicz-Jacobs, 2017; OSCE, 2006), teaching approaches and content selection vary widely from one country to another. This implies that knowledge, already limited and circumscribed, can vary enormously among social media users and therefore certain forms of distortion are more frequent among users in certain geographical areas than in others. For example, in some countries (United States and United Kingdom) that historically were among the Allies, there may be more emphasis on the role of the liberators than, for example, on the events experienced by the countries occupied by Nazi Germany. Similarly, the history of the resistance to German occupation in Western European countries, for instance, may be given more emphasis than the mass killings committed in Eastern Europe (the so-called 'Holocaust by bullets') (Lawson, 2017; Vice, 2019). Finally, it is important to remember that conflicting cultural memories within the same country can lead to approaching the history and memory of the Holocaust in different ways, possibly with distorting outcomes depending on the political or ideological agendas that may sometimes underlie a specific memory policy.

## APPARENT FOCUS ON REMEMBRANCE AND COMMEMORATION RATHER THAN ON PROVISION OF HISTORICAL CONTENT

Studies have shown a global tendency to emphasise commemoration practice over solid factual knowledge as a result of the rhetoric surrounding the prevailing culture and the purpose of Holocaust education in certain countries (Lawson, 2017); in line with this trend, in some countries Holocaust organisations and museums tend to privilege remembrance and commemoration events over the provision of historical content. Diversity of approach may depend on several factors, such as: the identity and mission of the museum or memorial (memorial museums, by their nature, focus more intensely on remembrance activities than museums dedicated to historical content; Jaeger, 2020); their geographical location (in some countries, the greatest emphasis may be placed on universal respect for human rights or on comparison with other genocides as a moral lesson); the specific local history that the institution intends to commemorate. In all these cases, the unwanted result may be partial or uneven knowledge, with special emphasis on specific historical events or on the way they are remembered, which may lead to greater risks of distortion.

## MATERIALS NOT GENERALLY SUITABLE FOR YOUNGER GENERATIONS

Recent studies have shown that the main users of major social media (Facebook, Twitter and Instagram) are adults, mainly female and with a medium to high level of education (Manca et al., 2022). It is easy to imagine that museums and memorials would be aware of the socio-demographic characteristics of their average user and would thus prepare materials or announcements of events targeting this audience. The communicative style, lexical register and tone used for communicating generally make the material more suitable for an adult audience, while neglecting to address teenagers or young adults, who are more used to receiving content through very short videos or short texts and are accustomed to more informal communication styles. This trend has also been highlighted in recent surveys, which show that Germany's 16-25-year-olds are much more interested in the Nazi era than their parents were and tend to draw analogies from that period to today's racism

and discrimination and are eager to examine the motives of perpetrators. However, they also want more “snackable content,” or information in digestible doses, and a “fusion of digital and analog” offerings, like digital follow-up visits to memorial sites (Axelrod, 2022)<sup>2</sup>. Current experiences with the use of TikTok by museums, organisations and survivors, for instance, highlight the importance of adopting communication styles and media formats appropriately tailored for a younger audience (Ebbrecht-Hartmann & Divon, 2022).

<sup>2</sup> For more information about this study, see <https://enc.arolsen-archives.org/en/study/>

## LIMITED BI-DIRECTIONAL INTERACTION WITH SOCIAL MEDIA USERS

The management of contentious contents is still a complex and delicate issue for Holocaust museums, which are mainly preoccupied with limiting cases of denial, distortion, misuse, and superficial representations. However, scholars have also emphasised the “passivity” of Holocaust institutions, resulting from fear of trivialization or distortion and the risk of harbouring conflicting memories, which might in turn have brought about an over-cautious attitude by Holocaust agencies in soliciting users’ interaction (Manca, Passarelli & Rehm, 2022; Walden, 2021b). Holocaust organisations seem to prefer one-directional communication and the broadcasting of a “carefully shaped, widely acceptable message via social media” (Kansteiner, 2017, p. 324). This ‘passivity’ translates into a lack of participation on social media in terms of publishing further content or comments on other users’ posts, while there is a tendency in users to favour interaction made up mainly of ‘likes’ and shares/retweets (Manca, 2021b).

## LACK OF SPECIFIC EXPERTISE IN ADDRESSING ISSUES OF DISTORTION ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Although museums and memorials devote efforts and energy in their educational programmes to addressing the issue of distortion, the format of social media requires that materials be suitably packaged to be conveyed through these media. This calls for appropriate forms of communication and means activating various attention and awareness mechanisms that require social media literacy skills (Manca, Bocconi, & Gleason, 2021). Yet, museums’ staff often lack the relevant training, expertise and experience to deal with all facets of social media communication. This constitutes a challenge and, paired with chronically understaffed communication departments, calls for caution in responding to online communication incidents with instigating individuals and crowds. Additionally, despite some general rules and structural similarities, all social media platforms involve nuanced differences in usage. Consequently, communication staff are also required to acquire specific knowledge and skills for each platform they are using, such as tools to measure social media impact and search engine optimisation. As socio-technical systems, social media offer a series of user affordances, constraints and expressive as well as interactive possibilities which users are obliged to master both globally as a technological category and locally according to the characteristics of each platform (van Dijck, 2013).

## LIMITED STRUCTURED AND LONG-TERM INTERACTION WITH OTHER LOCAL AND INTERNATIONAL HOLOCAUST ORGANISATIONS

Although there are associations or organisations that connect different museums and memorials both nationally and internationally, smaller institutions generally act individually and not in synergy with similar institutions. This leads to fragmentation of experiences and expertise, even after many years of activity, which cannot be coordinated to generate good practices to be shared with others. While acknowledging the oftentimes understaffed Holocaust museums and the resulting lack of time and resources to fully engage with (inter) national cooperation, coordination would greatly benefit the overall cause of combatting distortion and could also distribute the work and burden across the parties involved.

### MEASURES TO COUNTER HOLOCAUST DISTORTION ON SOCIAL MEDIA

In order to address these shortcomings and to support Holocaust memorials and museums, as well as a wider set of stakeholders, in their important work to counter Holocaust distortion, a range of proactive and reactive measures has been identified.

## EXPANDING HISTORICAL KNOWLEDGE OF THE HOLOCAUST

One of the most important measures in this respect is the preparation of further study or education materials to be distributed on social media in order to broaden user knowledge (both in adults and young people). This can be done by drawing on the historical and educational archives held by individual institutions and by providing fact-based material in collaboration with Holocaust scholars and experts. Due to the short-lived nature of social media, there is a need for a repository where short posts based on historical facts could be assembled and embedded within a broader context. One possibility could be to provide an external link, e.g., to museum websites. Since each museum has its own history, it will provide specific content devoted to that history. One way to do so is, for instance, building up digital glossaries with important facts referring to that museum and its history. It will be important to address the various phases that may characterise the history of one place (e.g., it might have also been an internment camp for prisoners of war, a transit camp for Jews, a refugee camp, or might have been transformed, even only in part, into a camp for German prisoners of war or civilians accused of Nazism after the defeat of Germany). This will help to commemorate the different 'lives' of the place and prevent some from being forgotten and becoming the subject of memory conflicts.

## ADAPTING AND TRANSLATING AVAILABLE MATERIALS AND TOOLS

The IHRA, UNESCO, and major national and international Holocaust agencies have developed reports, teaching guidelines and toolkits to address the issue of distortion and, more generally, to teach and learn about the Holocaust. This existing body of knowledge and guidance constitutes a set of resources that can be appropriately adapted and translated

into national languages. Expanding the materials and toolkits provided by IHRA and other major governmental organisations and NGOs will allow the development of new tailor-made applications. UNESCO, for instance, produces technical guidance materials for education stakeholders who seek to implement or substantiate the study of the Holocaust, of genocide and atrocity crimes and of antisemitism more broadly in education systems (<https://en.unesco.org/themes/holocaust-genocide-education/resources>). Other examples of useful material are #ProtectTheFacts (<https://www.againstholocaustdistortion.org>), the report “Understanding Holocaust Distortion. Contexts, Influences and Examples” and the “Toolkit Against Holocaust Distortion” (<https://againstdistortiontoolkit.holocaustremembrance.com/>) by the IHRA. The short film “Holocaust Distortion: A Growing Threat” (<https://youtu.be/ovdF4pGhew8>), in which international experts explore what Holocaust distortion is, how it manifests itself and why it poses such a threat to the legacy of the Holocaust, is currently available with subtitles in English, German, Hungarian, Italian, and Slovenian. Resources that focus on providing historical content and fact-based data can be found at the websites of major Holocaust organisations.

## INVESTIGATING USERS’ PRECONCEPTIONS AND BIASES

Investigating students’ preconceptions and biases when visiting museums and memorials is another useful means of combating distortion phenomena since their attitudes may be reflected in their participation on social media. Museum operators tend to highlight that, in the preparation for a visit, the visitors’ knowledge, opinions, doubts and curiosities regarding the themes and experiences to be covered should be sounded out in advance. Generally speaking, museum staff get pre-prepared for the school group they are going to meet, based on what has been communicated or reported by teachers. As important as this presentation may be, it is necessary for the encounter with history and related human issues regarding the Holocaust to be consolidated as learning. It is important for practitioners to gain a clear, articulate sense of what students think and know. Pedagogical reflection has revealed that knowledge, including disciplinary and humanistic knowledge, is a construction that is formed in many contexts outside the school environment (Coleman, 1990). In particular, encounters with themes regarding Holocaust history, facts, episodes, policies, etc. take place in many information and communication contexts, and increasingly in virtual and social contexts, where fake news and distortions are present, whether intentionally or not. In the construction of knowledge and prejudices, “social capital” is decisive in individual choices, so much so that in recent years there has been growing attention towards the role that small relationships, face-to-face relationships, local cultures and virtual groups play in favouring/obstructing the functioning of social systems that seem to be regulated by impersonal norms (Luciano, 2003). It is therefore important to identify which tools may be most suitable for building an initial bridge between students’ knowledge needs and the educational initiatives carried out by museums. Social media platforms can therefore be exploited to establish contact with students by soliciting responses to questions that will be addressed during the visit. Referring to the opinions of students and taking up their point of view creates engagement, greater interest and opens up avenues for deconstructing false or distorted knowledge, or prejudices that are widespread in society. In this sense, museums and memorials should remain curious about opinions from society and consider which narrative forms and views are already visible on social media, as well as where they can engage in real dialogue.

## PROVIDING RECOMMENDATIONS AND EXAMPLES FOR LEGITIMATE ANALOGIES OR COMPARISONS

Although Holocaust analogies and comparisons are usually perceived as dangerous by Holocaust educators, who “only” commit themselves to provide accurate content and fact-based material, “learning with examples” still remains a valuable pedagogical approach (Renkl, 1997). There are several examples of people being labelled as Nazis, Hitler, Gestapo, Goering by their political opponents, or of politicians from across the ideological spectrum, influential media figures, and ordinary people on social media casually using Holocaust terminology to bash anyone or any policy with which they disagree. In view of all this, it is important to provide “acceptable” analogies or comparisons to move beyond an oversimplified approach to complex history. Drawing historical parallels to the current situation or to post-Holocaust events always involves illustrating similarities and differences between two events. It is precisely in identifying legitimate examples that it is also possible to point out profound differences through contextualisation work, so as to provide clear indications of the legitimacy of comparisons. Being proactive, in this case, has the undeniable advantage of providing acceptable “coordinates”, as certified by experts and practitioners. A possible output could be, for example, a decalogue designed to avoid the error of denial and history manipulation, in a similar way to the decalogue for non-hostile communication adopted in some countries.

## PROVIDING SUPPORT IN DETECTING FAKE NEWS AND DEVELOPING CRITICAL DIGITAL LITERACY FOR USERS

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.againstholocaustdistortion.org/news/debunking-inappropriate-holocaust-comparisons-the-covid-19-yellow-star>

Fake news, (mis)information and post-fact culture are all societal developments that have been fuelled by the increased use and impact of social media on our everyday lives (Mihailidis & Viotty, 2017). While these phenomena can be found in almost all types of content areas, their impact on Holocaust remembrance and commemoration is undisputed. The “COVID-19 Yellow Star” is one example of

individuals using social media to propagate incorrect information and misused Holocaust remembrance for their own purposes<sup>3</sup>. Based on these developments, it can be argued that Holocaust memorials and museums can provide valuable inputs to counteract the sharing of this kind of information, not only by offering factually correct information, but also by contributing to the development of critical digital literacy among users. Digital literacy constitutes a variant of media literacy and can be divided into i) functional and ii) critical digital literacy (Polizzi, 2020). While functional digital literacy deals with practical skills, e.g., how to engage in online discussions, critical digital literacy is nested in users’ understanding of societal developments and circumstances. It requires users to reflect and understand how social media has started to affect democracy and civic and political participation (Fry, 2014). Returning to the example of the “COVID-19 Yellow Star”, scholars like Salzani (2021) among others, have referred to this kind of comparison as “triviali[zing] and dishonor[ing] the memory of those who suffered true persecution: it amounts to a banalization of both Nazism and its persecution of the Jews, diluting the truth of their horror and obscuring the comprehension of their historical reality and meaning” (p. 2). It is exactly in circumstances of this type that Holocaust memorials and museums can play an important role in contributing



to individuals' critical digital literacy by informing them about the meaning of the yellow star during the Nazi regime, by highlighting significant differences between the situations and by adding relevant perspectives to this discussion. This might then initiate a process of reflection among individuals and possibly foster a process of more critical, careful consumption of information from social media.

## PROMOTING AND INCREASING THE DIGITAL CULTURE OF REMEMBRANCE

The culture of remembrance has long been present in the new media. The question of how to remember is at the core of public and scientific discourse as an ongoing discussion. Walden (2021a) speaks about a "still substantial tension" between official and non-expert interpretations of the remembrance culture. New ways of strengthening a remembrance culture include addressing new target groups and also connecting existing actors in the remembrance context. In the process, local remembrance practices should also be linked with digital remembrance formats. Live tours provide a good example of a synchronous link between the place of remembrance and the digital place of remembrance (Ebbrecht-Hartmann, 2021). Digital remembrance allows boundaries to be overcome, making the distance between the participants and the place of remembrance irrelevant. Social media technology also opens up new forms of interaction with the participants. 'Liking' and commenting could thus express one's own memory in combination with other forms of remembering. In view of the decreasing number of contemporary witnesses, digital formats with personal memories are extremely important (Hogervorst, 2020; Shandler, 2017).

## KNOWING AND ADDRESSING (YOUNGER) TARGET AUDIENCES

A recent survey has found that before any educational treatment, 80% of teens had heard of the Holocaust, with almost half of them having read about the Holocaust on social media. They are also impacted by Holocaust denial: one third think that the number of Jews who died has been exaggerated, or question whether the Holocaust even happened (Lerner, 2021). Generally, as mentioned above, young generations are often subject to misconceptions or a general lack of knowledge about the Holocaust. Hence, Holocaust museums can greatly contribute to the fight against distortion and misinformation by directly targeting younger generations in their efforts. Social media channels can be instrumental in achieving this goal, as younger generations constitute a large portion of their usership. However, it is not sufficient to just share and distribute the same information across different platforms. Holocaust museums have to acknowledge that younger generations expect "snackable content" (Axelrod, 2022) on social media, or that "there is still substantial tension between officially accepted memory discourse as acknowledged and practised by Holocaust institutions and promoted by transnational organisations such as the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (the IHRA), and other forms of non-expert productions that become increasingly visible in digital spaces" (Walden, 2021a, p. 6). Additionally, any shared information also needs to adhere to the language of these contemporary communication channels (Jonsson, Årman, & Milani, 2019). In other words, if Holocaust museums want to engage with younger generations, they have to be aware and also be able to "speak their language" and engage in the social media spaces most relevant to them (Walden, 2021a). Prominent examples include, among others, the Eva Stories project on Instagram (Henig & Ebbrecht-Hartmann, 2022), the #Uploading\_Holocaust project on YouTube (Ebbrecht-Hartmann & Henig, 2021) and the increased use of TikTok by Holocaust museums (Divon & Ebbrecht-Hartmann, 2022).

## ACTIVE INVOLVEMENT OF THE FOLLOWER/FAN COMMUNITY

Placing greater focus on user activation and on the creation of a community brings a number of advantages to those who manage social media pages. Not only do users receive stronger gratification for the time spent on these pages, but the web pages themselves can represent a valuable resource in reducing distortions. This is because, within a group or a community, the norms of appropriate behaviour are collectively negotiated: users set the boundaries for appropriate discourse and behaviour through a number of social sanctions, reward and punishment typically expressed in terms of 'likes', reshares/retweets or negative emojis and sharp comments, or by reporting content to a community or platform moderator. Besides, social media users can influence the perception of others on a platform: research shows that exposure to user-generated "social corrections", such as comments countering false claims, is effective in lowering misperceptions especially if the comments are accompanied by a credible source. On the other hand, an active involvement of the fans/followers and the creation of a user community require ensuring safety for users, who should feel they can express themselves freely and receive support from both peers and the administrators/moderators of the social page or profile. An additional measure might be, for example, occasional invitations to users to discuss and debate certain related questions on social forums. Empowerment of the remembrance community is also aimed at strengthening the community itself, so that it feels that the culture of remembrance and the work of the memorials are important. They must be supported in their opinions and knowledge and also be given appropriate space.

## ENGAGING INFLUENCERS TO EXPAND AWARENESS

Social media influencers are generally people who have large audiences of followers on their social media accounts and leverage this popularity to influence or persuade this following to buy certain products or services. In the context of Holocaust memory and education, using influencers to expand awareness of the problem and to reduce perceived unawareness of historical facts may be a great strategy. Influencers can increase content awareness and reach larger audiences, improve credibility and trust, and enrich content strategy with personalisation and storytelling. The use of an influencer to launch a social media campaign is one of the most common strategies to engage social media users and fast track a page's way to a bigger audience. Careful selection of potential influencers has the added advantage of harnessing the reach, authenticity and personality of individuals who have built up their own following in a specific niche with a particular target audience.

## COLLABORATING AND WORKING TOGETHER TO INCREASE IMPACT AND EXCHANGE INFORMATION

Research has shown that museums already follow each other (Manca, 2021b; Rehm, Manca, & Haake, 2020), but stronger cooperation, e.g., in the context of commemorative days or joint actions, would open up further opportunities. Working with larger museums would allow "smaller" museums to attract attention and reach more users. Campaigns and events can be planned and executed together<sup>4</sup>[2]. The increasing presence and activity of museums on social media makes it sensible to exchange ideas and network more closely, for example in dedicated (digital) working groups. In this way, general problems and new developments can be discussed and strategies coordinated.

<sup>4</sup> A recent example of a cross-platform social media campaign conducted jointly by several institutions is #75liberation / #75befreiung.

## PROVIDING MATERIALS OR RESOURCES FOR FURTHER STUDY BASED ON A DISTORTING EPISODE

Providing in-depth materials or resources upon request or in the event of distorting comments/posts is a reactive measure which has the undeniable advantage of addressing the users directly and giving them agency in the interaction. The provision of additional material to “correct” inaccuracies or gaps in knowledge can be handled either publicly, so that other users also benefit, or privately, e.g., if you do not want to demean that person in public.

## BLOCKING OR REMOVING POSTS/COMMENTS WHEN THE INTENT IS CLEARLY PROVOCATIVE OR AN END IN ITSELF

Sometimes, when it is assessed that other, more positive measures cannot be taken, all that is left is to block or ‘ban’ the user guilty of hate speech or clearly distorting behaviour, or to delete the offending comments or posts. Although this is an extreme measure that should not be overused, it is an important tool in the hands of administrators and moderators, who are otherwise unable to manage online and remote communication, which, it should be remembered, lacks paraverbal and non-verbal communication.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the aforementioned limitations and measures, we conclude this chapter by highlighting a range of different recommendations.

## ADDRESS THE HOLOCAUST AS A UNIQUE OR UNPRECEDENTED EVENT WITHOUT EMBRACING ONE SCHOOL OF THOUGHT OVER ANOTHER

Often in the light of certain phenomena of distortion or trivialization, there may be an idea of violating the assumptions that consider the Holocaust as a unique or unprecedented event. These two positions are still undergoing scholarly debate and, depending on which one is adopted, comparisons and parallels can be made at various levels. It is important to acknowledge that people may have implicit or explicit beliefs that lead them to endorsing one position over the other. Flexibility in dealing with distortion phenomena that may reflect a wide range of positions and nuances within these different epistemologies is therefore recommended, along with the acknowledgment of multidirectional perspectives and the recognition of grey zones and borderlines of distortion.

## FOCUS ON NATIONAL OR LOCAL SPECIFICITIES OF HOLOCAUST DISTORTION

Forms of distortion can be found in different countries or even within the same country, especially if the memory of the Holocaust has been politicised or ideologised. It is therefore important to be aware of the different legacies that the Holocaust has left within different geographical, cultural and social contexts in order to devise effective measures to contain



distortion. Greater risks of distortion may emerge in the presence of emergency or crisis situations because of the need to draw parallels or comparisons between the past and a present situation (a war or threat of conflict, an economic crisis, a health emergency, etc.) depending on the historical experience of that community or group. Among the most dramatic historical events of the last century, only the memory of World War II, however, is constantly present in popular imagination as a global and total war, providing a multitude of narrative possibilities and memories. And in this scenario, eighty years later, the Holocaust still remains a fascinating, frightening and intriguing subject to explore for many people, including young people, precisely because it was an event that has universal human significance and even today has implications for all areas of individual and public life (leadership, the upheaval of society, ideology and power, people in moments of spiritual elevation and decline, loss and destruction, sophisticated killing mechanisms and wars that last for years and claim victims on an incomprehensible scale). But precisely because of this, unlike other dramatic historical events, it may lend itself more than others to being distorted or trivialised in a variety of ways.

## IDENTIFY THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN INTENTIONAL DISTORTION AND DISTORTION RESULTING FROM LACK OF KNOWLEDGE

While some distorters deliberately misuse content for different gains (seeking visibility or consensus, enjoying provoking a reaction of outrage or offence, spreading hate speech or antisemitic ideas, etc.), there are many who lack solid historical knowledge or the skills to draw parallels and comparisons. Other may simply be easy prey to reductionism (see, for example, the “Reductio ad Hitlerum”, also known as playing the Nazi card, to invalidate someone else’s position on the basis that the same view was held by Adolf Hitler or the Nazi Party) or other forms of association fallacy. It is important to be aware that these differences exist, although they are not always easy to distinguish, and to implement remedial actions so that the segment of the population that cannot be reached is blocked, while those that might be well intentioned but are ill-informed are addressed.

## CAREFUL BALANCE BETWEEN ACTIVE USER INVOLVEMENT AND BANNING ‘TROUBLEMAKERS’

Prompt, careful moderation seen as a balancing act between actively engaging and/or blocking/deleting posts is an art that can be learned, providing one has acquired adequate skills in digital communication and social psychology. The balance between these two strategies will, of course, depend on the characteristics of the community and the type of target group addressed on the different platforms. Some platforms may allow one strategy more easily than the other, but it should not be forgotten that the resources available to the specific staff entrusted with moderation will also determine the appropriate mix. The greater the resources available, the greater the feasibility of constructive interaction and reaction.

## RAISE QUESTIONS AND NOT GUILT

Avoid guilt-ridden tones that may induce rejection in those who have not yet developed an adequate awareness and sensitivity level towards the Holocaust. The tone should not be institutional, and the work should encourage dialogue and also admit error. It is important to create a space that encourages dialogue and understanding and not a place to attack and judge others, even those approaching the subject of the Holocaust for the first time. Staff

and people in charge of curating content and interaction should present themselves with a listening attitude: if they act like another authority deciding what to say, there might be a risk of making the communication environment unappealing.

## AVOID RHETORIC OR EMOTIONAL TONES

It is recommended that a narrative register be adopted, trying to adapt the language to the audience and avoiding rhetoric or emotional tones. Sometimes irony can be used to dampen inflammatory tones or relieve tension in a heated debate. As ironic communication makes an evaluative argument that violates contextual expectations and intends the listener to recognize that she/he has deliberately misapplied the evaluative argument (Kaufer, 1981), it can also serve in shifting the focus of attention to the message to be conveyed without indulging in patronising or pedagogically explicit discourse. Another suggestion is to show juxtapositions between the present and the past, and explain the factors of difference in a very simple, informative manner. It is important to speak objectively in order to be eloquent, and to keep under control the very understandable emotionality that the seriousness of the topic may generate.

## TRY NEW THINGS! USE NEW FORMS OF SOCIAL MEDIA TECHNOLOGY TO EXPRESS YOUR IDEAS

Social media is a very dynamic field, always offering new ways of expression, e.g., 360° videos, Instagram stories or TikTok clips. It is thus important to be open to new forms of media storytelling and digital memory and to exchange ideas with people who have already gained experience in this field. Trying out new things and reflecting on them promotes discussion of how to remember in the present day and opens up opportunities to reach new target groups and get in touch. Explore alternative social media platforms like TikTok to engage younger generations on Holocaust themes: they are eager to listen to you!

## INVESTMENT ON STAFF'S PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND CONTINUING EDUCATION

Professional development opportunities for museum staff are usually designed to support projects that use the transformative power of professional development and training to generate systemic change within museums of all types and sizes. In the specific context of developing measures to counter Holocaust distortion, such programs are supposed to provide museum staff with the skills to integrate digital technology into museum operations and to support them in providing inclusive services to people with diverse geographic, cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds, especially by gaining the skills to deal with the different aspects related to the fight against Holocaust distortion. Museum staff should be encouraged to attend these kinds of programmes, which are expected to include topics of critical digital literacy and social media literacy skills focusing on recognizing and responding to distortion on social media.

## EMPOWER STUDENTS TO BE TOMORROW'S "MEMORY DISSEMINATORS"

Social media have become an indispensable part of students' everyday lives. Dealing with Holocaust topics in social media should be part of education in order to sensitize students to distortion and give them tools to become powerful representatives of tomorrow's culture of remembrance. Students should be empowered to participate in discussions and represent opinions, and also to become memory-makers themselves, thus participating in the construction of digital heritage in the collective memory. There are useful websites that provide guidelines for using social media in education, for example: <https://www.holocaustremembrance.com/resources/educational-materials/using-social-media-holocaust-education> and <https://reframe.sussex.ac.uk/digitalholocaustmemory/2021/09/08/the-holocaust-and-social-media/>

## GREATER INTEGRATION WITH THE LOCAL COMMUNITIES

Like schools, museums and memorials are part of a geographical context that continuously communicates and informs its visitors about what happened in the past and the changes that are taking place in the present. Social media can be tools for connecting and activating networks, providing that the exploration of places and the discovery of what has happened in neighbourhoods, streets and homes are designed as a concrete formative experience in the field (De Bartolomeis, 2018). The use of social media in such contexts represents an opportunity for involvement that is capable of integrating what is known and well-explored into a message/product of communication and expression of one's own point of view on the content learned (Schwartz, 1977). An important contribution to the development of these synergies in meetings, exchanges and learning can be made through the Service Learning methodology (Battistoni, 2002), which allows work on curricular contents by involving students in the identification of problematic areas concerning history, memory, documentation and testimonies. With Service Learning, it is possible to involve students in designing and implementing a service in solidarity with museums, memorials and the whole community and, at the same time, implement a learning pathway with well-defined disciplinary and cross-cutting objectives related to the Holocaust and to proper use of social media.

## STRENGTHEN INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION AND EXCHANGE

Continuous cooperation would support the work that museums carry out in the field of social media. This could involve coordinating joint actions and initiatives (social media campaigns, educational activities with students, initiatives addressed to the adult public, etc.). This may also help to create permanent infrastructures for data collection about identified distortions that are shared more frequently. The effect of learning from each other should not be underestimated. Joint campaigning adds weight to the conveyed content and reaches greater audiences. It would be useful to launch a collective, simultaneous action to show that all museums or all foundations are present at the same time to carry out this kind of common objective.

# CONCLUSIONS

The results presented in the previous sections allow us to draw some important conclusions. Although most of the data collected within the project focus on museums and memorials located in only two countries - Italy and Germany - they can still serve as a first example of the different trajectories that Holocaust remembrance and commemoration enacted by small and medium-sized museums can follow on social media<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> For an in-depth study of differences and similarities in commemorating the liberation and the end of World War II during the pandemic lockdown in the two countries, see Manca, Rehm, & Haake (in press).

As a matter of fact, although all involved institutions are located in two Western European countries, they nonetheless generally reflect the situation of Holocaust museology in many other countries around the world. In addition, for the first time the focus is on memorial sites that mainly address the local public, apart from a few cases that are well known to international audiences as well (e.g., Bergen-Belsen, Dachau, Buchenwald). From this point of view, the project has investigated national and local entities that usually are somewhat neglected by

academic research, which privileges large institutions with international visibility (Dalziel, 2016; Lundrigan, 2020; Manca, 2021b; Wight, 2020).

The most significant, valuable practices that have been highlighted in the previous sections, together with the discussed limitations, allow us to make some important reflections. First, it has been ascertained that the COVID-19 pandemic has been a powerful accelerator in the transformation of digital practices and habits in Holocaust museums (Ebbrecht-Hartmann, 2021; Walden, 2021b). Due to the dramatic disruption of social, work and educational habits for billions of people brought about by the pandemic, digital media consumption

has dramatically increased, and cultural heritage institutions have been no exception in resorting to extensive use of digital technologies (Agostino, Arnaboldi, & Lampis, 2020). In the accelerated move to online consumption, museums were among the first to introduce new ways for digitally experiencing cultural collections and responded in various ways to social needs by supporting online visitors with resources such as educational material, live events and creative activities. Among the digital technologies that gained pace during the lockdown, social media undeniably played a major role. For example, the Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum, which was closed for several months, made use of its Facebook and Twitter accounts to promote the institution's online resources, such as its panoramic virtual tour, e-learning lessons and crowdfunding (Dalziel, 2021; Najda-Janoszka & Sawczuk, 2021). In Germany (Ebbrecht-Hartmann, 2021) and in Italy, numerous memorial museums offered virtual tours and online visits of specific locations at memorial sites, video messages from survivors with political and other representatives, Instagram live streams introducing specific aspects of the camps' history or short clips aimed at offering social media users a virtual experience of the sites. Overall, this process of transferring activities online involved mediating simulations of objects which transformed the issues of authenticity, evidence and materiality, which were at the basis of an affective encounter with historical objects in a physical museum or memorial site (Walden, 2021b).

These ongoing transformations raise hope that the pandemic experience can be capitalised on and that new digital practices will be developed by Holocaust memorial agencies and their users. While the pandemic has certainly accelerated experimental use of social media for Holocaust memory in many respects, it is still too much of an ongoing process to speak of a real transition from the "era of the witness" (Wieviorka, 2006) to the "era of the user" (Ebbrecht-Hartmann & Henig, 2021; Hogervorst, 2020). Maybe in a near future we can witness a real "paradigm shift", which today also includes a third generations' Holocaust (Lang, 2017). Dealing with controversial content for this type of museum is still a complex, sensitive issue and a major challenge. Fear of trivialization or distortion and the risk of harbouring conflicting memories are always in the background. The limited type of user interaction, mainly consisting of likes and shares, highlights a general "passivity" of Holocaust institutions (Kansteiner, 2017) and a lack of engagement with social media users (Manca, Passarelli & Rehm, 2022; Walden, 2021b). If the Holocaust is to continue to be a landmark in the history of the 20th century for new generations as well, it will be important "to find constructive ways to negotiate between necessary security measures and still encouraging critical thinking and networking within and beyond these events" (Walden, 2021b, page 12). Along with experimenting with social media platforms such as TikTok, Holocaust museums and younger users have progressively become involved in new, creative and necessary kinds of testimony which have recently started to emerge (Divon & Ebbrecht-Hartmann, 2022; Ebbrecht-Hartmann & Divon, 2022). New memory ecologies developed through digital technologies are starting to question the general cautiousness towards the interactive and participatory potential of social media use. Memory ecologies heavily rely on the participation of users, by implicating them in the process. While Holocaust museums have traditionally acted as gatekeepers of Holocaust memory, they are also increasingly expected to overcome their hesitancy about the "producer" culture of social media and enable potential visitors to become ethical and active co-producers of memory. In this sense, addressing younger generations is particularly stringent today as students' knowledge about the Holocaust reveals limited understanding of "who the victims of the Holocaust actually were, an even more limited understanding of its perpetrators, and a similarly compromised sense of its geography" (Lawson, 2017, page 345).

As outlined in this White Paper and, in greater detail, in the Guidelines and Recommendations for Countering Holocaust Distortion (Manca, Haake, Rehm, & Guetta, 2022), expanding historical knowledge of the Holocaust, investigating users' preconceptions and biases, further promoting the digital culture of remembrance and actively involving the follower/fan communities are all measures that Holocaust museums and memorials may adopt to encourage the development of forms of Holocaust knowledge and remembrance that are participatory, innovative and critical. Above all, every move in these directions can contribute to keeping the memory of the Holocaust both relevant and current almost 80 years after the end of World War II.

# ANNEX. IHRA WORKING DEFINITION OF HOLOCAUST DENIAL AND DISTORTION<sup>1</sup>

The IHRA's Member Countries adopted the working definition of Holocaust denial and distortion by consensus at the IHRA's Plenary meeting in Toronto on 10 October 2013.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.holocaustremembrance.com/resources/working-definitions-charters/working-definition-holocaust-denial-and-distortion>

<sup>2</sup> <https://againstdistortiontoolkit.holocaustremembrance.com/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.againstholocaustdistortion.org/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.holocaustremembrance.com/resources/reports/recognizing-countering-holocaust-distortion-recommendations>

<sup>5</sup> <https://holocaustremembrance.com/resources/publications/holocaust-distortion-growing-threat-film>

<sup>6</sup> <https://holocaustremembrance.com/resources/publications/understanding-holocaust-distortion-contexts-influences-examples>

<sup>7</sup> [https://holocaustremembrance.com/sites/default/files/inline-files/Paper%20on%20Distortion\\_0.pdf](https://holocaustremembrance.com/sites/default/files/inline-files/Paper%20on%20Distortion_0.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.un.org/press/en/2021/ga12400.doc.htm>

This working definition was developed by IHRA experts in the Committee on Antisemitism and Holocaust Denial in cooperation with the IHRA's governmental representatives for use as a practical working tool.

The working definition of Holocaust denial and distortion has laid the foundation for further resources on recognizing and countering Holocaust denial and distortion, including an action-oriented toolkit<sup>2</sup>, the #ProtectTheFacts campaign<sup>3</sup>, policy recommendations<sup>4</sup>, a short film<sup>5</sup>, a publication<sup>6</sup>, and a paper<sup>7</sup>.

It has also inspired action outside the IHRA. The United Nations' General Assembly, for example, made use of the working definition in its Resolution A/76/L.30<sup>8</sup>, which condemned denial and distortion of the Holocaust and commended the IHRA for its work. The resolution was adopted on 20 January 2022, the anniversary of the Wannsee Conference.



## THE WORKING DEFINITION OF HOLOCAUST DENIAL AND DISTORTION

The present definition is an expression of the awareness that Holocaust denial and distortion have to be challenged and denounced nationally and internationally and need examination at a global level. IHRA hereby adopts the following legally non-binding working definition as its working tool.

Holocaust denial is discourse and propaganda that deny the historical reality and the extent of the extermination of the Jews by the Nazis and their accomplices during World War II, known as the Holocaust or the Shoah. Holocaust denial refers specifically to any attempt to claim that the Holocaust/Shoah did not take place.

Holocaust denial may include publicly denying or calling into doubt the use of principal mechanisms of destruction (such as gas chambers, mass shooting, starvation and torture) or the intentionality of the genocide of the Jewish people.

Holocaust denial in its various forms is an expression of antisemitism. The attempt to deny the genocide of the Jews is an effort to exonerate National Socialism and antisemitism from guilt or responsibility in the genocide of the Jewish people. Forms of Holocaust denial also include blaming the Jews for either exaggerating or creating the Shoah for political or financial gain as if the Shoah itself was the result of a conspiracy plotted by the Jews. In this, the goal is to make the Jews culpable and antisemitism once again legitimate.

The goals of Holocaust denial often are the rehabilitation of an explicit antisemitism and the promotion of political ideologies and conditions suitable for the advent of the very type of event it denies.

### DISTORTION OF THE HOLOCAUST REFERS, INTER ALIA, TO:

1. Intentional efforts to excuse or minimize the impact of the Holocaust or its principal elements, including collaborators and allies of Nazi Germany;
2. Gross minimization of the number of the victims of the Holocaust in contradiction to reliable sources;
3. Attempts to blame the Jews for causing their own genocide;
4. Statements that cast the Holocaust as a positive historical event. Those statements are not Holocaust denial but are closely connected to it as a radical form of antisemitism. They may suggest that the Holocaust did not go far enough in accomplishing its goal of "the Final Solution of the Jewish Question";
5. Attempts to blur the responsibility for the establishment of concentration and death camps devised and operated by Nazi Germany by putting blame on other nations or ethnic groups.



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This publication was made possible through the financial support of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA Grant Strategy 2019-2023, line 2 "Countering distortion", IHRA Grant #2020-792).

