

Article

Social Media as *Lieux* for the Convergence of Collective Trajectories of Holocaust Memory—A Study of Online Users in Germany and Italy

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Abstract: By articulating a shared victimhood or guilt or responsibility, memorial museums are designed as ethical projects that encourage visitors to learn from the past to build a “better future”. In contemporary Europe, Holocaust memorials and museums constitute a trajectory of remembrance about public Holocaust memory that consolidates political legitimacy and articulates national narratives of the legacy of WWII. In parallel, increasing adoption and spread of digital technologies have resulted in a convergence and a globalisation of themes and user interests associated with Holocaust memory. The purpose of this study is to investigate the perspectives and interests of users of the social media profiles of a group of Holocaust museums and memorials in Germany and Italy. Using a primarily quantitative approach, the study sought to understand the motivations, interests, and online activities of users of nine Holocaust museums and memorials. While national narratives regarding public policy continue to diverge in the two countries, users express a convergence of interests and motivations when using these social media profiles. This dual venture of Holocaust memory is a complex yet powerful example of how the globalisation of digital media is playing an increasingly significant role in European contemporary society.

Keywords: cultural heritage; Holocaust memory; social media; Holocaust museums; Italy; Germany



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1. Introduction

In the past decades, Holocaust memory has increasingly influenced Western collective memories and identities [1]. A European founding myth has been built around the memory of the Holocaust and it has become the yardstick by which other developments in politics are measured [2]. Today, the public memory of the Holocaust has become largely detached from the Holocaust itself and instead serves the political interests of contemporary states. In order to consolidate political legitimacy in contemporary Europe, it is used to promote highly contemporary national narratives and identities, as well as to build new coalitions and partnerships both domestically and internationally and to meet the specific foreign policy needs of particular countries [3].

In parallel with its political significance, Holocaust memory is progressively characterized by a phenomenon known as the “transnational turn” [4], which describes a number of historical events that transcend national boundaries [5]. Although in the context of transnational connectedness, bounded views on national belonging are challenged and national memories are rethought and reconfigured [6], the concept of national memories remains relevant and is undergoing a transformation as a consequence of globalisation [7]. In fact, the transnational does not occlude the nation [4]. With the development of the transnational, nations are recast both symbolically and politically; they are reconceived as intrinsically and externally relational, embedded, contextualised, always interconnected, and part of a larger whole.

Globalisation and internationalisation of historical memory in general, and the Holocaust in particular, have been accelerated by the continuing spread of digital technologies. Assmann's [4] "transnational turn" and Hoskins's [8] "connective turn" both suggest radical changes to how new technologies (re)arrange individual and social memory. Specifically, the connective turn "drives an ontological shift in what memory is and what memory does [...] liberating it from the traditional bounds of the spatial archive, the organization, the institution, and distributed it on a continuous basis via a connectivity between brains, bodies, and personal and public lives" [9] (p. 1). Increasingly, Holocaust memory is being conveyed through digital technologies, which support immersive, simulated, or counterfactual experiences of the Holocaust [10,11]. Throughout the past few years, new modes of Holocaust commemoration and representation have evolved as a result of the progressive digitalisation of society [12]. With the passing of Holocaust survivors and witnesses, the "era of witness" [13] has evolved into the "era of the user" [14,15], in which users can choose from numerous testimonies and navigate through a variety of digital resources available online. New memory ecologies are forming as a result of digital technologies [16], and the participatory culture of social media [17] contributes to the emergence of new forms of Holocaust commemoration and education [18].

Taking advantage of these developments, Holocaust museums have also begun to employ digital technology to attract visitors to their online spaces and to facilitate the presentation of material evidence [19]. As social media started to be used by major Holocaust organizations more than 10 years ago now [20], the recent COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the willingness of Holocaust memorials and museums to experiment and engage in the use of social media [21]. Thus, digital media has become more accessible, resulting in increased opportunities to experiment with it and in an intensification of ongoing changes in how museums and memorials are operated [22].

In the context of collective memories, which encompass both individual and collective processes [23], museums play a crucial role in the dissemination of cultural memory [24]. They may be considered as "lieux de mémoire", that is as "symbolic elements of any community's memorial heritage" [25] (p. 7). Developed as ethical projects, memorial museums seek to encourage visitors to learn from the past so that they may build a better future by identifying a common sense of guilt and responsibility that unite the nation [26]. However, the strains museums and memorials are under due to progressive digitisation have led to unprecedented challenges. On the one hand, the "participatory turn", which has been impacting the general museum sector [27], is driving social activism and democratisation practices. On the other hand, history museums and memorials remain places of public Holocaust memory where "the multitude" [9] of voices and agents of dialogue continue to be limited [22,28,29].

We examine in this study the tension between the national and the transnational, as well as the influence of digital technologies, particularly social media, on users' responses in a collection of Holocaust museums and memorials in Germany and Italy, where the legacy of WWII and the memory of the Holocaust differ in their conception and implementation. The purpose of the study is to determine whether these museums remain national(ist) ventures, or whether social media has been altering what a memorial or museum can be and facilitate a convergence of users' motivations and interests that transcends national boundaries [26]. As opposed to other studies concerning difficult heritage on social media [30], our research uses a survey methodology and analyses quantitative data collected from a questionnaire distributed to online users of the social media profiles of nine Holocaust museums and memorials. The hypothesis underlying this study is that the acceleration in cultural globalization [31] may also have affected digital mediatization of Holocaust memories across diverse countries as expressed by the convergence of users' interests, motivations, and agency in social media spaces. In this way, the study seeks to provide a broader understanding of the mediational and cultural transmission processes involved in the articulation of social memory through the perspective of the users [32].

2. Holocaust Museums and the Participatory Turn of Digital Memory

As a field of study, research on the digital memory of the Holocaust on social media relates to the category of difficult heritage and falls under the umbrella of history, memory studies, heritage studies, digital media studies, computer science, and tourism studies [30,33]. For this research study, it is important to examine the contributions made by memory studies and media studies to investigate such a complex and transdisciplinary phenomenon. As a result of “mediatisation” [34], many social and cultural processes, including the ways in which individuals and societies remember and forget, have been transformed [10]. The transition from collective memory [35] to “connective memory” [8] is a major focus of research on memory that examines social and mobile technologies, as well as the ability of social media to articulate marginalized memories and archive them. Digital cultural studies have suggested that digitisation is synergistically related to globalisation, leading to another area of research known as the “global” turn [33]. In this concept, the word “global” is deliberately mixed with the computer term “bit”, implying that digital memories are unevenly distributed and are mobilised by diverse agents of memory. Among them, museum curators and Holocaust memorial staff members play an important role in the preservation and transmission of public memory [26].

In addition to serving as an ethical project that encourages visitors to recognize that they are victims, guilty, or responsible, Holocaust memorial museums have also faced the transnational turn [4], which has profoundly impacted their political mission [36]. Consequently, questions arise as to whether national memorial museum projects remain national(ist) enterprises or whether digital technology alters what constitutes a memorial museum [26]. With the transition from a national to cosmopolitan Holocaust memory [37], a strong transnational memory culture has been developed due to the flourish of international and European networks and organisations. The study of national articulation of memory in Holocaust museums and memorials [26,28] illustrates, however, that while the term Holocaust has progressively acquired transnational resonance [38], a strong national articulation of memory persists, which undermines the transnational turn described in the broad field of digital memory.

This scenario also supports the view that the shift from “collective memory” to “memory of the multitude” [9] is still quite limited [26]. Considering the growing importance of user-generated content (UGC), which enables individuals to formulate, reinforce, and challenge interpretations of the past [39], the fear of trivialization or distortion, coupled with the risk of harbouring conflicting memories [40,41], have all contributed to the occurrence of a sort of “passivity” by Holocaust museums [20,28,29]. By this, we mean that a cautious approach has generally been taken towards soliciting user interaction, and a preference has been shown for unidirectional communication and the broadcast of a “carefully shaped, widely accepted message via social media” [11] (p. 340). Furthermore, from the perspective of a multitude of voices in museums and memorials, traces of agonistic [42] or multidirectional memory [43] are still rare [26].

3. German Memories of Guilt and the Myth of the Good Italian

The convergence between historical knowledge and commemoration practises that has resulted from Holocaust “musealization” trends [24] has led to the construction of different cultural memories of World War II by diverse communities, and contemporary history museums reflect both historical knowledge and cultural memories of their era [44]. Although Holocaust memory has become one of the strongest collective memories and identities [1], it was rooted in specific geographical areas, times, and landscapes. Consequently, historical events can be observed on a variety of geographical levels with strong, if not contradictory, national and local memories.

Although contested memories remain prevalent in former communist countries in eastern Europe, divergent memory practises are common throughout the continent [3,45]. It is the case of two countries in Western Europe, Germany and Italy, which have developed divergent narratives regarding their involvement in World War II and during the Holocaust.

Their initial alliance has morphed into an antagonistic relationship, and they continue to perpetuate a variety of official and vernacular narratives of the Holocaust, which are largely woven together as intricate narratives about victimisation and perpetration ¹.

Germany is frequently described as a nation with a deep understanding of its national history of violence and oppression. As a watchword for historical responsibility, the discourse of “Vergangenheitsbewältigung” (“Coming to terms with the past”) has transcended national and linguistic boundaries, becoming a symbol of reconciling with the (Nazi) past. Compared to the investment of most other nations in reparative justice, the German government is often commended for its commitment to education [46]. According to the German discourse on memory, Germany’s WWII history is “reprehensible”, and there is a general consensus that any positive memory of that period should be banned. Through a negative memory, the commemoration of German guilt and the country’s reintegration into the circle of civilisation has become an almost unquestioned matter, of course [47]. Moreover, another hegemonic truth lies in the imperative to remember (“We must not forget”), which has been built up over many years with enormous energy, financial investment, and civic commitment. Since then, it has become accessible and unmissable to the entire population through a variety of institutions, initiatives, memorials, and museums, as well as events and programmes. However, it has been the process of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* that fuelled a new form of nationalism of superiority manifested as “memory championship” by the German nationality, which has led to a sense of self-congratulatory national pride in how well the nation dealt with its criminal legacies [3].

In contrast with the hegemonic memory of the National Socialist era and the Holocaust in Germany, Italy is one of the western countries that have emphasized anti-Nazi resistance over pervasive local collaboration during the Holocaust. In the immediate aftermath of the war, there was no cohesive national memory [3]: the Resistance movement developed a narrative in which Italy was portrayed as a victim of a war perpetrated by Mussolini and Hitler, while another developed in opposition to antifascist rhetoric and was characterised by widespread anti-communist sentiments. The Italian government’s commemoration and remembrance events still tend to emphasize German guilt rather than Italian guilt more than half a century after the end of World War II, while simultaneously highlighting the role played by the Italian resistance movement and the numerous mass killings committed by German forces [48]. Italian collective memory continues to invoke national myths of the “good Italian” and the “bad German” in their recollections [49], while still avoiding a problematic confrontation with the roles played both by civilians and police officers in the persecution and deportation of Jews [50]. A counter-narrative that alleges that ordinary Italians did not act with goodness and benevolence towards the Jewish population has started to emerge only recently. In addition to this, an interconnection between national memories and transnational memorials that mark the memory of Holocaust events is also expressed in the calendar of the major national commemorations and celebrations as well as the manner in which these are conceived and established [51].

In spite of the fact that both countries have unresolved historical issues that are not acknowledged in the predominant narrative—the Italian mass crimes in occupied Yugoslavia and in northern Africa [3]; armed forces killings, awareness and indifference to the genocide when it was occurring, and the sale of confiscated Jewish property [46]—both countries participate in a complex relationship between transnational themes associated with Holocaust memorials and distinctly national ones. Using the perspective of users of Holocaust museums and memorials, we investigate how these cultural institutions use their roles on social media to showcase this interweaving of national and transnational memories.

4. Methods

This study is part of a larger research project that examines Holocaust commemoration practices using social media [28,29]. It examines how users of five German memorials and four Italian museums use social media ecosystems to acquire knowledge about historical content and engage in digital commemoration activities. The nine museums and memorials

have been identified as being active on at least two social media platforms among Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube.

Based on previous studies, a survey was developed to assess the type of information typically contained in social media profiles of organisations of this type [11,52,53]. The questionnaire included 36 questions, divided into three sections. In the first section, we collect information about the respondent (gender, age, location, occupation, educational qualifications); in the second section, we explore their personal experiences and interests in Holocaust issues; the third section examines how users use social media in order to produce content published by Holocaust museums on their profiles/pages and how they perceive social media use by these museums. The survey includes multiple choice questions, Likert-type items, and open questions. In particular, the second and third sections of the survey include five sets of Likert-type questions (with a response scale ranging from 1 = not at all/never to 5 = completely/very often) measuring different aspects:

1. Participants' interests in several topics related to the Holocaust (e.g., "antisemitism" and "human rights"), 19 items.
2. Personal motivation(s) to follow the museum/memorial page (e.g., "I feel responsible for the coming generations" or "I want to expand my study/professional network of contacts in the field of the Holocaust"), 17 items.
3. Motivations to follow a museum/memorial page related to the page (e.g., "Quality of comments by followers/fans" or "Frequency with which new content is published"), 7 items.
4. Frequency reported taking specific actions on the page (for example, "Post a comment", "Mention or tag other users/accounts/pages", 12 items.
5. Lastly, participants were asked to rate their satisfaction with certain aspects of their page (e.g., "I am satisfied with how the administrator interacts with me" or "I feel safe in the followers/fans community"), 11 items.

An open-source survey platform, LimeSurvey (<http://www.limesurvey.org/>), was utilized to administer the online survey, and the nine institutions participated by disseminating the survey among their users. From February to December 2021, we collected 276 responses from Italian museums' users and 254 responses from German memorials' users.

Out of the two groups of Holocaust organizations indicated (Table 1), respondents were asked to identify their favourite social media channel for a museum or memorial. The majority of respondents were Facebook users, however, for other social media channels, we observe a different pattern between respondents from Italy and Germany, where the former follows almost exclusively Facebook (80%) and YouTube (14%), and the latter is divided between Facebook (46%), Instagram (39%), and Twitter (14%).

Table 1. Distribution of responses across the nine museums and memorials and their social media channels.

	Germany	Italy	Total
Facebook page	117 (46.1%)	222 (80.4%)	339 (64.0%)
Twitter profile	35 (13.8%)	8 (2.9%)	43 (8.1%)
Instagram profile	99 (39.0%)	7 (2.5%)	106 (20.0%)
YouTube channel	3 (1.2%)	39 (14.1%)	42 (7.9%)
Total	254 (100.00%)	276 (100.00%)	530 (100.0%)

In terms of socio-demographic characteristics (Table 2), respondents were predominantly women with an average age of 47.9 years (52.3 years in Italy and 42.4 in Germany) and a higher education qualification. They had also a variety of professional backgrounds, including teachers, academic staff, clerical staff, retired people, and students.

Table 2. Socio-demographics and professional characteristics.

		Germany	Italy	TOT
Gender	Female	144 (56.7%)	208 (75.4%)	352 (66.4%)
	Male	101 (39.8%)	65 (23.6%)	166 (31.3%)
	Other/Prefer not to say	9 (3.5%)	3 (1.1%)	12 (2.3%)
Higher education degree	Yes	172 (67.7%)	202 (73.2%)	374 (70.6%)
	No	82 (32.3%)	74 (26.8%)	156 (29.4%)
Position	Teacher/Educator	13 (5.1%)	85 (30.8%)	98 (18.5%)
	Retired	15 (5.9%)	52 (18.8%)	67 (12.6%)
	Clerical staff	18 (7.1%)	36 (13.0%)	54 (10.2%)
	Scholar/Academic/Cultural operator	65 (25.6%)	28 (10.1%)	93 (17.5%)
	Self-employed	21 (8.3%)	25 (9.1%)	46 (8.7%)
	Student	31 (12.2%)	11 (4.0%)	42 (7.9%)
	Other	91 (35.8%)	39 (14.1%)	130 (24.5%)
Educational and informal experiences related to the Holocaust	Teaching	210 (82.7%)	191 (69.2%)	401 (75.7%)
	Organization	183 (72.0%)	180 (65.2%)	363 (68.5%)
	Planning	164 (64.6%)	180 (65.2%)	344 (64.9%)
	Participation	225 (88.6%)	232 (84.1%)	457 (86.2%)
	Visits to memory sites	246 (96.9%)	259 (93.8%)	505 (95.3%)
	Teaching	210 (82.7%)	191 (69.2%)	401 (75.7%)

The means for the German and Italian respondents were calculated for each of the five sets of Likert-type items and compared using two-sample *t*-tests to determine if there was a significant difference between the two groups. Data were analysed using the software R 4.1.1 (<https://www.r-project.org/>).

5. Results

The results are summarised in Table 3 and the graphical summaries are shown in Figures 1–5. According to the results, Italian respondents expressed greater interest in 14 of 19 topics relating to the Holocaust than German respondents. There were no significant differences between the two groups regarding the remaining five topics—fascism, Nazi ideology, personal stories of victims or survivors, racism, and remembrance and commemoration.

Table 3. *t*-test comparisons for Likert-type items.

Category	Item	Germany (M ± SD)	Italy (M ± SD)	<i>t</i> -Test Results
Interest	Antisemitism	3.95 ± 0.67	4.28 ± 0.73	<i>t</i> (502.56) = 5.4, <i>p</i> < 0.001 ***
	Cultural heritage	3.68 ± 0.77	4.25 ± 0.72	<i>t</i> (485.33) = 8.63, <i>p</i> < 0.001 ***
	Dark tourism	3.94 ± 0.72	4.13 ± 0.92	<i>t</i> (494.94) = 2.69, <i>p</i> = 0.007 **
	Fascism and other Nazi accomplices' ideology	3.98 ± 0.71	4.10 ± 0.89	<i>t</i> (497.16) = 1.7, <i>p</i> = 0.089
	Heritage from the Holocaust: Hope, Faith and Resilience	3.79 ± 0.85	4.10 ± 0.88	<i>t</i> (497.1) = 3.94, <i>p</i> < 0.001 ***
	Historical events	4.03 ± 0.72	4.31 ± 0.71	<i>t</i> (493.14) = 4.51, <i>p</i> < 0.001 ***
	Holocaust denial and distortion	3.84 ± 0.85	4.15 ± 0.91	<i>t</i> (501.13) = 4.01, <i>p</i> < 0.001 ***

Table 3. Cont.

Category	Item	Germany (M ± SD)	Italy (M ± SD)	t-Test Results
	Human rights	3.91 ± 0.81	4.36 ± 0.75	$t(484.89) = 6.42$, $p < 0.001$ ***
	Jewish culture	3.61 ± 0.81	4.07 ± 0.98	$t(499.95) = 5.75$, $p < 0.001$ ***
	Nazi ideology	3.65 ± 0.84	3.50 ± 1.06	$t(496.7) = 1.7$, $p = 0.091$
	Other genocides	3.37 ± 0.90	3.79 ± 0.87	$t(491.79) = 5.31$, $p < 0.001$ ***
	Personal stories of victims or survivors	4.21 ± 0.73	4.23 ± 0.84	$t(501.87) = 0.36$, $p = 0.717$
	Racism	3.88 ± 0.78	4.01 ± 0.91	$t(501.32) = 1.77$, $p = 0.077$
	Refugees and immigration	3.59 ± 0.97	3.88 ± 0.91	$t(484.93) = 3.48$, $p = 0.001$ **
	Remembrance and commemoration	4.14 ± 0.77	4.08 ± 0.84	$t(501.3) = 0.73$, $p = 0.465$
	The Righteous among the Nations	3.47 ± 0.94	4.09 ± 0.88	$t(483.14) = 7.59$, $p < 0.001$ ***
	Totalitarian regimes	3.35 ± 0.94	3.83 ± 0.93	$t(491.58) = 5.76$, $p < 0.001$ ***
	Trauma psychology	3.26 ± 1.16	3.75 ± 1.05	$t(479.05) = 4.95$, $p < 0.001$ ***
	Wars and conflicts	3.14 ± 0.96	3.57 ± 0.95	$t(492.95) = 5.06$, $p < 0.001$ ***
Personal motivation	I feel responsible for the coming generations	3.81 ± 0.93	4.18 ± 0.77	$t(405.41) = 4.59$, $p < 0.001$ ***
	I feel empathy for the victims	4.21 ± 0.73	4.27 ± 0.73	$t(435.92) = 0.93$, $p = 0.354$
	I want to be informed about exposi- tions/evidence/ artefacts of the museum	3.89 ± 0.77	4.26 ± 0.71	$t(425.06) = 5.36$, $p < 0.001$ ***
	I want to expand my study/professional network of contacts in the field of the Holocaust	2.81 ± 1.41	3.51 ± 1.17	$t(405.35) = 5.67$, $p < 0.001$ ***
	It is a part of my history/heritage that I want to know more about	3.52 ± 1.17	3.87 ± 1.10	$t(428.72) = 3.3$, $p = 0.001$ **
	I want to expand my personal network of contacts in the field of Holocaust	2.98 ± 1.26	3.38 ± 1.14	$t(423.07) = 3.52$, $p < 0.001$ ***

Table 3. Cont.

Category	Item	Germany (M ± SD)	Italy (M ± SD)	t-Test Results
	I want to speak for those who no longer can, but also for humanity more generally	3.26 ± 1.19	3.87 ± 1.03	$t(415.66) = 5.76$, $p < 0.001$ ***
	I want to share personal opinions/ideas on the topic with others	3.02 ± 1.09	3.65 ± 0.96	$t(416.27) = 6.39$, $p < 0.001$ ***
	I want to commemorate the victims	3.98 ± 0.82	3.99 ± 0.90	$t(443.42) = 0.13$, $p = 0.895$
	It's a way of coming to one's senses and thankfulness	2.97 ± 1.30	3.81 ± 1.08	$t(404.2) = 7.31$, $p < 0.001$ ***
	I want to learn more about the Holo-caust/Second World War	3.92 ± 0.79	4.16 ± 0.81	$t(440.14) = 3.12$, $p = 0.002$ *
	I want to be able to tell the story further to next generations	3.99 ± 0.89	4.31 ± 0.82	$t(424.13) = 3.95$, $p < 0.001$ ***
	I want to understand what happened during the Holocaust	4.15 ± 0.74	4.35 ± 0.72	$t(434.58) = 2.98$, $p = 0.003$ *
	I want to share my study/professional interests with others	2.73 ± 1.41	3.51 ± 1.19	$t(406.87) = 6.3$, $p < 0.001$ ***
	I am curious to know what happened during the Holocaust	3.87 ± 0.86	4.06 ± 0.89	$t(440.61) = 2.32$, $p = 0.021$ *
	I want that such a horrific occurrence may never happen again	4.63 ± 0.64	4.78 ± 0.56	$t(416.15) = 2.52$, $p = 0.012$ *
	I am afraid that something can happen in the future again	3.59 ± 1.02	3.91 ± 0.98	$t(431.86) = 3.29$, $p = 0.001$ ***
Motivations related to the page	Direct knowledge of the administrator/s of the page/profile	1.93 ± 1.14	2.50 ± 1.23	$t(408.38) = 4.88$, $p < 0.001$ ***

Table 3. Cont.

Category	Item	Germany (M ± SD)	Italy (M ± SD)	t-Test Results
	Quality of the comments by followers/fans	2.66 ± 1.08	2.70 ± 1.02	$t(397.72) = 0.39$, $p = 0.695$
	Reputation of the Institution in the field	3.63 ± 0.97	3.89 ± 0.92	$t(397.04) = 2.78$, $p = 0.006^{**}$
	Accuracy of the information published on the page/profile	4.47 ± 0.64	4.44 ± 0.72	$t(408.88) = 0.4$, $p = 0.692$
	Relevance of the posts and comments	3.72 ± 0.79	3.98 ± 0.94	$t(407.15) = 3$, $p = 0.003^{**}$
	Frequency with which new content is published	3.24 ± 0.84	3.65 ± 0.93	$t(408.93) = 4.6$, $p < 0.001^{***}$
	Popularity of the page/profile (e.g., number of “likes”, number of followers)	1.87 ± 1.02	2.30 ± 1.11	$t(408.55) = 4.12$, $p < 0.001^{***}$
Actions	Like content	3.42 ± 1.16	3.46 ± 1.21	$t(402.76) = 0.33$, $p = 0.743$
	Like comments	2.31 ± 1.08	2.67 ± 1.21	$t(403.99) = 3.14$, $p = 0.002^{**}$
	Post a comment	1.98 ± 0.90	2.03 ± 0.81	$t(382.84) = 0.63$, $p = 0.532$
	Reply to a comment	1.90 ± 0.92	1.94 ± 0.83	$t(380.97) = 0.46$, $p = 0.647$
	Reply to content/comment with new content (e.g., comment with text/photo/video/link)	1.69 ± 0.89	1.75 ± 0.80	$t(383.03) = 0.7$, $p = 0.486$
	Post new content (e.g., text, photo, video)	1.71 ± 1.05	1.60 ± 0.80	$t(343.53) = 1.15$, $p = 0.249$
	Retweet/share content	2.64 ± 1.29	2.55 ± 1.16	$t(379.76) = 0.79$, $p = 0.431$
	Mention or tag other users/accounts/pages	1.84 ± 1.02	1.91 ± 1.01	$t(395.25) = 0.7$, $p = 0.483$
	Use direct or private message to interact with other users	1.64 ± 0.99	1.75 ± 0.97	$t(389.83) = 1.13$, $p = 0.259$
	Use direct or private message to interact with the administrators	1.38 ± 0.70	1.61 ± 0.77	$t(398.21) = 3.1$, $p = 0.002^{**}$

Table 3. Cont.

Category	Item	Germany (M ± SD)	Italy (M ± SD)	t-Test Results
	Use page/profile hashtags in my posts	2.04 ± 1.22	1.73 ± 0.96	$t(354.09) = 2.83$, $p = 0.005^{**}$
	Participate to donation campaign organized by the page/profile	1.61 ± 0.75	1.88 ± 0.92	$t(381.38) = 3.18$, $p = 0.002^{**}$
Satisfaction	I am satisfied with how the administrator interacts with fans/followers	3.89 ± 0.81	3.86 ± 0.88	$t(333.3) = 0.36$, $p = 0.716$
	I am satisfied with how the administrator interacts with me	3.70 ± 0.81	3.69 ± 0.88	$t(266.58) = 0.09$, $p = 0.927$
	I am satisfied with how other fans/followers interact with me	3.50 ± 0.70	3.48 ± 0.72	$t(265.69) = 0.29$, $p = 0.775$
	I am satisfied with how the fans/followers interact with each other	3.59 ± 0.78	3.59 ± 0.76	$t(308.24) = 0.06$, $p = 0.955$
	I think something in the way administrators handle communication with fans/followers should change	2.50 ± 0.93	2.85 ± 0.93	$t(294.27) = 3.36$, $p = 0.001^{**}$
	I think the way in which the content is communicated by the administrators is consistent with my expectations	3.92 ± 0.73	4.17 ± 0.87	$t(357.48) = 2.98$, $p = 0.003^{**}$
	I think that the administrators censor the discussions	2.11 ± 1.03	2.16 ± 1.11	$t(334.92) = 0.41$, $p = 0.685$
	I think administrators filter hate messages properly	3.99 ± 0.80	4.11 ± 0.93	$t(353.97) = 1.33$, $p = 0.183$
	I think administrators filter fake news properly	4.03 ± 0.76	4.20 ± 0.96	$t(355.9) = 1.89$, $p = 0.060$

Table 3. Cont.

Category	Item	Germany (M ± SD)	Italy (M ± SD)	t-Test Results
	I feel safe in the follower/fan community	3.95 ± 0.77	4.10 ± 0.90	$t(343.14) = 1.67$, $p = 0.096$
	I feel that administrators respond to fan/follower questions and comments in a timely manner	3.94 ± 0.75	3.95 ± 0.87	$t(329.18) = 0.09$, $p = 0.931$

*— $p < 0.05$; **— $p < 0.01$; ***— $p < 0.001$.

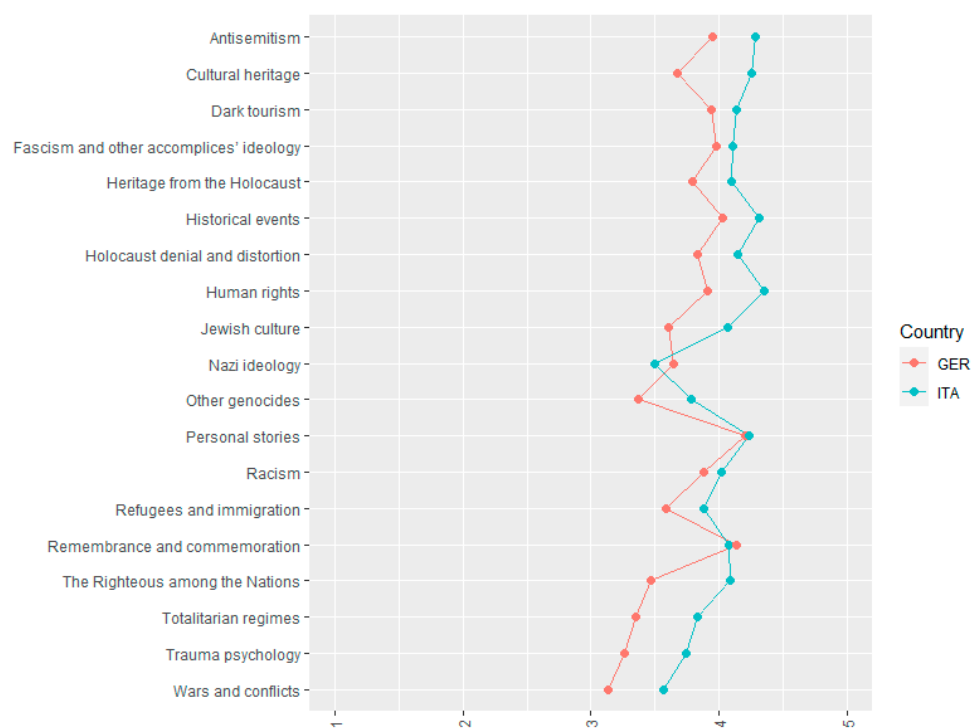


Figure 1. Statistical averages for topics related to the Holocaust.

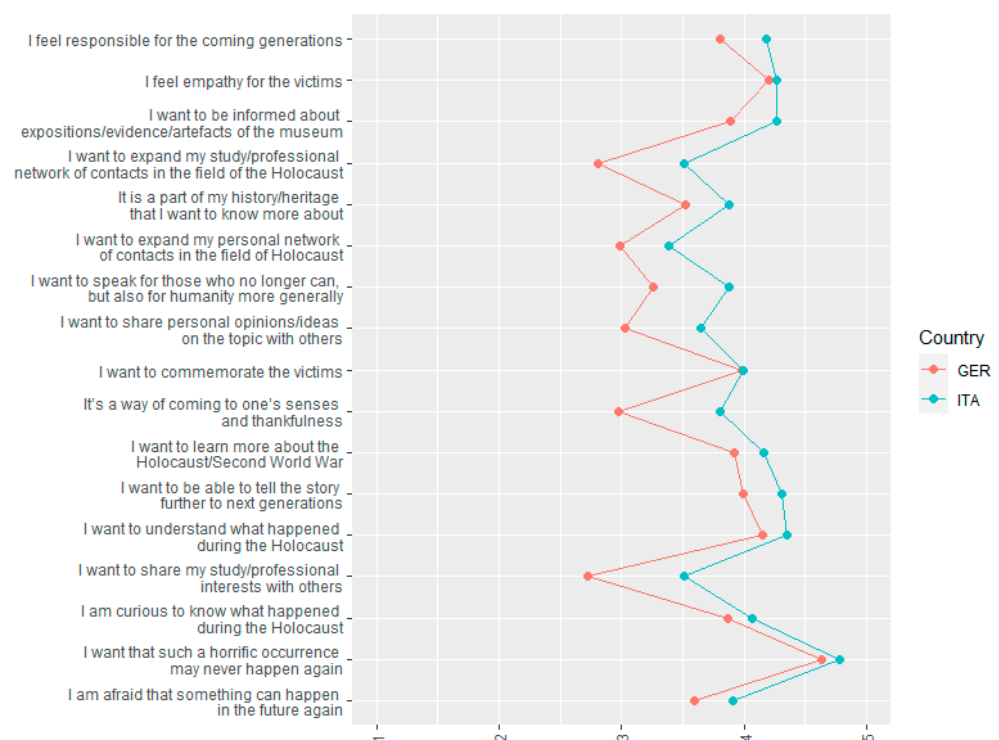


Figure 2. The average score for items on personal motivations for following a page.

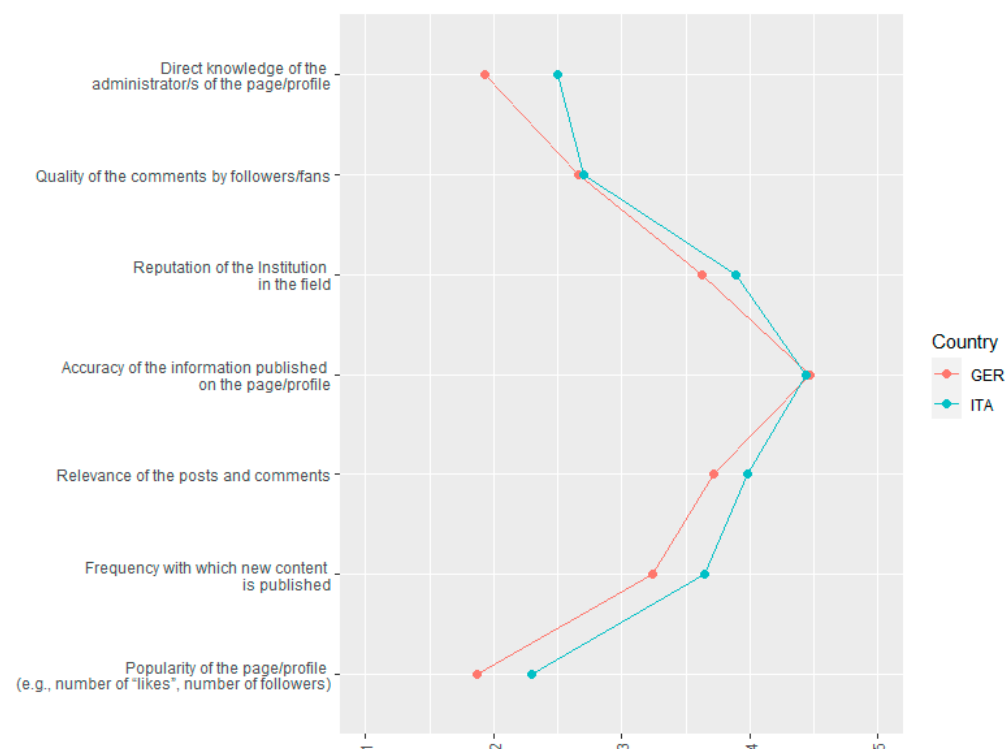


Figure 3. Averages for items on page-related motivations for following a page.

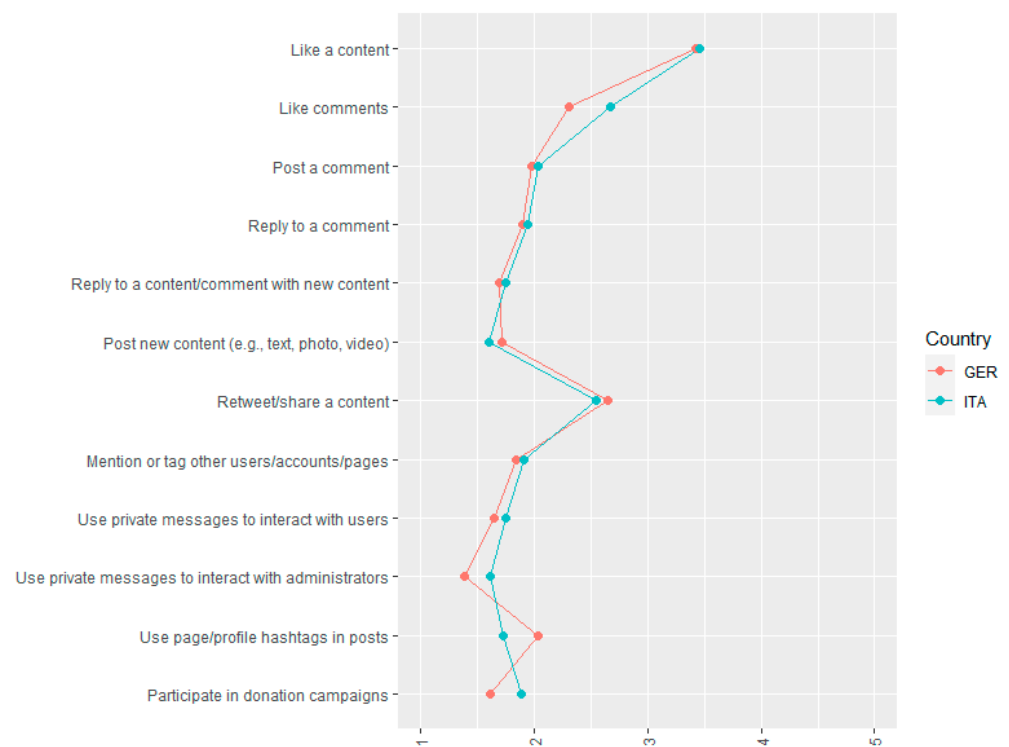


Figure 4. Statistical averages for items based on their reported frequency of (inter)action.

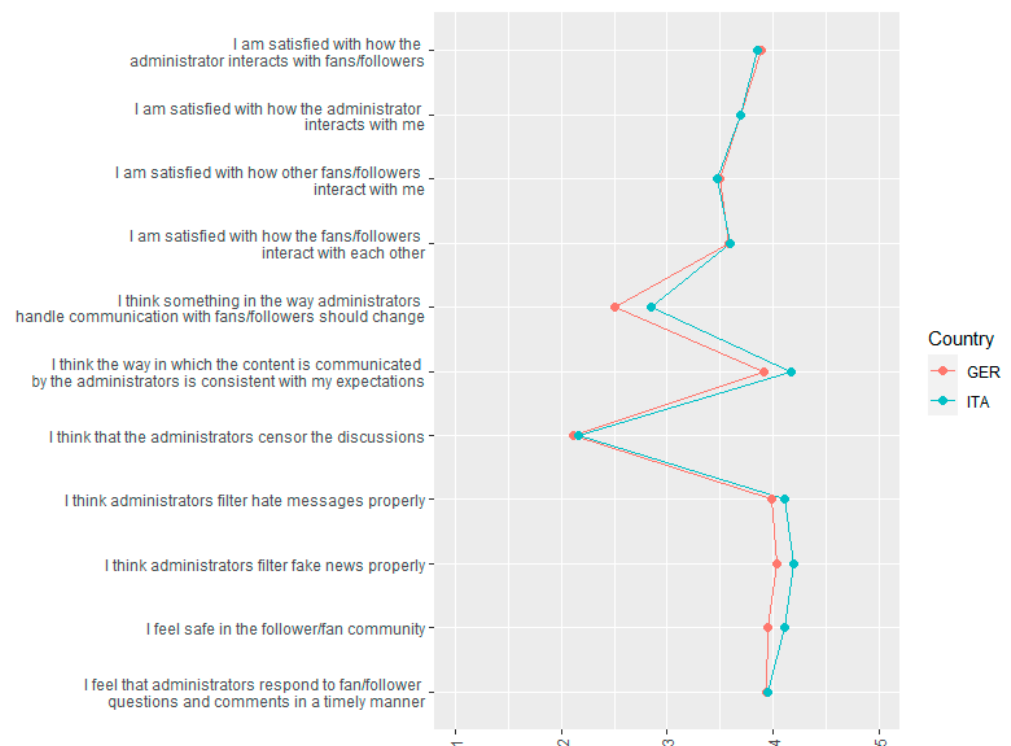


Figure 5. Averages for items related to the content and management of the page.

As for personal motivations for following the page, we have observed higher averages for the Italian samples for all motivations except two (feeling empathy for the victims and wanting to commemorate the victims), which did not show significant differences. We observe a similar pattern regarding motivations for following the page, for which two

items do not show significant differences (quality of comments and accuracy of information published), while all other items have higher means for respondents from Italy.

Among the items related to satisfaction, we observe that only two items show significant differences in favour of respondents from Italy: “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”.

In general, respondents from Italy reported a higher average than respondents from Germany on most items. However, plotting the graphs of averages (Figures 1–5) reveals important similarities in the pattern of responses, indicating that the two samples are more similar than it appears from the t-tests. For example, both groups have a low interest in trauma psychology and wars and conflicts, whereas historical events, personal stories, and antisemitism rate relatively high (Figure 1).

Furthermore, respondents from both countries reported that their reasons for following the page were primarily based on emotional reasons (e.g., feeling empathy for the victims, wanting such a terrible occurrence to never occur again), as opposed to professional reasons (e.g., expanding one’s own professional network or sharing professional interests with others, Figure 2).

A striking similarity can be found between the two samples when it comes to items related to page-related reasons for following the page, with both groups placing a high value on the accuracy of the information published, with no emphasis placed on the popularity of the page or being familiar with its administrators (Figure 3).

In terms of actions taken on (or with) the page, we again observe remarkable similarities between the samples, but also a tendency towards passivity: “liking” posts or comments is the most common action, followed by sharing or retweeting. The posting of new content, comments, or replies is relatively uncommon in both countries (Figure 4).

As a final point, the satisfaction items are closely mirrored between the two samples, with overall satisfaction with administrator communication and low levels of concern over censorship (Figure 5).

6. Discussion

As indicated by the convergence of users’ interests, motivations, and agency in social media spaces, the primary hypothesis of this study according to which acceleration of cultural globalisation [31] has affected digital mediatisation of Holocaust memories across different countries has been somewhat confirmed. Although there still remain strong national articulations of memory in Holocaust museums and memorial culture [26], when it comes to investigating the digital attitudes and behaviour of users, these differences seem to have greatly diminished. Based on the main results of the study, it would appear that the differences in terms of motivations, interests, and agency between the German and Italian user groups are not largely due to differences in national cultural memories. However, with the exception of a few category items, the sample of Italian users demonstrated a greater level of interest and motivation. Several factors may explain this difference. The first factor may be related to cross-cultural differences and country-specific factors that influence the response rate. The magnitude of web survey response rates and their related averages can be influenced by socio-cultural factors [54]. For example, the willingness to participate in surveys across countries can vary due to the perceived value of surveys and some cultures may be more open to sharing information than others.

Another factor that may have contributed is the sense of Holocaust fatigue that exists in large segments of the German population. Although many people believe that commemorating the Holocaust is an ideal that can be applied across national boundaries, they also consider the German practise of reuniting with the Nazi regime to be annoying due to its abundance, frequency, and ubiquitous nature [47]. This fatigue has likely been exacerbated by the fact that Germany has been forced to confront the legacy of the Holocaust in many ways, such as the establishment of memorials and museums, the criminal prosecution of

Holocaust perpetrators, and the adoption of laws that prohibit Holocaust denial and hate speech. In addition, it is possible that some members of the German population have felt a sense of guilt and shame related to the Holocaust, which may have led to an avoidance of the topic or at least to the expression of less enthusiasm. However, more research is required to determine whether there are additional or different explanations for these differences. For example, it could be that there are environmental factors that influence the differences in outcomes between genders, or it could be that there are more subtle differences in the way men and women approach the same subject. Additional research could help to determine the exact causes of the observed differences.

As a result of the broad findings, we offer a two-pronged interpretation, namely the authoritative role museums play as sources of historical knowledge, and the high levels of interest and motivation that are associated with the lack of corresponding social media interaction.

6.1. Museums and Memorials as Trusted Authorities about the Past

Research on the motivation and degree of satisfaction with the management of the social media pages/profiles by museum and memorial communications staff revealed that users place a high value on the accuracy and relevance of published information, as well as on the reputation of the institution in the field of Holocaust memory and education. As such, this confirms the findings of related studies that suggest social media profiles of museums and memorials are reliable sources of historical and trustworthy information through which they contribute to the development of memory ecologies [28]. By engaging with a broad audience through social media, these institutions create a platform for the sharing of knowledge, ideas, and stories from the past, thus allowing citizens to gain access to archives, collections, and other multimedia resources.

As one of the greatest concerns when dealing with the topic at the level of the general public, and social media in particular, is denial or distortion, our study indicates that users are satisfied with the way both fake news and hate messages are handled. These findings are also associated with a general feeling of satisfaction with the level of interaction and a feeling of security, which is in agreement with recent studies that emphasise the importance of creating safe online spaces for visitors by museums [55]. These practices are somewhat reflected in the three main forms of treatment of the past that can influence the collective memory of a nation: contextualization of past events within a historical framework, explicitation of the connections between the past and the present, and commemoration of past events through reporting of the events when the anniversary occurs [56]. Studies that looked at the social media content of this type of cultural institutions have revealed that all of these types of content are present, although to varying degrees [28]. The degree to which different types of content are present can be attributed to the objectives and resources of the institution, including the types of social media content they feel is important to promote. Factors such as marketability and audience engagement also play a role in determining the types of content the institution produces.

Although traditional commemoration practises have been noted to have shifted as a result of the use of social media at the point when local and institutional memory initiatives became global and opened up possibilities for alternative memory work [57], traditional approaches to remembrance and education embedded in memorial museum practices remain authoritative both online and offline [26]. Web 2.0 memory projects that are radically rearranging Holocaust memory, such as Eva Stories on Instagram [58] and Holocaust survivors engaging younger generations on TikTok [59], remain in contrast to museum and memorial practices primarily focused on broadcasting elective practices. Our survey has revealed that, as we shall see in the next section, this leads to low levels of user engagement and interactivity. It is important for now to emphasise that Holocaust memorials and museums remain places where hegemonic practises related to the remembrance of national socialism and the Holocaust are more conservative [47]. As Molden [60] points out, this mnemonic hegemony is dependent on the power and audibility of the voices that support it

in order to penetrate and establish the hegemonic set of specific memories that form memory cultures and their historical canons. However, there is a need for more research on how this mnemonic hegemony aimed at demonstrating authority and expertise collides with more participatory and democratic practises at the grassroots level. For example, how do grassroots memory cultures challenge and disrupt the hegemonic discourses of a particular memory culture? How do certain memories become privileged over others and how does this influence our understanding of history? What impact does this have on social and political power structures? These are some of the questions that require further exploration in order to gain a better understanding of the complexities of mnemonic hegemony.

6.2. *A High Level of Interest but Low Levels of Interaction*

According to the list of topics that users most frequently choose, it appears that respondents are primarily interested in subjects related to human rights, historical knowledge, antisemitism, and cultural heritage, which are generally considered to be major topics in Holocaust education [61]. The preferences are also in line with other evidence derived from the pedagogical tradition of Holocaust education that emphasizes individual experiences over ethically oriented collective memory and humanises statistics [61,62]. We also suggest that our respondents represent a trend in memorial museums in which collective memory is also articulated through the lens of victim perspectives [63], specifically in regard to the rescue of Jews by the Righteous Among the Nations [64]. This trend can be seen in the increasing number of memorial museums dedicated to the memory of the Holocaust and those who risked their lives to save Jews that have opened in recent years. These museums are often focused on personal stories of individual rescuers and survivors, as well as on the heroic actions of those who were willing to go above and beyond to help others [65].

This type of interest is also reflected in the major motivations to use social media pages of the nine Holocaust museums and memorials as they are expressed by most users. Following a page or profile is often motivated by the desire to prevent such events from occurring again, knowledge of the historical facts leading up to the Holocaust, and empathy for the victims. Factors such as the desire to expand one's professional and personal network and the desire to share information are less important. This is likely because people are more prone to be driven by their feelings and emotions when it comes to topics such as the Holocaust, rather than any practical benefits they may receive. Therefore, users are more likely to be motivated by the desire to learn, understand, and prevent similar events from happening in the future, rather than any immediate gain. There is no doubt that civic responsibility for the legacy of the Holocaust is one of the factors driving users to follow social media profiles considered in this study [66]. This civic responsibility is further reinforced by the fact that the Holocaust serves as a reminder of how this type of tragedy can occur if people are not vigilant or take action when they witness injustices. Moreover, it is seen as a moral reminder of the importance of upholding human rights and respecting diversity. Holocaust lessons are considered a permanent part of collective memory, as expressed by the phrase "Never forget, never again", which led to Holocaust memorials reshaping collective conceptions of mass murder, prejudice, and morality [67].

However, a closer inspection of the profile or page reveals that the most frequent activity is liking posts or comments or sharing/retweeting content, whereas more interactive behaviours, such as replying to comments, posting new content, or using hashtags to tag content, are less frequent. When comparing the two samples, it is evident that the Italian sample has a higher frequency of "Like comments", "Use direct or private messages to interact with administrators", and "Participate in donation campaigns organized by the page/profile", actions commonly associated with Facebook use. On the other hand, a greater use of Twitter and Instagram is associated with the frequency of "Use page/profile hashtags in my posts" in the German sample.

The findings of this study are similar to those found in an analysis of social media metrics for the four Italian museums examined whose social media profiles were investigated, which determined a low level of interaction in general [28]. Furthermore, it confirms

a general trend regarding the use of social media by cultural institutions [27] as well as Holocaust museums [20]. This is due to the fact that Holocaust museums often have a more limited audience and their content is considered more sensitive, so there is often less engagement with their posts than with those of other museums. Additionally, it has been found that museums often have difficulty finding the right balance between providing educational content and engaging their audience. Scholars have provided additional explanations for this phenomenon, ranging from the fear of trivialization or distortion [40] to the general “passive” attitude among Holocaust museums [11]. This results in a cautious attitude towards requesting user interaction, and a preference for unidirectional communication. A cautious attitude on the part of museums and memorials appears to encourage a self-disciplining logic [26]. In addition to moral behaviour suggested by many museums and memorials, which were clearly affective for many users, self-discipline is also evident in the surveillance culture of social media, where users are often compelled to behave conventionally to avoid stirring controversy and “digilantism” that elicit punitive attitudes towards perceived morally transgressive behaviour [68]. This is because the culture of social media is largely based on self-governance, meaning that users are expected to follow certain rules and norms to avoid criticism, judgement, and potential repercussions. This creates a sense of self-regulation that encourages moral behaviour and discourages moral transgressions.

As highlighted by Kansteiner [69] (p. 117), “The arbitrary limits of social media memory reflected in patterns of public admonition and private self-censorship are strongly influenced by settled, transnational cultural memories as they are defined in Holocaust institutions all over the West”. On one side, this suggests that Holocaust memory has been institutionalised and become part of the cultural memory of Western societies, and its influence on public discourse is pervasive. As a result, people are more likely to be sensitive to the use of Holocaust imagery and language on social media and may even self-censor out of fear of reprimand. On the other side, this means that the way people remember and talk about the Holocaust has been shaped by the establishment of Holocaust memorials and museums, which serve to define the public memory of the Holocaust. As a result, this influences the way people talk about the Holocaust on social media, both in terms of what is allowed to be said and what people choose to censor themselves. This “official” narrative then shapes the way people think and talk about the Holocaust on social media: people may feel pressure to conform to this narrative, leading to self-censorship in order to avoid being seen as disrespectful or inaccurate.

7. Conclusions: Do Social Media Platforms Contribute to a Globalisation of Holocaust Memory?

Although social media have become an increasingly globalised and transcultural arena for mediated memories, tensions remain between national and transnational cultural memories of the Holocaust [28,44]. National memories of the Holocaust are often framed by particular political and cultural contexts, while transnational memories focus on the shared responsibility of all nations for the perpetration of the Holocaust. Furthermore, different nations have their own distinct memories of the Holocaust, which can cause tension when trying to form a unified transnational memory [3]. These tensions also arise due to differing perspectives on the Holocaust and its legacy. For example, in some countries, the Holocaust is seen as a unique event in history, while in others it is seen as part of a larger history of oppression and genocide [70].

The role that social media plays in how the Holocaust is remembered can be seen in the different ways that different communities memorialize the event. For example, some people may choose to use social media to share stories of survivors and victims, while others may choose to focus on the positive aspects of the Holocaust, such as the resilience and strength of the Jewish people. Additionally, social media’s role in the formation of memories of the Holocaust is still being studied, and as a result, there can be disagreement between different groups about how the Holocaust should be remembered. Some groups argue that

social media can be a powerful tool for Holocaust education and remembrance. Others argue that it can be a source of misinformation and can oversimplify the complexities of the Holocaust. The debate over how the Holocaust should be remembered and taught is ongoing.

For now, despite recent claims [8], we can state that digital interactivity has been overstated in memorialisation, particularly in the context of social media use by Holocaust memorials and museums [18,26]. While digital interactivity can be a powerful tool for engaging people in Holocaust memory, its potential has not yet been fully realised. More research is needed to understand how digital media can effectively convey the lessons of the Holocaust to new generations in a meaningful way. This is because digital media can be used to create immersive experiences that allow people to explore the events and the stories of those affected in a way that traditional media cannot. Additionally, digital interactivity allows people to personalize their experience, which can help them understand the events of the Holocaust more deeply and draw more meaningful connections to their own lives. Digital media offers a unique way of engaging with history and memory: through interactive platforms, such as virtual reality, users can explore different aspects of the Holocaust in a way that is both immersive and educational [71]. Additionally, social media provides a platform for survivors to share their personal stories and to ensure that the legacy of the Holocaust is preserved and passed on to future generations [59].

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Notes

- ¹ A military occupation of half of Italy followed Italy's surrender and declaration of war against its former Axis partner in September 1943, which marked the beginning of armed resistance to the German occupation as well as the establishment of Benito Mussolini's puppet state, the Italian Social Republic. Deportations of Italian and foreign Jews to Germany and Poland began at this time.

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