

Heritage in the Political World: Communities and Comparative Aspects

(HPHE7001)

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Assignment 2: Option 2

Critical Analysis of the online presence of the Imperial War Museum, London

Image of the Museum via its online presence.

The Imperial War Museum in London is recognised as a world-class museum that is dedicated to the study of modern conflict and its far-ranging impact on people's lives. The museum is famous for its extensive collection of documents, films, artefacts, and photographs that are related to human conflicts from the First World War to present day conflicts such as the Russian war in Ukraine.

The website of the Imperial War Museum offers a veritable representation of the physical site of this world class institution.

As will become evident in the course of this work, the Imperial War Museum offers exhibitions and public programmes through its website and are well known for their innovativeness and engaging approach to the presentation of historical material with a focus on the human experience of war and conflict.

The website of the Imperial War Museum provides visitors with a wealth of information targeted at a deeper understanding of the broad impact of war and conflict on society, as well as fostering reflection and promoting debate on issues relating to conflict, war and peace.

The website of the Imperial War Museum also showcases the museum's efforts to engage with contemporary political and social issues such as inclusion and diversity, climate change, as well as human wellbeing and mental health.

The museum's website further helps project its image as an institution willing and able to broaden expand its audience through the use of social media and digital technologies, thus making its collections more accessible to the general public.

For example, visiting the museum's YouTube Channel and accessing its content provides visitors with a sense of its purpose and its image as an institution with authority on what it is dedicated to; the study and interpretation of modern human conflict, presented in the most accessible of ways.

Through its online presence – particularly its website, Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, as well as YouTube, the Imperial War Museum projects its image as a global authority on human conflict and its wide-ranging impact on people's lives. The museum's family of five museums, namely, Imperial War Museum, London, Churchill War Rooms, Imperial War Museum, Manchester, HMS Belfast, and Imperial War Museum, Duxford are all represented on their website and across their social media platforms.

A good example of the museum's effort at diversity and inclusiveness can be found on their Facebook page where a very important contribution made by women during the first World War is showcased.

The user-friendliness of the Museum's online presence.

The Imperial War Museum has an overall user-friendly presence across its various online platforms – Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, and on its website.

Usability or user-friendliness refers to ease of use and access – for example, on the website of the Imperial War Museum, clicking and navigating its catalogue and digital collections is straight forward, uncluttered, and it is easy to read content on its webpages, content has fast load times, its webpages are compatible with mobile devices such as smartphones and tablet computers, the information architecture is well planned and visitors can learn, engage and get involved in its interactive content in hassle-free ways.

A further example of the user-friendliness of the online presence of the Imperial War Museum is evidenced on its YouTube Channel where the language of description is clear, free of jargon, structured, and overall design and content delivery is simple and responsive.

Content on its YouTube channel have an average view time of fifteen to twenty minutes and contents are clear and of good quality – easy to see and hear, have excellent entertainment value and are very informative.

On its Instagram, Facebook and Twitter pages, its excellent presentational approach is maintained. For example,

The Effectiveness of any Teaching and Learning Resources distributed by the Museum.

The website of the Imperial War Museum is richly endowed with a wide range of learning and teaching resources, and these are enumerated below.

Events and workshops: The Imperial War Museums hosts and facilitates regular workshops and events for schools and educators. These events are targeted at the provision of knowledge and understanding of the museum's extensive collections and the significance that they hold.

Online exhibitions: The museum has numerous exhibitions available on its website, Facebook, Instagram and YouTube Channels. These exhibitions are accessible from anywhere in the world and cover a wide range of topics spanning the period of the First World War to current conflicts such as the Russian war in Ukraine.

Online collections: The museum's extensive online collections provide instant access to hundreds of thousands of photographs, objects and documents. The museum's online collections provides excellent resources that are priceless for students, teachers, and researchers.

Learning resources: A further example of the wealth of learning and teaching resources available on the museum's website is evidenced by the creation and availability of lesson plans for teachers and students, worksheets and interactive activities including war games, all covering topics such as history, human conflict, and commemorations and remembrances.

Virtual visits and outreach programmes: The virtual visits available on the museum's website provide opportunities for the exploration of the museum's galleries and collections from the comfort of one's home – particularly useful during the lockdown, for example.

The museum's oral history archives contain several thousands of interviews documenting first hand experiences of people who lived through periods of war and conflict. These

interviews offer useful insights into the experience that people had during wartime and are a priceless resource for students and historians.

Overall, the Imperial War Museum, London offers a wealth of learning and teaching resources through its online presence and offer opportunities for engagement and inspiration of learners across all ages.

The Effectiveness of any Interactive resources distributed by the Museum.

The learning, teaching, and interactive resources distributed by the Imperial War Museum have been well-received and overall, considered to be effective in the provision of valuable learning and teaching materials.

Some of the primary factors that have contributed to the effectiveness of these resources include:

Accessibility – the learning, teaching and interactive resources are available and readily accessible by a wide range of audiences including students, teachers, researchers, the general public and anyone who is interested in history. These resources are available twenty four a day and every day of the week and can be accessed from anywhere in the world.

The variety of available resources further demonstrates the effectiveness of the museum's online presence – including its interactive resources. These include the availability of virtual tours, virtual exhibitions, learning materials, and archives. This variety of resources enables visitors to engage with history and human experience of conflict at different levels.

Many of the learning and teaching resources on the museum's website and social media platforms are interactive and help to enrich the learning experience of visitors. For example, the virtual exhibitions frequently feature images and interactive elements, videos, educational games targeted at making the learning experience fun and very engaging.

The quality of available content about the human experience of war, as well as the availability of user feedback on the museum's website, is further testament of the effectiveness of the museum's online presence. These resources are valuable for learning and teaching and are accessible, of very high quality, interactive, and available for audiences across the world.

The Effectiveness of the Museum's Social Media Accounts

The social media accounts of the Imperial War Museum – mainly its Twitter, Instagram, Facebook and YouTube, form a core part of its outreach initiatives.

The social media platforms of the Imperial War Museum are highly engaging and provide visitors with regular updates about events, exhibitions and new resource.

The Instagram and Facebook pages of the Imperial War Museum provides it with readily available means to reach a wide range of audiences. The museum's Instagram and Facebook platforms use storytelling to bring history to life and makes it possible for visitors to engage with its content. Colourful and interesting personal stories and perspectives on human conflicts spanning the First World War to current conflicts such as the Russian war in Ukraine, help connect followers with the historical information contained in those experiences.

The museum's social media accounts help promote and project the museum's collections, events and exhibitions, and provides the added value of increased awareness of the museum's activities – which in turn increases engagement and attendance.

The Effectiveness of any online activities, databases or catalogues distributed by the Museum. The manner in which the Museum's website relates to wider scholarly debates about history and heritage.

As a foremost museum in the UK dedicated to the collection, preservation and display of objects and records relating to war and human conflict from the First World War to current conflicts, its activities and catalogues do relate to wider scholarly debates concerning history and heritage in numerous ways.

The museum's vision – collection and interpretation of objects and records from war have a relationship to history as the conflicts occurred during a historical time period. For example, the museum's focus on the experiences of communities and individuals rather than military strategy and tactics deployed during the conflicts can relate to social and cultural history.

The museum's exhibitions and displays available through its online presence can prompt debates about the political and ethical representation of war and conflict – the glorification of human violence, for instance.

Additionally, as a public institution and tourist attraction, the museum's it can have an impact on broader perceptions of history and understanding of heritage.

The idea of community participation in heritage (Smith, 2006:27) is relevant when considering the wealth of available interactive resources available through the online presence of the Imperial War Museum under consideration in this work.

The ethics of representing the past, as well as the ethical issues inherent in the representation of traumatic and contentious historical time events such as war and human conflict and the potential impact that they can have on individuals and communities appear to have been well thought out and considered by the museum on its online presence. On the museum's Instagram page for example, accounts of the Second World War experience of Germans is available for the public to access and thus gain knowledge and understanding of history and the impact of the Second World War.

Robert Hewison's suggestions that although heritage is about the past in the present and for the future, and his questions about how true the past is, and 'whose past is it anyway' (Hewison, 1987:16), I believe, is apt when looking at the no doubt priceless value of what the Imperial War Museum stands for and its approach to doing so.

For Robert Hewison, while heritage is an important part of cultural identity and useful for cultural cohesion, its role is often contentious considering its often shaped by broader societal/global political and economic forces.

The Imperial War Museum's online presence is accessible, and a veritable source of rich learning and teaching resources designed to elicit interest in history, war and human conflict, while also being well equipped with tools such as interactive videos and games for visitors.

References

Hewison, R. (1987) *The Heritage Industry*. London: Routledge.

Smith, L. (2006) *Uses of Heritage*. London: Routledge.

