Negotiating Authority

Social media does not avoid the problem of negotiating authority in engagement with the public. Social media is often seen as a democratic space, yet Walker (2014) highlights how pre-existing authority is transferred to virtual space, as such a traditional sense of authority is upheld, with the archaeologist in power and the public as a “passive consumer” (Richardson, 2013).

An attempt at reducing the top-down model of authority can reduce feelings of social isolation in those who feel they are a minority, or under-valued (Walker, 2014, 227). Yet in an attempt to include more of the public, Bevan (2012, 4) suggests that it can conceal a desire to remain in control over the interpretation or data-driven narrative presented by the archaeologist.

Evolution of Modern Communication and the Struggling Archaeologist

Social Media is ever changing, in addition to being constantly updated by users; social media platforms are updated, created, and removed. In this social media life cycle: once well-loved websites become obsolete.

As such, there is very little certainty that work and thoughts uploaded by archaeologists to social media platforms will remain in the future, and that creating an archive may be necessary to retain important information.

Lomborg (2012) states that a full archive is impossible, as the data used is ever changing, the thought process behind the data creation is invisible and the differing levels of access or “privacy” make data collection difficult. Lomborg (2012, 226), The London School of Economics and Political Sciences (2012), and Beale & Harris (2012) recognise the difficulties in archiving audience participation, an example being that individual consent needs to be given to use data created by social media users.

Participation can be hard to measure, as simply clicking on a post and reading, but not actively engaging can be classed as engagement, yet is not necessarily obvious to the archaeologist. (Richardson, 2012, 19; 2013).

CAA 2012 and Our Efforts

In 2012 the International Computer Applications and Quantitative Methods in Archaeology Conference (CAA) organised a team (SMiLE) to undertake a study of the use of social media throughout the conference.

Throughout this Twitter was overwhelmingly adopted, with over 12,000 tweets using #Caasoton. Plus 435 photos on Flikr, and Vimeo views across 40 countries. (Harris, 2012). In archiving despite many correspondents feeling that the data should be anonymised or not kept (The London School of Economics and Political Sciences, 2012). Harris (2012), states that none of those involved expressed a wish for their tweets to be removed.

Our efforts have included the use of Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Wordpress; we have posted status’, tweets, blog posts, photos, and have attempted a #tinathetrowel campaign which encouraged others to engage with our pages.

Engagement with our Twitter and Facebook pages is shown in figures 1 and 2.

For further information and references visit: https://archaeoengage.wordpress.com/