International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance

Using Social Media in Holocaust Education[1]

Section 1: Practical Guidelines for Holocaust Educators

Social media is a rapidly expanding form of communication and community in our world and in education more specifically. Holocaust educators, like other educators, are tasked with determining how best to utilize this tool in their programming without compromising program or subject integrity.

This document outlines considerations and practices in deploying social media in the Holocaust educational environment.

What is social media? [2]

Social media has been defined as "Any form of online publication or presence that allows interactive communication (monologue or multi-logue), including, but not limited to, social networks, blogs, Internet websites, Internet forums, and wikis."[3] Similarly, a European Union-commissioned study about using social media in higher education in Europe defined social media as "Web 2.0 – the Read-Write Web," allowing everyone to publish resources online using simple and open, personal and collaborative publishing tools, also known as social software. Social Media is characterized as dynamic, open and freely available. Other examples of social media include social bookmarking systems and podcasts. Prototypical examples include Facebook, which reached nearly one billion users and nearly 500 million simultaneous users around the globe, and YouTube, which realized 3 billion views and 48 hours of video uploaded every minute in 2011.[4]

Social media is not passive: individual users access shared digital spaces and actively participate, collaborate, contribute, and create.

---

[1] Due to the rapidly changing nature of social media, this document should serve as a dynamic source, subject to regular revision in line with emerging trends, and – unlike other IHRA educational guidelines – not something that is intended to be definitive or permanent. Paper written by Kori Street and Kim Simon, USC Shoah Foundation, April 2014.

[2] Definition retrieved from iCamp Report: How to Use Social Software in Higher Education, 2008.

[3] Definition retrieved from: DoE report: *Building Enduring Race to the Top Education Reforms: Using Social Media to Engage With and Communicate to Key Stakeholders. A Reform Support Network Guide for States*. October 2012

[4] iCamp, 2008.

The distinctive opportunity that social media provides is in the easy creation of communities – communities of practice, communities of supporters, communities of actors and communities of learners. As with any community, participants share a common agenda and seek a sense of belonging. In such a social space, users want to be accepted by, invited to and contribute to their virtual communities, and when they feel they are not engaged this way, their interest in belonging declines.[5]

Community-building is an art and in and of itself presents a number of opportunities. Increasingly, virtual communities are becoming segmented into different types of circles (friendship, interest, business) and galaxies (distinct niches within a larger universe). These smaller niche communities can have a more narrowly defined agenda and can be more active. A large number of "followers" or "likes" may not be as effective as a highly motivated niche group. Effectively deploying social media in education requires recognizing who the audience is, whether it is the general public or more formal educational environments, and methods to appropriately engage the specific community.

General practice guidelines in using social media:

Using social media in Holocaust education will rely on many of the same practices for using social media generally, as outlined below, with important differences.

As Michael Gray recently argued, "The ubiquity of social media in many adolescents' lives clearly provides opportunities and challenges" for Holocaust education. While misuse of social media can result in diminishment, this is "a pedagogic problem which transcends Holocaust education specifically."[6] As educators in other fields are finding ways to overcome the challenges to realize the opportunities that social media can provide, Holocaust educators can, too.

Social Media is *Social* – The key to success is to build an active community of users with common interests and give them a space to contribute. The space must be shared, accessible, and prompt and support multiple users' interactions. Simply posting and pushing content out will not deliver positive results.

Connect Trusted Sources – Leverage the existing social media community by identifying other trusted organizations that have common interests or agendas. Link to their postings and sites, and share their materials on your site. Ask them to do the same. Multiple and shared listings do not undermine an organizations' site visits; conversely, they result in increased use and discoverability. Create these reciprocal social media partnerships to expand use and relevance of your space.

Communication and Digital Citizenship – It is a misconception that students are experts in online communication and teachers are out of their comfort zone in this digital space. As with any other form of communication, it is essential that teachers set a model for students to follow and learn. Social media provides teachers with an opportunity to develop important communication and digital literacy skills among their students.

---

[5] http://socialmediatoday.com/social_advocacy_politics/3-steps-optimizing-facebook-page-wall-posts-action
[6] Michel Gray, *Contemporary Debates in Holocaust Education*, (New York: Palgrave, 2014)p. 107.

Ask Questions – Moving beyond pushing information out to users can be a challenge; asking questions that are relevant to the targeted audience(s) may be a simple way to invite your community to contribute. This method works well particularly with students and informal learning groups.

Moderate Your Community – On most types of social media spaces, there are tools that can be used to moderate user participation. These tools can help shape the etiquette of the community. For example, Facebook allows control of which posts get published on your wall. Turning that feature on allows moderation of commentary. Alternatively, there may be value in letting your community have an online conversation, and subsequently correct inaccuracies or address objectionable posts.

Privacy – Remember that protecting the interests of your students should always be the paramount concern, taking precedent over any other aims that you may hope technology will help to achieve. Be aware of the ways that social media can blur educational and social boundaries and take care to discuss and model appropriate behavior.

Use Images More Than Words – Social media is graphic. Users click on photographs more than they do videos or links. Images are also shared most often. Use a caption to communicate the most important information connected to the image, as captions are shared along with images that get shared.

Offer a Good Hook – Always have a short, clear and powerful hook to start any post or status update. Studies of digital media consumers indicate they "snack," meaning they move quickly from one item to the next, so a good hook is more likely to capture the attention of these fast-moving users.

Convert Simple Posts to Interactions – Community members will be more engaged if they are invited to be active. Even simple requests for actions such as "sharing" or "liking" can heighten engagement; however, deeper engagements offer more opportunity for learning.

Know Your Educational Environment – The use of social media in education is developing rapidly; teachers and students are continuing to work with social media and figuring out how to do so effectively. Local, regional and national authorities publish guidelines for using social media. These can be valuable sources of information when planning your social media strategy.

Additional guidelines for use of Social Media in Holocaust and Genocide education:

In addition to the general best practices for social media in education that are outlined above, Holocaust educators must give special consideration to vocabulary and historical context because of the nature of the subject.

Appropriateness – Regarding the visual nature of social media, refer to International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance general educational guidelines; for example, consider the guidelines cautioning against the use of dehumanizing imagery, in order to ensure that using social media does not serve to undermine longstanding, internationally recognized educational best practices. Similarly, although encouraging engagement is considered good practice in the educational use of social media, it is important that the limitations of the media itself do not serve to trivialize the content; for example, the

commonly used Facebook term "likes" may not be appropriate when used in context of an image of victims in a concentration camp. Find a way to enable students to engage meaningfully and appropriately.

Vocabulary – Appropriate vocabulary is essential when using social media in Holocaust and genocide education and it can be different than what is normally found in social media. Setting the tone in your own posts and tweets will help establish the tone for the community.

Historical Context – Ensuring that anything posted or shared to the community is historically accurate is paramount. Users may be interested but have very little knowledge, so it is important to ensure that captions reflect images accurately and that all information that is posted or shared is correct.

Additional special considerations for Holocaust educators working with the Internet and social media include:

- **Personal Boundaries –** Social media can shift the boundaries between what is private and what is shared, sometimes re-defining the student-teacher dynamic and student-student dynamics.
- **Classroom Boundaries –** Even in closed-group environments, digital content is difficult to shield completely from the public. For example, Twitter hashtags used by a particular history class may not be of great interest to people outside of that class, but they are still visible anyone who wishes to engage. Digital content is just a copy-and-paste away from being made public.
- **Opt-out Choice –** If social media is being used as an essential platform for learning, can students opt out of using it? Are they being forced into the public sphere against their better judgment?
- **Balancing Privacy and Anonymity –** It should not be the expectation that students establish a public profile. Many may not want to. Alternatively, some students may want to establish a public profile, but later in life may wish that they had not. By contrast, if students are able to engage anonymously, they may not be held accountable for content, which can result in misuse.

Section 2: Further Considerations on Use of Social Media

From 2000 to 2010, the number of people online increased from 350 million people to 2 billion people. In the next decade, the world's virtual population will exceed the actual population. By 2025, it is estimated that 8 billion people will be online in some form or another,[7] with many of those billions engaged in social media.

Currently, more than 200 social media sites operate worldwide, excluding sites devoted to dating.[8] Facebook has over 1 billion subscribers worldwide and 1.8 million in North America alone. Twitter has almost 100 million subscribers and Instagram 150 million.[9] The opportunity that these types of sites provide to educators is unprecedented.

What is the role of social media in education?

Social media has tremendous potential in education. Whether it is formal, informal or public education, deploying social media, when done appropriately and effectively moves beyond public relations, promotion, marketing or delivery of information. Learners can develop key competencies in the social Internet: collaboration, negotiation, reflection, constructive criticism, selection, and information analysis.

Henry Jenkins from University of Southern California wrote in 2006 (notably, *before* Facebook and Twitter became the significant cultural forces they are today) about the importance of distinguishing between *participation* – which is at the core of social media – and interactivity. "Interactivity is a property of the technology, while participation is a property of culture. Participatory culture is emerging as the culture absorbs and responds to the explosion of new media… A focus on expanding access to new technologies carries us only so far if we do not also foster the skills and cultural knowledge necessary to deploy those tools… using participation as a term that cuts across educational practices, creative processes, community life, and democratic citizenship. Our goals should be to encourage youth to develop the skills, knowledge, ethical frameworks, and self-confidence needed to be full participants in contemporary culture."[10]

According to Mimi Ito, from University of Irvine, Jenkins' theory of participatory culture has come into being thanks to the rise of social media. Writing in 2013, Ito argued that educators are increasingly realizing that social media sites are a space for learning. Far from being a waste of time, social media is an important site of social and emotional learning that cannot be underestimated. It is a space where students can be engaged appropriately and effectively. New media behaviors are tremendously diverse. Friendship-driven participation online is not very different from what young people are doing in the classrooms or hallways of their schools. These interpersonal negotiations are important to their social

---

[7] The New Digital Age, Schmidt, Eric and Cohen, Jared, 2013)
[8] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_social_networking_websites
[9] Shea Bennett, "Pinterest, Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, Google+, LinkedIn – Social Media Stats 2014" January 20, 2014, www.mediabistro.com
[10] Henry Jenkins, *White Paper - Confronting the Challenges of Participatory Culture: Media Education for the 21st Century*, MacArthur Foundation, 2006http://www.macfound.org/press/publications/white-paper-confronting-the-challenges-of-participatory-culture-media-education-for-the-21st-century-by-henry-jenkins/

development. Social media sites also provide opportunities for what Ito called "messing around" behaviors or "geeking out" where student are using the online world and new media production tools to develop interests and activism, as well as various sophisticated forms of technical, media and digital literacies.[11] The way that educators approach the different levels of student engagement is the key to providing learning.

What is the potential role for social media in Holocaust Education?

In addition to its potential reach, there are many important opportunities to be realized through the integration of social media into Holocaust education. The appropriate use of social media in Holocaust education may increase the ability for students to retain and sustain cognition, or historical knowledge (the basic facts, figures, and context), or, to take the learning outcomes one step further, gain historical empathy.[12]

The development of historical empathy among students is of particular interest to Holocaust educators because it denotes a deep understanding of historical events and processes. While empathy refers to the identification with another's experiences, thoughts, or attitudes, historical empathy requires that students understand the past and individual actors who shape the past, from multiple perspectives[13]. Such understanding could be demonstrated and is based on knowledge, critical thought and affective learning. By interrogating not only a text, but the context of a text, students can reflect on changing values, practices and biases of the actors and the authors of the past. Learning the skill of historical empathy leads to a more nuanced and balanced understanding of history – a hallmark of Holocaust education.

These pedagogical objectives, sometimes described as "humanizing" the history of the Holocaust, are aided by the fact that a vast amount of photographic and video archival material exists to document this history, including pre-war photographs of Jewish life in Europe and post-war video testimonies of witnesses. Therefore, it can be argued that one of the key aptitudes at the core of effective education – visual literacy – is also one of the key aptitudes which is fostered by the use of social media, an environment that emphasizes the use of images more than text. Social media, if used properly, could in fact be the *ideal* tool for learning about the Holocaust.

Additionally, the use of social media encourages the newly termed "global classroom" approach to teaching. Considering the huge geographical range of the events of the Holocaust and the contemporary voices of those who have personal experiences or expertise to share, there is an opportunity to encourage a cross-cultural study of the Holocaust with the integration of social media that enables students to learn from both local and international perspectives.

Considering the extensive time young people spend engaging in social media outside of the context of formal learning environments, Holocaust educators have a unique opportunity to find ways to develop

---

[11] Mimi Ito et.al., *Connected Learning: An Agenda for Research and Design*, Digital Media and Learning Initiative, 2013 (http://dmlhub.net/publications/connected-learning-agenda-research-and-design)
[12] Darren Bryant and Penney Clark, "Historical Empathy and "Canada: A People's History", *Canadian Journal of Education,* Vol. 29, No. 4 (2006), pp1039-1063.
[13] Jill Jensen, Developing Historical Empathy through Debate, 2008

their practice to utilize the tools that are outside the classroom and bring them into the classroom. With creative and innovative approaches, educators can integrate, translate, and transfer curricula, lessons, activities, and content to leverage social media and social behavior to reach students in their introduction to Holocaust education. By engaging students at this intersection of social media and Holocaust education, there is potential to inspire ethical behavior, acknowledgement of other, tolerance, and responsible participation in civil society, and to affect changes in attitudes regarding contemporary issues of discrimination, persecution and genocide.

What are the challenges about using social media in Holocaust and Genocide education?

Many educators and scholars perceive the increasing use of social media in education as inherently problematic and debate whether social media is a "good" or "bad" idea when teaching about the Holocaust. Social media is so prevalent, however, that it cannot be ignored in Holocaust education or anywhere else. The important question, therefore, is not about the promise or pitfalls of the social media; rather, it is about how best to adapt Holocaust education to this new format, using its potential to limit any potential challenges. Some considerations specific to Holocaust educators include:

- Trends such as Holocaust denial, diminishment and trivialization are rampant on the Internet, and using social media has the potential to introduce these topics to students and give them unwarranted prominence. To counter, it is imperative that users have access to and know how to recognize trusted sources and appropriate images. Aside from issues of appropriateness, educators must also consider issues of legality. In certain countries Holocaust denial is in fact illegal and educators should ensure their students are aware of relevant laws.
- Social media is typically seen as a platform for entertainment – the purview of pop culture, not learning and intellectual debate. Using social media in Holocaust education may be seen as a diminishment to the integrity of the discussion and the topic.

What is the current landscape for use of social media in Holocaust education?

At this time, Holocaust educators display a reluctance to engage fully with social media. While many institutions in the field offer social media sites, they are typically used for distributing information with limited interactivity. For example, organizations using Twitter often tweet about anniversaries or special dates. Facebook posts are most often pushing information about programming or moments in history. The most common sites deployed in the Holocaust field are Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, with emergent use of Pinterest and Google+ as well.

It is not uncommon for institutions to engage in online or digital learning outside of the social media realm. There are several excellent examples of interactive, digital learning sites, such as the London Jewish Cultural Centre's *Holocaust Explained;* The Museum of Jewish Heritage's *Coming of Age;* and USHMM's *The Holocaust: A Learning Site for Students*. Interaction on these sites is normally limited to clicking and navigating, but most of these engagements do not rise to the level of social media.

A smaller number of educational organizations have successfully developed their own platforms which integrate social functions, notably the USC Shoah Foundation's *IWitness* and the Digital Jewish Monument hosted by the Jewish Historical Museum in Amsterdam – both of which offer positive models of good practice.