The power of attention: campaigning archaeology in social media

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Abstract – Attention has never been any more measured, qualifying and crucial as it is nowadays. Constantly in the social media expressions including views, likes, loves, sadness, comments, shares, or even subscribes define extensively how the perceptions are created, followed and cherished. This innovative setting however not always translates into joyful and promising ground in which posts, appearances, reporting and publication secure attention and by default success. Archaeology is increasingly developing in an interdisciplinary focus and especially in the last few decades such approach has produced rather captivating scientific results. Also coupled with other fields and disciplines has gained an indispensable role and is shaping several shaping several professions and careers that include: museology, protection, promotion and management of culture heritage, legislation, development of tourism, environment, public and private sectors and entrepreneurship. In this paper, I examine the nature of news posted in the social media and to what extent this content affects perceptions for the discipline in the public eye. I argue that awareness regarding the role of publicity in the field should not only be raised, above all, such dimension must become an indispensable task within the field.

Key words - archaeology; campaigning; social media

Titel – Die Macht der Aufmerksamkeit: Kampagnen zur Archäologie in den Sozialen Medien

Zusammenfassung – Aufmerksamkeit war noch nie so exakt vermessen und wichtig wie in der heutigen Zeit. In den sozialen Medien bestimmen Indikatoren wie "Views", "Likes", Herzchen, Traurigkeit, Kommentare, das Teilen und das Abonnieren auf vielfältige Weise, wie Wahrnehmungen erzeugt, verfolgt und geschätzt werden. Dieses neuartige Umfeld führt jedoch nicht immer zu einer freudvollen und vielversprechenden Grundlage, auf der sich Beiträge, Auftritte, Berichte und Veröffentlichungen Aufmerksamkeit und damit Erfolg sichern. Die Archäologie entwickelt sich zunehmend interdisziplinär, und gerade in den letzten Jahrzehnten hat diese Herangehensweise zu recht bestechenden wissenschaftlichen Ergebnissen geführt. Auch in Verbindung mit anderen Bereichen und Disziplinen hat sie eine wichtige Rolle bei der Gestaltung verschiedener Berufe und Karrieren erlangt, darunter Museologie, Schutz, Förderung und Verwaltung des kulturellen Erbes, Gesetzgebung, Entwicklung des Tourismus, der Umwelt etc., und zwar im öffentlichen wie im privaten Sektor und im Unternehmertum. Der Beitrag untersucht die Art der in die sozialen Medien geposteten Nachrichten über Archäologie und inwieweit sich diese Inhalte auf die Wahrnehmung der Disziplin in der Öffentlichkeit auswirken.

Schlüsselwörter - Archäologie; Kampagne; Soziale Medien

Introduction

It is quite impossible to get a whole grasp of the dynamics of the archaeological explorations and research around the World. Within the academic environment, as professionals, we mostly are inclined to deepen our focus at a given field, era or region. Various theoretical and methodological traditions and the interdisciplinary approaches that the discipline had embraced in the long run have had their own effect on such segmentation. Beyond this striking variability however, what does seem rather 'unifying' is the perception that the mission of the discipline conveys to the general public. Someone with very little effort could see that in the public eye Archaeology yet remains equalized within the boundaries of an exploratory field in the search of the oldest, finest or the most mysterious objects. Stuck into this framework, Archaeology is portrayed in a limited set of activities that seek to inform only about the most basic actions of the discipline aiming to inspire a rather shallow curiosity, obtain attention, through the public reaction including views, likes, loves,

sadness, comments, shares, or even subscribes.

In its own research bubble archaeology increasingly has developed an interdisciplinary focus. Especially in the last few decades such approach has produced rather captivating scientific results for the understanding of human behavior. Not to mention here quite a broader role and involvement of the archaeologists in the public sphere, conservation, preservation and management of culture heritage, legislation, museums, education, economy, tourism and so on. However, these activities only come very partially to the public attention, making it quite difficult for the field to be understood in its whole potential.

In this paper I will discuss how Archaeology is portrayed in the social media and the kind of public reactions it provokes. I argue that professionals in the field of archaeology must take into serious consideration exploring a path which is beyond their immediate research contribution in the field, envisage the whole dimensions of the discipline and explore the effective media strategies to bring it to the general public.

Media Outlet	Followers/Likes	Titles of posts in Archaeology/November 2022
BBC News	58 million Followers	Celtic ruler's 2,000-year-old ring kept in cupboard for 28 years
		Space shuttle Challenger: Debris found by divers
		Enheduanna: The world's first named author
		UK museums willing to return skulls to Zimbabwe
		Was the Azores home to an ancient civilization?
CNN	39,285,482 Followers 34,625,703 Likes	Tunnel discovered beneath Egyptian temple may lead to Cleopatra's tomb, archaeologist says
		Space Shuttle Challenger remnants discovered underwater by documentary crew
		In search for unidentified victims of 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre, remains were found of a man with a gunshot wound
		Clues at ancient lake site reveal earliest known cooked meal
The Guardian	8,774,397 Followers 8,477,996 Likes	Man repatriates 19 antiquities after reading Guardian article
		The plot thickens: new study reveals complex identity of ancient Britons
		Funding cuts leave England's national parks facing 'existential crisis'
The New York Times	19,065,407 Followers 18,105,279 Likes	Climate Change and Human Activity Erode Egypt's Treasured Antiquities
Al Jazeera	16,676,717 Followers 13,882,531 Likes	Climate artefacts: How Nazi warships resurfaced in the Danube
		'Our Auschwitz, our Dachau' Reckoning with Germany's genocide in Namibia.
		Climate artefacts: Zakhiku: The ancient city in Iraq revealed by severe drought
Huffington Post	12,011,020 Followers 12,061,615 Likes	Bermuda Triangle Expedition Discovers Large Piece of Space Shuttle Challenger

Tab. 1 Mainstream media and titles associated to Archaeology published on Facebook during November 2022.

Perceptions of Archaeology in the social media

Many are those who have expressed their skepticism with social media however, rarely any could compare to the witty comment of Umberto Eco who during an interview at Torino in 2015¹ coined it as: "social media gives legions of idiots the right to speak when they once only spoke at a bar after a glass of wine, without harming the community [...] but now they have the same right to speak as a Nobel Prize winner. It's the invasion of the idiots!" At the time this opinion did receive a notable criticism, but even to these days there are many researchers and academics in the field of archaeology to whom social media still remains not a desirable venue that deserves any attention. However, seven years after Eco's opinion, the social media has proven to change in an irreversible way, how we are informed, what kind of news obtain most of the attention, how attention translates into economic revenues and how it defines public in-

terest, inspiration and perceptions. Against this backdrop, I analyze the appearance of Archaeology in social media in a twofold perspective: through the mainstream media and in the venues exclusively dedicated to Archaeology.

Archaeology in the mainstream media

The mainstream media besides their websites and televised or paper features use rather dynamically and creatively the pages of social media. Their publication and updates occur daily and in short spans of time. For this analysis I consider the main media outlets in their official pages on Facebook reach roughly above 10 million likes or followers including, BBC News, CNN, The Guardian, The New York Times, Al Jazeera and Huffington Post. As **Table 1** indicates, most of the media outlets dedicated one to five title to Archaeology during November 2022.

Indeed, with so much attention given to the daily politics, especially with the mid-terms in the USA, the war in Ukraine and the G20 meeting such attention to archaeology could be good news. Compared to the number of posts on the official websites, only some get to be posted in Facebook however, even in this case their content hardly surpasses that of a simple reporting on the excitement of a new discovery interpreted either as the earliest ever found or as the most exotic and/or mysterious. At times, some interesting dynamics could be pinpointed as well. For instance, attention expands from the conventional ages that the discipline has covered for decades, including prehistory, classics and medieval period.

Later events of the so-called historic periods like the excavations of Tulsa Race Massacre in 1921,² research of the Namibia's genocide³ or the Space Shuttle Challenger remnants⁴ receive significant interest in more than one media. Attention is also given to the impact of the climate change. Al Jazeera has created a new storyline named the climate artifacts, addressing either new potential for discoveries like the Nazi warship resurfaced in Danube⁵ or the ancient city of Zakhiku in Iraq revealed by the severe draught or warming temperatures.6 This nature of content addresses another matter regarding public attention and reacts.

Table 2 shows in quantitative terms the reactions (likes, love, care, sad and angry), comments and share for posts in the medias (BBC, CNN and

Al Jazeera) that published three or more titles with focus on Archaeology. Impact of climate change in Egypt treasured antiquities is more thoroughly considered in a story published in The New York Times.⁷ There is a notable correlation between the popularity of the media and the quantitative amount of attention given from the public. However, even in this case the most popular posts are those with an exotic content that describes potential and famous discoveries including the tunnel discovered beneath Egyptian temple, which may lead to Cleopatra's tomb,8 the world's first name author,9 the Celtic ruler's 2,000-year-old ring kept in cupboard for 28 years¹⁰ or the earliest known cooked meal as an incredibly important discovery.¹¹ Through comments, the public reaction boils down in groups of enthusiasts, speculative articulations from those who see archaeological discoveries challenge the religious paradigms, negative formulations which at many cases even promote hate speech, and some funny or even sarcastic expressions. In the wave of these comments, it is obvious to see that the mission and the activity of the discipline even with the most decent expressions comes solely perceived within a narrowly exploratory perspective with attention raised especially at content that marks the earliest, the first, and most mysterious. Other posts focused much later, or even those addressing

Media Outlet	Posts	Reactions	Comments	Shares
BBC	Celtic ruler's 2,000-year-old ring kept in cupboard for 28 years	10 K	243	346
	Space shuttle Challenger: Debris found by diver	1.1 K	55	89
	Enheduanna: The world's first named author	6.6 K	212	685
	UK museums willing to return skulls to Zimbabwe	1.8 K	1 K	88
	Was the Azores home to an ancient civilization?	1.3 K	197	202
CNN	Tunnel discovered beneath Egyptian temple may lead to Cleopatra's tomb, archaeologist says	14 K	1.3 K	2 K
	Space Shuttle Challenger remnants discovered underwater by documentary crew	1.2 K	46	69
	In search for unidentified victims of 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre, remains were found of a man with a gunshot wound	1.4 K	139	45
	Clues at ancient lake site reveal earliest known cooked meal	3.4 K	794	342
Al Jazeera	Climate artefacts: How Nazi warships resurfaced in the Danube	356	19	19
	'Our Auschwitz, our Dachau' Reckoning with Germany's, genocide in Namibia	809	278	60
	Climate artefacts: Zakhiku: The ancient city in Iraq revealed by severe drought	360	18	34

Tab. 2 Attention and reaction of public in the posts of the mainstream media.

1	Popular Archaeology	20 K	no account
2	Current World Archaeology	10 K	10.3 K
3	Innovative Technologies Invented by Ancient Civilizations	no account	no account
4	Archaeology Magazine	2.1 Million	352 K
5	National Geographic – Archaeology	no account	no account
6	Archaeologica	no account	no account
7	American Journal of Archaeology	no account	no account
8	Ancient Origins	1,133,186	168 K
9	Current Archaeology Magazine	24 K	10.8 K

Tab. 3 List of the 9 best Archaeology Websites and Blogs to Follow - simple Google search.

climatic change and discoveries vet fail to obtain significant attention in the public.

Archaeology in the pages of social media

In this section I see the appearance, attention and popularity of Archaeology on Facebook and Instagram, yet two most popular social medias. With a simple google search as general public appear at least nine best Archaeology websites and blogs to follow. 12 However, as Table 3 indicates, in the social media four of these websites do not appear at all.

From those choosing to publish in social media the Archaeology Magazine¹³ reaches the highest numbers of followers on Facebook with 2.1 million and Instagram with 352 hundred thousand. Here again, most of the attention goes to new discoveries, but posts that yield intriguing results from interdisciplinary research are published as well. The news reproduce reports and stories from the web version of the magazine. In contrast with the mainstream media, no effort is given to formulation of titles that may attract the attention of the general public. The Instagram account with fewer followers offers similar posts but puts in the center of attention filtered photos of artefacts or archaeological sites.

Table 4 shows posts published in the Facebook page from 1st to the 10th of November. The attention to archaeological research and explorations worldwide is obvious in the posts on Facebook and Instagram. However, from 26 posts listed in Table 4, 18 of them have obtained a steady attention with less than a thousand reactions. Eight posts that exceed a thousand or more reactions are mainly associated with news and discoveries in Italy, Scotland, Sweden, France, or the Gulf of Mexico. News on the famous tomb of Egyptian pharaoh Tutankhamun or the Egyptian stelas at least in the quantity of reactions remain much behind compared to the updates associated with the western or northern Europe. In the comment section, with the discovery of the 24 well-preserved bronze statues in Etruscan baths,14 public expresses enthusiasm and excitement. Other posts, like the discovery of a canoe canal in Alabama linking Mobile Bay with the Gulf of Mexico has been found to date to about A.D. 600^{15} puts the public reaction into virtual clash between those believing that the Americas were only discovered from Christopher Columbus and those defending earlier evidence associated with the indigenous population.

The second most popular venue in both Facebook and Instagram is the page Ancient Origins.16 Compared to Instagram, Facebook quantitatively receives much more public attention (see Table 3). Some serious effort is noted here with exciting titles and photos aiming to attract more attention. However, most posts do not exceed tens or hundreds of reactions. Quite interesting is the nature of posts that obtain thousands of reactions. From a selection of posts on two days in November (Table 5) one could hardly give any prominence to the titles that recieve most reactions. Keywords like sex coins, mysterious people, love for birds, oldest known map, enigmatic symbols are those mostly viewed and perhaps read, however other posts that obtain less quantitative attention do not appear with lesser attractive titles.

This page mainly posts attractive titles with content in archaeological discoveries, human origins, or mysterious myths and beliefs. Such is even more apparent in the events they announce on the page including an upcoming event on: the inner mysteries of Ancient Egypt and the Nile; or a webinar on April 2020 themed with "Where is the body of Alexander the Great?".

Such content on the most popular archaeology pages in social media contributes considerably to

Time	Posts	Reactions	Comments	Sha
Nov. 1	Silver coins were recovered from the wreck of Batavia	778	8	
	French archaeologists discovered a first-century B.C villa	3.5 K	35	
	Herring bones unearthed at a Viking Age center in Poland	413	9	
	Fragments of Roman monuments set into the walls of a medieval cemetery in Croatia	628		
Nov. 2	An unusual example of an iron folding chair dating to about A.D. 600	568	23	
	Archaeologists are racing to study middens at sites in southwest Greenland	214		
	Archaeologists have uncovered postholes from the stockade of a Revolutionary War–era	903	60	
Nov. 3	Ancient Mesoamerican beliefs about the afterlife, which endure in Mexicans' celebration of the Day of the Dead	642	25	
	Found throughout Western and Eastern Europe, bronze lamps in the shape of waterfowl	448	5	
	A 1,000-year-old hoard of silver artifacts from Viking Age	743	19	
	Basalt axes and stone flakes found on Norfolk Island in the South Pacific	606	35	
Nov. 4	Updates on the Egyptian pharaoh #Tutankhamun	628	23	
	In a Scottish cemetery, archaeologists unearthed a cross slab	1.2 K	104	
Nov. 7	A 4,000-year-old Egyptian stela that was believed to serve as a portal to the afterlife	562	6	
	In India's western state of Maharashtra, about 1,000 petroglyphs dating to between 12,000 and 5,000	901	17	
	stimulants and plants in Nazca culture	593	13	
Nov. 8	Spanish conquistador Hernán Cortés in Tenochtitlán	792	22	
	Archaeologists in southwestern Sweden unearthed a metal amulet	4.4 K	216	
	A rare, priceless Roman glass vessel known as a cage cup that was discovered in a cemetery in France	3.5 K	50	
Nov. 9	A canoe canal in Alabama linking Mobile Bay with the Gulf of Mexico has been found to date to about A.D. 600.	3.8 K	330	
	Members of Virginia's Rappahannock tribe are working with archaeologists to identify settlements	404	9	
	The grave of a child who was buried some 6,000 years ago in eastern Finland contained rare, preserved samples of plant fibers and animal	1.4 K	20	
Nov. 10	This foot-tall copper head found at the site of Nineveh, in present-day Iraq, may represent Sargon the Great	3 K	351	
	Archaeologists exploring the medieval towns of Tanzania's Swahili Coast are discovering how the Swahili	550	1	
	24 well-preserved bronze statues dating to the 1st and 2nd centuries B.C. were discovered in Etruscan baths	3.5 K	73	
	A new study of thick-billed parrot remains found at Indigenous settlements in Arizona and New Mexico	291	3	

Tab. 4 Posts, reactions, comments and shares on the Facebook account from 1st to 10th of November, 2022, in the most popular site Archaeology/Archaeology Magazine.

understand at what extent the discipline firstly is published with comes portrayed from professionals and secondly what kind of perceptions this strategy creates in the general public. The publications in the social media are yet not a priority for prestigious websites with focus on Archaeology. As Table 3 indicates, from the nine best ranked archaeology websites, almost half of them do not appear at all in any social media.

Even with the two most popular and followed pages, like the Archaeology Magazine and Ancient World, some matters must come to the

Time	Posts/Titles	Reactions	Comments	Shares
Nov. 17 & 18	Spintriae, The Roman Sex Coins That Showed What Was on The Menu	2.7 K	112	132
	Ottoman-era (13th-20th c.) birdhouses that show how much Turkish people loved birds.	2.1 K	73	368
	Craco: The Abandoned Medieval Ghost Town of Italy (reposted)	3.8 K	27	115
	El Tajín, The Lost City of a Mysterious People	4.1 K	30	154
	Enigmatic Symbols and Carvings in Man-Made Royston Cave	1.1 K	10	31
	Translation of 5,500-Year-Old Babel Text from China Reveals Oldest Known Map of Inner Solar System	1.3 K	9	80
	The Peloponnesian War: Intrigues and Conquests in Ancient Greece	3.7 K	40	170
	Why was Alfred the Great One of Only Two Kings Named 'Great' in English History?	3 K	37	115

Tab. 5 Posts receiving thousand reactions on the Ancient Origin Facebook page (a selection from November 17 and 18).

fore of discussion. The Archaeology Magazine maintains a focus on discoveries and research worldwide bringing into attentions the benefits of interdisciplinary research. However, posts only come in the written format, are introduced without attractive titles and by default this does not translate into a promising growing public attention. At most cases the reactions of the posts only get to some hundreds. In contrast with the Archaeology Magazine, the Facebook page of the Ancient World offers interesting titles that could potentially attract the public eye. However, even in this case most commonly the posts and titles rely on keywords and content that deal with mystery, enigma, oldest discoveries and so on. Neither of those however seems to offer to the public the whole mission and role of Archaeology.

Discussion

I do not consider myself an active participant in the social media even though I do have a Facebook and Instagram account. It enables me to see the attention we give to pages or news which shape the suggestions the social media offers to us in a long run. It is a space that gives you a dubious feeling about certain posts or people. However, especially with the young generation, but also much advanced ages, Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, or TikTok are becoming the main source of attention, information, influence and inspiration. Against such potential I see the representation and appearance of Archaeology in an apathetic state, to say the least.

One could not complain about the mainstream media, when in a month full of hot politic activity attention is given to topics with archaeological content. International news including BBC, CNN, The Guardian, or Al Jazeera bring the news in an elaborated fashion and indeed hit into sensitive topics including the impact of global warming in archaeology, the study of genocide through archaeology, or the repatriation of antiquities. However, even within these media the most popular posts are those that offer the excitement of new fancy discoveries, like the potential to discover the tomb of Cleopatra or the ring of the Celtic ruler. This type of news not only secures a higher attention but also provokes polarized or irrational public views.

Additional issues emerged in the pages with exclusive focus to Archaeology. In their content no consideration at all is given to the promotion of work and training of the young researchers or their achievements in the field. What kind of professions are created and how promising could be approaching a career in the future. There is indeed a growing attention to the discovery of later periods including events of the last century, which has changed rather dramatically the clichés that Archaeology explores either prehistory or the classic civilizations. However, in the message given to the public the posts fail to promote this. Pages and posts in the social media do not take very seriously the fact that while communicating with the public the message should be elaborated, attractive and irreproachable. Many individuals who use their social media pages on a daily basis, with the one and only purpose to get

as much attention as possible through a higher number of followers, of reactions and likes. Many in this effort are able to post the most simple and basic messages in a highly innovative and attractive way, most simple and basic messages being published in a highly innovative and attractive way through photo collages, reels, or videos with witty content, just to name a few. Those who are most successful in such endeavor have even invented new careers as bloggers or influencers.

Despite the enormous potential, Archaeology in its social media pages does not even consider these innovative ways. It must be stressed, that the interdisciplinary focus of the discipline is increasingly producing myriad opportunities and potentials for a future profession beyond research that could be approached in museology, conservation, restauration, culture heritage, environment, curation, promotion and management of national parks, private and public sectors, tourism, entrepreneurship and so on. The social media fails to portray these dimensions and at most cases is clogged either into highly superficial content relying on the most basic actions of the discipline such as discovery and/or excavations and fancy contexts/artefacts or offer mostly updates on ongoing research and explorations around the world. Following such content it is easy for the public to either express excitement, be part of a polarized discussion or at most cases show no interest at all.

Not only for the simple purpose of the information of the general public, but indeed for the inspiration, encouragement and the attraction of attention from the young generation, there is an imperative need to reflect and above all to transform the publishing strategy so that the whole role, mission and potential of Archaeology is presented, cherished and followed.

Notes

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