CHRISTOPHER ANDERSON: INTERACTIVE TECHNOLOGY

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Introduction

For this assignment, I chose an interactive exhibit that closely relates to my museum partner object. My local museum partner is the Holocaust Memorial & Tolerance Center of Nassau County ("HMTC"). The mission of the HMTC "is to teach the history of the Holocaust and its lessons through education and community outreach."[1] The HMTC offers a permanent exhibit, special collections, and archives.[2] In order to provide visitors with a deeper understanding of the exhibits, the HMTC provides informative programs for both students and adults.[3]

While the HMTC provides a number of innovative tools and resources to encourage visitor engagement, at this time none of the exhibits are available online. Interactive technology and online access deliver the ability for users worldwide to interact with museum objects even if those users are geographically remote from the physical museum. The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum ("HMM"), located in Washington, D.C., is a museum that has a similar mission to the HMTC and offers exhibits both in-person and online. For this assignment, I will review the HMM online exhibit *State of Deception: The Power of Nazi Propaganda* and examine how the exhibit can serve as a template for displaying my museum partner object.

Online Exhibit

The exhibit *State of Deception: The Power of Nazi Propaganda* is part of the online exhibits platform offered by the HMM.[4] The online platform currently supports sixteen (16) exhibits, which include, among others: *Life in Shadows: Hidden Children of the Holocaust*; *Anne Frank the Writer: An Unfinished Story*; *Nazi Persecution of Homosexuals 1933-1945*; and *Hidden History of the Kovno Ghetto*.[5]

Screenshot of Online Exhibitions page.

The exhibit *State of Deception: The Power of Nazi Propaganda* focuses on how "the Nazi Party used modern techniques as well as new technologies and carefully crafted messages to sway millions with its mission for a new Germany."[6] This exhibit, together with the other online exhibits, helps visitors gain a more in-depth understanding of the Holocaust and how the Nazi Party rose to power in Germany.

Interactive Features

Within the online *Propaganda* exhibit, there are numerous features allowing for an immersive visitor experience. Some of the more innovative features are a poll and online forum for visitors to discuss and share their thoughts as well as a multi-media presentation "about the mass-produced People's Radio and its use under the Nazi regime."[7] The online exhibit, based on a HMM special exhibition, allows visitors to examine a timeline of events, explore various propaganda themes, and view a gallery of museum objects.[8]

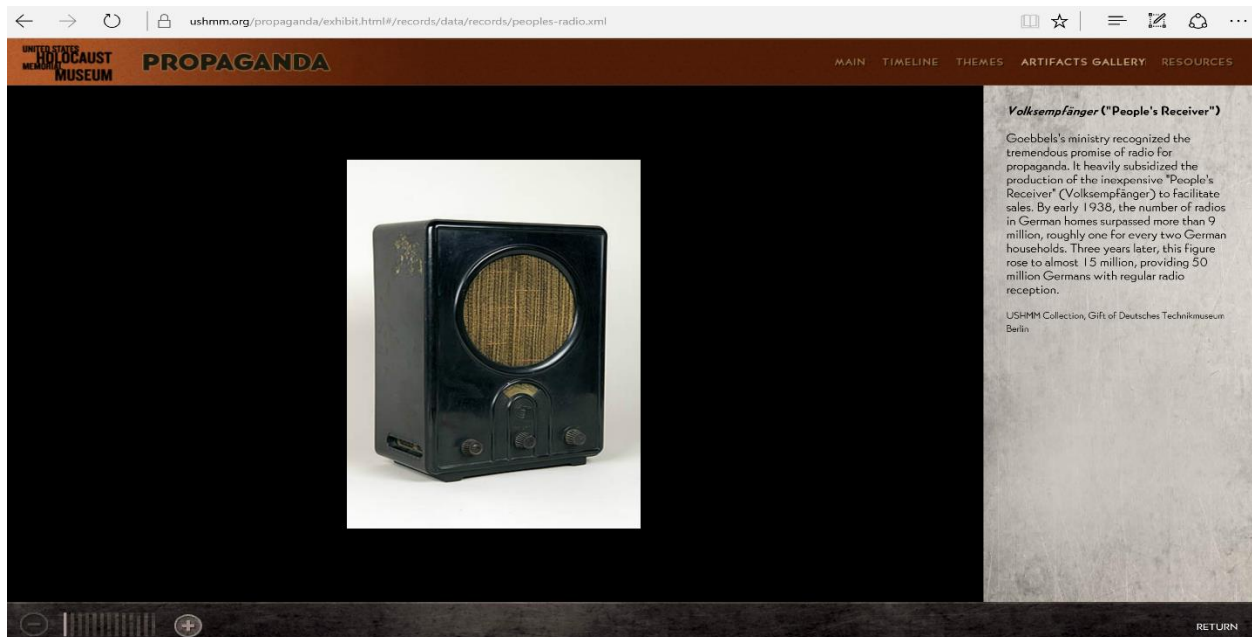Screenshot of [Propaganda](#) page.

The poll and online forum are well-constructed interactive tools that encourage visitors to think critically about the information presented and to share their own thoughts and observations in a collaborative environment. Within the "Student Activity" section is a well-crafted and insightful presentation on the People's Radio, which was a mass-produced radio that served as a modern tool for the Nazi Party to espouse their world-view.[9] The museum object is accompanied by audio, text, and additional images to present an engaging history of the People's Radio and its impact on the Nazi Party's propaganda agenda.
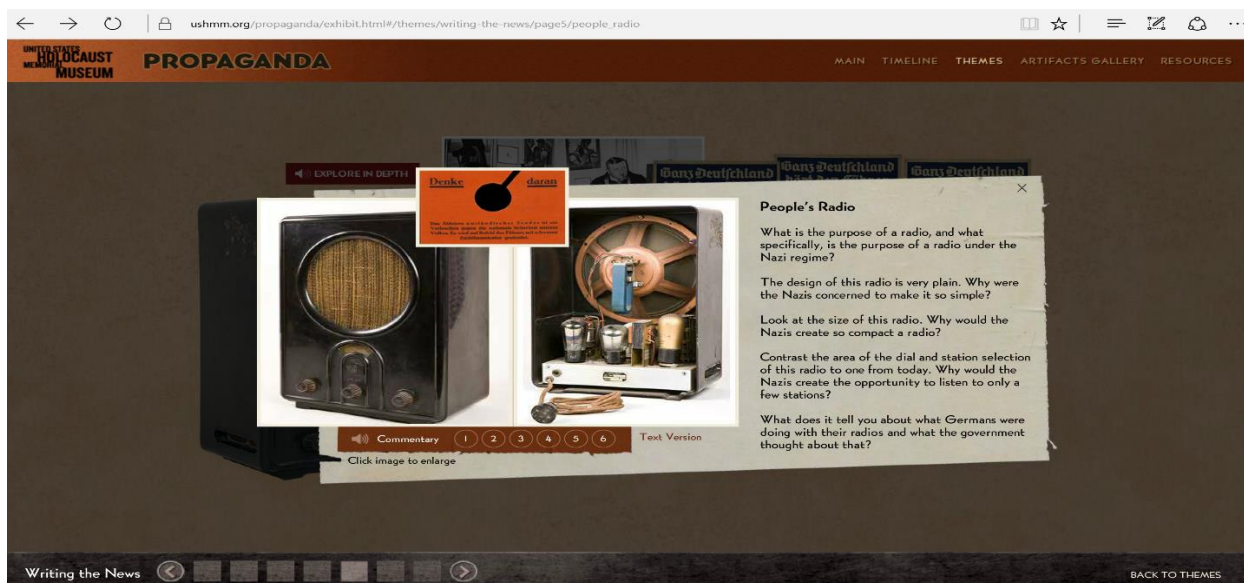
Screenshot of [People's Radio](#) page.

In addition, visitors can click on the image of the People's Radio, which directs visitors to a standalone page featuring the museum object and information about the radio's history.[10] There is also data regarding acquisition of the museum object, which was donated to the HMM as a gift from Deutsches Technikmuseum Berlin.[11]

Screenshot of People's Receiver page.

The designer's of the *Propaganda* exhibit did an excellent job of combining interactive features to provide a sensible balance of text, images, audio, and video. I am particularly impressed by the online poll and discussion forum because these features allow visitors to actively engage with museum objects, the online exhibit, and fellow visitors. This level of visitor engagement is an important aspect of a museum's digital strategy.[12]

Examples of Interactivity

The *Propaganda* exhibit and the accompany People's Radio museum object serve as a good example of interactivity both for my museum partner object and for other museums. My museum partner object is a child's shoe found at Auschwitz-Birkenau. In order to reach a wider

audience, the HMTC could use some of the same strategies as the HMM and place images of museum objects from the HMTC permanent exhibit in the online environment.

"Auschwitz-Birkenau Child's Shoe Found"
Holocaust Memorial and Tolerance Center of Nassau County
Permanent Exhibit
Artifact courtesy of Ya'acov (Jackie) Handeli

To increase participation and make exhibits available worldwide, the HMTC could provide online exhibits accompanied by text, images, audio, video, and interactive features such as a poll or online forum. In order to thrive in a technologically driven environment, museums must adopt "values such as agility, flexibility, and usability to keep pace with rapidly evolving societal changes that are increasingly inseparable from technology."[13] An engaging and interactive online exhibit presence is one important method to connect museum objects with users from all around the world.

Potential Audiences

Two potential audiences that can benefit from an interactive online exhibit such as *Propaganda* are students (7th-12th grade) and individuals who benefit from exhibits with Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliance features.

Students will benefit from hands-on learning and the interactive nature of polls and discussion forums. Furthermore, incorporating audio, images, text, and video provides students with numerous avenues to explore the exhibit and museum objects. In addition, the *Propaganda* exhibit includes text transcripts of the accompanying audio, which is an important feature for those who have visual or auditory impairments/difficulties.[14] Providing numerous avenues to explore a collection will benefit all visitors, including those who need special accommodations.

Conclusion

Both the HMTC and the HMM offer informative and educational exhibits for a wide spectrum of visitor demographics. The HMM provides a robust and interactive online presence to help users from around the world connect with exhibits and museum objects. By using the HMM online exhibits as a model or guide, the HMTC can expand its reach by providing online exhibits that highlight the HMTC's unique and extensive collection.

Endnotes

[1] "Our Mission," Holocaust Memorial & Tolerance Center of Nassau County, Accessed March 29, 2018, https://www.hmtcli.org/.

[2] "Museum," Holocaust Memorial & Tolerance Center of Nassau County, Accessed March 29, 2018, https://www.hmtcli.org/.

[3] "Education," Holocaust Memorial & Tolerance Center of Nassau County, Accessed March 29, 2018, https://www.hmtcli.org/.

[4] "Online Exhibitions," United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Accessed March 29, 2018, https://www.ushmm.org/information/exhibitions/online-exhibitions.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Ibid.

[7] "Propaganda," United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Accessed March 29, 2018, https://www.ushmm.org/propaganda/.

[8] Ibid.

[9] "People's Radio," United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Accessed March 29, 2018, https://www.ushmm.org/propaganda/exhibit.html#/themes/writing-the-news/page5/people_radio/.

[10] "Volksempfänger ('People's Receiver')," United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Accessed March 30, 2018, https://www.ushmm.org/propaganda/exhibit.html#/records/data/records/peoples-radio.xml.

[11] Ibid.

[12] "NMC Horizon Report: 2016 Museum Edition," The New Media Consortium, 2016: 22, Accessed March 20, 2018, http://cdn.nmc.org/media/2016-nmc-horizon-report-museum-EN.pdf.

[13] Ibid.

[14] "Transcript: People's Radio," United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Accessed March 30, 2018, https://www.ushmm.org/propaganda/transcripts/people-radio.html.

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United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. "Volksempfänger ('People's Receiver')." Accessed March 30, 2018. https://www.ushmm.org/propaganda/exhibit.html#/records/data/records/peoples-radio.xml.