

## **1 x News / current affairs summary (1000 words) 25%**

A summary of a current subject of debate within your chosen discipline.

### **A summary of the current debates on the rise of Pseudoarchaeology across social media, television, and streaming services, and the connection to issues regarding Public Communication.**

A rising debate within the Archaeological discipline regards the quality and accessibility of public involvement in archaeology, and whether this can be to blame for the rise in Pseudoarchaeology in online spaces such as social media and streaming services.

“Public interest in archaeology has never been stronger” [The British Academy]. The public wants to be aware and involved in archaeology, however, public communication remains an ongoing issue for modern archaeology. In this new digital world information has never been more available for public consumption. This is no different for Archaeologists, the internet is full of reports, papers and articles targeted for Archaeologists, many are even free such as *Archaeopress*’s open access section. However, concerns have begun to rise regarding the lack of archaeological information targeted towards the public. Many public perceptions of these sites and articles are that they are ‘too academic’ for casual public consumption, containing specialized lexis, without proper definition, leading to it being seen as hard to understand, therefore uninteresting.

This issue isn't restricted to online spaces, Dr Hannah Pathen describing public access dig sites as being “somewhat sterile and occasionally soulless” [Pethen H] suggesting that even when archaeology is presented for the public it’s watered down, lacking quality, thus leading to limited engagement from the general public towards these sites.

Does this possibly lead the public to obtain their archaeological knowledge from less reputable sources, feeding the rise of pseudoarchaeology on social media, television and streaming platforms?

When the public want for archaeological knowledge is unfulfilled by the academic world, they seek that knowledge elsewhere. This leaves room for a rise in misinformation and Pseudoarchaeology through social media sites such as TikTok, X (formerly Twitter), and YouTube, leading too widespread misinformation regarding archaeological topics.

This issue has further been spread by streaming platforms such as Netflix producing and hosting inaccurate, but easily digestible, 'documentaries' such as Grayham Handcock's *Ancient Apocalypse*, which makes drastic claims without adequate evidence or room for discussion. And when there can be nothing presented to contradict it, many members of the general public have no reason not to take it as fact, epically when it is being presented as that. Although many of these documentaries are lacking in quality, compared to the archaeological papers available online, they are more accessible and easier to understand for the public, resulting in their increased popularity.

Then does the responsibility lie on social media sites and streaming platforms rather than archaeologists? Or should archaeologists create content for the public?

Archaeologist *Jenna Hendrick* in her 2024 article *Public Outreach* argues that it is archaeologists reasonability, stating "Public outreach in this regard becomes a means of translation; we need to communicate with the public in terms they understand because *they want to learn*, and if we don't help them, then they either become discouraged and their interest wanes, or they misunderstand the research, which could lead to negative consequences"[[Hendrick, J](#)]

She also brings awareness to another issue that occurs within much of this 'Pseudoarchaeology'. Much of archaeological findings can hold great cultural importance and a large part of an archaeologist's role is giving the care that's needed. Archaeologist Bill Caraher in his article "Pseudo archaeology is in the Air" mentioned that when publishing archaeological findings, "we are forced to confront our racist, colonialist, positivist, and exclusionary past" [[Caraher, B.](#)] which is something that often doesn't happen with this 'pseudo archaeological' content, which holds the potential of "erasure of

indigenous heritage”[Dibble, F] commonly by undermining the capabilities of typically non-European civilizations, such as the Mayan and Ancient Egyptian.

A program that has commonly received this critique is The History Channel’s *Ancient Aliens*, a show presented to the public as a documentary, popularizing the idea of the Pyramids were built by aliens, despite lacking evidence or findings for its claims, invalidating the capabilities of the Ancient Egyptian society. Archaeologists C Bonacchi, M Krzyzanka and A Acerbi in their article *Positive sentiment and expertise predict the diffusion of archaeological content on social media* argue that “‘pseudoarchaeology’ content defending ‘ancient alien origins’ has been leveraged to communicate white supremacist views”[Bonacchi, C., Krzyzanska, M. and Acerbi, A.]. Popular broadcast programs such as this lead to a rise in conspiracy theories and hate across social media.

So, what is the future of public relations in archaeology in a digital world? Does the future of public relations with archaeology lie within social media as a method to combat the surge of widespread pseudoarchaeology?

However, points can be made suggesting archaeological content, supported by research and findings is on the rise on social media, such as the British museum's YouTube channel, with 730K subscribers, publishing a video series of easily digestible archaeological content directed at the public. As well as several YouTube and TikTok pages, each with a large follow count such as *Stefan Milo* and *Dig-it-with-raven*, both channels dedicated exclusively to using academic sources.

But is it really enough and do more resources need to be put towards improving public involvement in archaeology?

Ultimately the public are interested in archaeology and want to be involved in it, but it can be difficult due to a lack of easily digestible content produced with academic accuracy in mind, possibly resulting in an increase in pseudoarchaeological content being produced and consumed, and although there are attempts by archaeologists to combat it, it's still an ongoing issue and debates continue around the topic.

## Biography

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