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Mike Messina

COMM 460

How We Talk About Archaeology in the Digital Age

Introduction

When you think about anthropology and specifically archaeology you may not think about the digital world. Everything that surrounds anthropology and archaeology makes us think about what came before us and how we got to where we are now. If anything, you might think about your digitally streaming versions that you may have of the *Indiana Jones* films. Stop and think about how you have seen what you have seen when it comes to all of the archaeological content you have taken in. A good majority of it has probably been on the internet. Do you follow any museum accounts on Instagram? The Instagram account for the Smithsonian has over 1 million followers. The British Museum posts incredible content that we can all see without even visiting. This isn't exactly the same experience as seeing it in-person, but it serves as an intro to what is out there for so many. Simply visiting the Instagram accounts of some of these world-known museums helps boost the hard work and findings of the fantastic archaeologists out there. So much work goes into the research and exploration that take place to create this presentation of perfectly curated items for you to take in, whether it be at the British Museum in London or through their Instagram. That work being boosted is a big advantage for their work to continue to in so many ways, such as further funding for research and not to mention the interest in the profession that will spread across the globe to so many. Archaeology in the digital age has changed the ways in which it is explored, studied, and consumed due a variety of advancements in the field. The purpose of this research paper is talk about how we got where we are now and all of the ways in which it has all changed. Through in-depth content analysis this research's goal

is to uncover how archaeology has advanced by looking at theory from anthropologists new and old and analyzing digital strategy from current day archaeologists.

Literature Review

In order to properly explore all of what we are attempting to uncover within the digital age of anthropology and archaeology, we must take a look at the journey it has been to get to this point. Reading about anthropology and archaeology theory and the methods used to present findings is extremely important. Gaining the knowledge that is the way of studying these fields is going to help us pave the way in our thoughts and findings. We need to look at how archaeology is explained from the experts in the anthropological field of study. Thinking like an anthropologist will help us craft our decisions when it comes to how we perceive the new digital era of archaeological findings. As the legendary anthropologist, Franz Boas touched on at the beginning of his book, *Anthropology & Modern life*, we need come up with an understanding of everything that makes up anthropology before we start to come up with our own theories. Then, once we discover a strong social understanding, we can then start to shine a light toward what we are looking. The man known as the “Father of Anthropology,” knew that when making our research and going on our travels, we must keep in mind the humanity in all of us. We are all human and we are learning about one another and about one another. We should invest ourselves in what we learn and then make our decisions in our daily lives based off of what we have taken in. When studying within the field we must make sure we are focused on the group at hand not just a particular individual and we should be sure to keep in mind the ways in which archaeological artifacts are presented showcase this fact. We are studying the how and why of so many examples from a group of people and we cannot let one artifact become a symbol of just one, but it should become a conversation of where it came from and what it represents (Boas,

1928). We must continue the efforts that went into what was found by telling that human story to a whole new group in a way that represents humans properly. We have to create a presentation that informs the viewer so that they learn all that they can about what went into that artifact.

Stanley Barrett has so many amazing things to say about the globalization of anthropology. In this research, social media and digital media is the centerpiece as the artifact of study. Archaeological findings, museum curations, digs; it is all out there for us all to take in all the time on platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, and podcast platforms. We can see firsthand what is happening in the archaeological world. This has opened everything up in a new way, much like Barrett's ideas on globalization. He speaks of globalizations being an advancement that we haven't seen since the industrial revolution. Globalization through digital communication has brought everyone together in an unlimited amount of ways through all of our forms of social platforms and media (Barrett, 1999). Looking back to 1999, he was so right. Right now, in the year 2022, the world has seen such an increase in globalization, year after year. The ways in which we are connected now allows us to share so much with one another and learn so much. Linking globalization and social media to anthropology and the ways in which we share knowledge is so important. Everyone is always looking for more ways to share information. In the study of anthropology, we are studying humans and often times the ways in which they have communicated throughout history. Archaeologists take their discoveries and then get to work searching for the meaning behind it. Whether it be writing, sculptures, art, anything; we are looking at all of the ways in which we have expresses ourselves throughout time. Right now, since the turn of the 21st century, in the era of immense globalization, people are no different. The methods are much different, but they always have been advancing as many anthropologists like Barret have predicted (Barrett, 1999). Communities all over the globe have

always evolved in communication methods and build upon them. It is amazing that we are able to share stories of findings through updates on our Instagram, creating a community of people who are all interested in the same thing and eager to know more. We can now all go on archaeological adventures together. We are now able to inspire so many by sharing in new and creative ways on social media platforms. We can excite more and more people to go check out museums that they may not have been to before. We can get them hooked on certain aspects of history that are deeply fascinating. Globalization quickly became the norm in anthropology at the turn of the century and now we are taking that work and expanding it to even more people (Lewellen, 2002). The possibilities are truly endless when it comes to how we can really bring together big communities of people through amazing archaeological findings.

When sharing finding from field work in the archaeological field we of course want to ensure that everything is being explained in the proper way. Now, of course there are different depths in which we need to go into explaining, but everything should be planned out well when breaking down the knowledge of what is being discussed. When we apply this to how we share everything now in this digital era we have been in for the last 20 years or so, we think of the ways in which we bring viewers in and show them what has been found. It is a duty to make sure that when taken in, viewers don't get led to any false information around artifacts, the people around them, or the history that belongs to it. Dr. Kara Cooney, an Egyptologist at UCLA has an informative and engaging podcast titled *Afterlives with Kara Cooney*, which is dedicated to bringing people into the world of Ancient Egypt and all of her studies around it. She has a strategy in place that works very well at communicating her research to the audience (Cooney, 2022). People within the field must make sure that they come up with a digital strategy so that users of that digital platform are understanding everything behind it, as connectivity and ethics

are certainly complex and the conversation is ongoing around this. (Faubion, 2009). There needs to always be a structure and process planned out for the audience. No one can expect the audience to have done all of the research beforehand and the person delivering this it will have the gift of being able to inform them with something new. When making posts to social media platforms about artifacts we are able to get a condensed but concise history of what it is that we are posting about. We can do this in a variety of ways such as supplemental graphics, captions on Instagram and TikTok, or explanations within our tweets. It is also common to provide a link to find out more about it on a website. The responsibility we carry when it comes to sharing the correct information is major. There are of course so many varying ways to do this and certain occasions call for more explanation. Every single post doesn't have to be a serious breakdown of every single thing behind it and a step by step inside look at the research and dig that happened to find said object. At the end of the day, "anthropological connectivity resides logically within a moral-affective," so we need to always make sure we are doing everything within our knowledge to share our history in the proper way (Faubion, 2009, p. 157).

Anthropologist, Johannes Fabian talked about how anthropology is taken in, "Anthropology, he wrote, is treated like a 'time machine.' When you leave your university study you are in the Time of Now. When you arrive in the field, you are in a Time Gone By," (Engelke 2018, p. 75). Thinking about this is incredibly important when it comes to the discussion of how we are sharing our anthropological research during this digital age. Each year our ways of engagement increase and the forms in which we can communicate with people all over the world across social platforms go up. When the information that we are sharing is being spread, it is important to take a step back as the creator of the content and the viewer of the content to think about the magnitude of what we are taking in. There is a massive romanticism to it all that

cannot go ignored. We are talking about the history of the human race on our planet. We are discussing all of the ways in which we have communicated and artistically expressed ourselves throughout time. It is majorly important for us to learn from it all, as we all grow as humans when we learn about ourselves, as it sets us all up to live our absolute best lives moving forward. It gives us the thought to implement the old with the new. We must always make sure that we are communicating what was being said accurately in the past and telling its story accurately through our new digital strategies.

Research Questions

In this research, we are seeking to find how archaeology within the anthropological world of study has evolved in the digital age. We are also looking for the pros and cons within the field and how we can go about finding these answers. What has changed in this digital era when it comes to anthropology and how we talk about archaeology? How do we talk about archaeology in general now? These questions were the focus when going through all of the readings and research used for this study. Getting down to how archaeology is discussed in general and how it has changed and what it has all meant for anthropological communication is the big overarching question that provided as a guide through all of the research. There were a lot of terrific answers found.

Approach/Method

Starting out the research for this project was going to entail looking through digital catalogs of research papers that were done very recently, only in a digital format. Soon after, it was realized that for this project, many hours needed to be spent reading books on anthropological theory on the rise of globalization to see how that could apply to the field of archaeology today. Content analysis was used by reading books new and old about the journey

that the study of anthropology has been on. The search for how digital media was predicted to be a major factor within anthropological field was the driving force here. Looking back at how legendary anthropologists predicted how things would go was so fascinating to read about. Scouring through books from decades ago to this past decade really allowed for this content analysis to be diverse and range in time with perspective from anthropologists from different eras. Evaluation on how this current era would come about and what it would mean for the field was extremely valuable information to take in during this part of the research. Content analysis of books new and old on theories, speculation, and current review of the way in which archaeology is spoken about today and how anthropology is studied was the perfect choice for this research. Tying everything together came the content analysis of social media and podcast platforms in which archaeologists are currently sharing their research.

Findings

Where we are now and how we talk about archaeology was always predicted to be this way by incredible amounts of scholars. Before we had all of the technology that we have now, in the early 1900s, there were anthropological theories set in place on how globalization would happen through the advancement of humankind and how we communicate. Communication is constantly advancing; it always has been and it always will. The stories that we tell about archaeology and all that humans have been through and done and left behind for us was told in so many different ways. The practice of communication changes in time and by culture. The world entered into a major time of change just before the year 2000. Globalization impacted how archaeological research is shared through advancements in social and digital media. Social platforms, podcasts, streaming services and more have opened up the gates to how archaeological findings can be shared to the public. Anthropologists knew that this era that is

known as the digital era would get here and the way in which humans communicate would ramp how findings share and how teachings were taught to all of us. The digital era in archaeology, like all fields has given the practice many changes. We see the way in which fieldwork is done and share now compared to how it used to. We see how archaeologists are able to use certain tools, apps, and social media to heighten what they can do during excavation, planning for digs, mapping out travel, and sharing content with the world like never before. The digital era has allowed for people to become educated in the archaeological world like never before.

Communities have formed on Twitter amongst academics within the archaeological field and those interested in it. Online community creation though all of these platforms mentioned has taken the field to the next level.

Discussion

How we talk about archaeology was the big focus in the research here and there was so much found. Globalization as predicted has allowed for us to be connected like never before. Social media is used to inform so many on what is going on. We just found out on the day that it happened that an archaeological team in Cairo, Egypt finally figured out how Ancient Egyptians were able to build the pyramids by doing it themselves. A team of 20 or so on this archaeology team put together a contraption that they saw stories told about with modern day equipment that matched what they figured out to be the same as what they used back then. It was really just wood and rope. They also used water to make things move better. Besides strength that was what it was and they posted a video of this team doing it! This experimental archaeological finding was shared in mass across all of social media. When doing this research, it was first come across via Twitter and then starting to become talked about on TikTok by archaeologists on there, breaking it all down for people. This 2-ton limestone block was move by what they call the

“sledge and slideway,” as explained Dr. Gregory Marouard, who is an archaeologist and Egyptologist at Yale University. The National Geographic Museum in Washington, DC will have having an exhibit this June presented in a variety of digital ways called “Beyond King Tut: The Immersive Experience,” marking the 100-year discovery of Tutankhamon, the incredibly famous Ancient Egyptian pharaoh. These are just a couple of examples of how the digital era has transformed how archaeological findings are being communicated to the public. Like the National Geographic Museum, museums showcase archaeological findings, both new and old, all across their social media platforms and their websites. The same goes for archaeologist’s social media accounts. As previous mentioned with the video and breakdowns on the experimental discovery in Cairo, many archaeologists take to social media to give updates on their research excavations, and plans. Many others will breakdown the news within the archaeological world in extremely informative and entertaining ways on TikTok. Archaeology TikTok is a fantastic community to be a part of as it is filled with so many dedicated archaeologists who are always so excited to share new information on what is being discovered, as well as talking about older findings. Whether you want to listen to a fantastic Egyptology podcast, diving deep into the research and journey of being an Egyptologist, or if you want to follow an archaeologist on TikTok who talks about findings and excavations each day, there are so many possibilities within the field of archaeology on what can be taken in and how.

Conclusion

The digital age has really done nothing but positive things for the archaeology community. The study of archaeology has opened up more and more with each passing year as we are able to find new ways to enhance finding through digital technology. In the same breath, we are able to now share these findings at such a rapid rate and inform the public as everything is happening.

We can now all follow our favorite archaeologists on TikTok as they update us all of the news surrounding their research and what they have come across. We can watch an excavation on our phone in real time on Instagram Live, receiving information on what is happening before us as we are getting in on that action. Getting new information from archaeologist who have dedicated their life to finding out this information and making these discoveries is inspiration. Dr. Kathleen Martinez for example has dedicated her time to finding the tomb of Cleopatra. She moved to Egypt and has given update after update every time she comes across something new via her Instagram. She believes that she is getting closer and closer to finding the resting place, as over the years she has made many fascinating discoveries pertaining to her. She has been leading the way with an archaeology team at the location known as Taposiris Magna, just outside of the city of Alexandria, Egypt looking for Cleopatra. At this location, she has found coins with the images of Cleopatra and her love, Mark Antony on them. Dr. Martinez says, “it is very improbable that I won’t find the tomb,” with confidence (Hendawi, 2021). When this discovery of a lifetime is made, you can be sure that it will be shared across social media like wildfire. Once she posts about it and the news gets out, you will be seeing photos, videos, articles, and breakdowns of all sorts across every platform that there is. Archaeology is a field in which research is done on the most fascinating stories of our past and exploration is done to find examples of that historic time. We are now able to share our past like never before and the future will continue to help tell the tale.

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