

**Research Article**

## **Assessing the Impact of Media Types on Public Engagement and Sensationalism in Archaeological Discourse**

**Aidan J Hong**

Independent Researcher, Seoul International School, South Korea

Email: [aiho2025@gmail.com](mailto:aiho2025@gmail.com)

**Received:** November 28, 2024

**Accepted:** December 18, 2024

**Published:** December 25, 2024

### **Abstract**

While effective media content increases archaeological interests and actions, some content leads to mere sensationalism. The current study examines different media contents (article, long-form post, short-form video, and documentary) and compares their archaeological impact on individuals. A survey measured sixty participants on their prior level in archaeology and their subjective evaluation of the archaeological contents from different media formats. Based on their reports, scores were calculated that considered the media's appeal, archaeological-impact, and sensationalism. The results indicated that archaeological impact and susceptibility to sensationalism significantly differed between participants' archaeological level. While audiences with high level understanding show high interest and archaeological contribution, results of media appeal and archaeological impact were independent for low-level audiences. Particularly, short-form video revealed sensationalism among low-level viewers, with high interest but low contribution. Results from this study show that media type and audiences' prior experience determine the degree of contribution media gives to archaeology, suggesting that content creators should adjust their approach to consider the target audience.

**Keywords:** Archaeology Interest, Media Impact, Sensationalism, Media Type.

### **1. Introduction**

At the intersection of media and archaeology, media plays an essential and transformative role in bridging the gap between academic research and the general public. Archaeology, often seen as a field reserved for specialists and scholars, can be made more accessible to a wider audience through diverse media channels (Schablitsky, 2014). With technological advancements bolstering the growing popularity of digital platforms, media content related to archaeology can significantly impact how the public engages with the field. The field is influenced by a variety of content ranging from articles about new discoveries, v-logs that explore archaeological sites, and documentaries that delve into historical narratives. Such media not only disseminates new information but also helps cultivate a deeper understanding and appreciation for archaeological research. This reflects the media's potential to enhance public awareness and garner attention for archaeology is crucial, especially as the discipline faces challenges, such as limited financial support and gaps in public comprehension. Consequently, the role of media in connecting the public with archaeological research has become increasingly pivotal, as it serves to promote interest, facilitate learning, and advocate for the continued importance of archaeological exploration.

### **2. Background**

Recent archaeological research often faces substantial barriers due to the lack of financial resources and the challenge of engaging a broader audience beyond academic circles. Many archaeological projects struggle to secure funding due to fluctuation in public interest for the discipline as result of limited exposure or misunderstanding of its relevance. Media, therefore, serves as an important tool in addressing these challenges by highlighting discoveries and contextualizing archaeological research in a way that resonates with the general public. The growing influence of certain media platforms has led to a shift in how archaeological findings are communicated to people outside of the field, with content that ranges from long form academic articles, posts, and feature documentaries, all the way to easily accessible short-form videos. However, the effectiveness of media in fostering public interest and understanding can be undermined if driven primarily by sensationalism (Ransohoff and Ransohoff, 2001; Uzuegbunam and Udeze, 2013). When

media outlets prioritize garnering attention over accuracy, sensationalized portrayals of archaeology can distort public perceptions, potentially misrepresenting findings or overstating their significance. Such editorial biases, driven by a desire to attract large audiences, can lead to misinformation and skewed understanding.

Therefore, it is essential to critically assess how media content impacts the public's understanding of archaeology, ensuring that it serves to inform rather than mislead. The current study evaluates four primary types of media content—articles, long-form posts, short-form videos, and documentaries—in order to examine their effectiveness in enhancing public engagement with archaeology. By analyzing the interrelationships between these media formats and audience responses, the study aims to provide insight into how media strategies can be optimized to foster greater awareness and authentic appreciation for archaeological research (Clack, 2007; Chambers, 2023).

### 3. Method

#### 3.1. Participants and Stimuli

A total of sixty participants were recruited for the study through an online survey platform. Each participant provided written consent to take part in the research and was compensated with \$10 for their time and participation. The survey was divided into two main sections: *Archaeology Experience* and *Media Evaluation*, with each section designed to gather specific information about the participants' background and their responses to various media types.

The first section, *Archaeology Experience*, aimed to assess participants' knowledge, interest, and exposure to the field of archaeology. It consisted of four questions designed to document the participants' familiarity with archaeology, their level of interest in the subject, and their previous exposure to archaeological media or research. This section helped to categorize participants based on their existing engagement with the field, providing context for understanding their responses in the second section.

The second section, *Media Evaluation*, focused on evaluating four distinct types of media content: articles, long-form posts, short-form videos, and documentaries. These media types were chosen for their varying formats and potential to influence public perceptions of archaeology. Participants answered 16 questions, including four on media appeal (MA), eight on archaeology's impact (IA), and four on negative sensationalism (NS). This design aimed to explore how different media influences perception of and engagement with archaeology.

The structure of this survey was carefully designed to explore how different types of media content might shape public perceptions of and engagement with archaeology, with particular attention to the potential impact of sensationalism in these portrayals. By analyzing responses across these various questions, the study sought to uncover how media formats influence participants' understanding of archaeological topics and the degree to which media content can enhance or distort perceptions of the field.

**Table 1.** Questions in archaeology experience and in media evaluation section.

Archaeology experience	
How would you describe your level of experience in archaeology?	
How would you rate your interest in archaeology?	
How often do you encounter (purposefully, randomly) archaeological context?	
Are you interested (in general) in media contents that exhibit archaeological stories?	
Media evaluation	
Articles about archaeology catch my attention.	MA
Articles about archaeology increase my interest in the field.	IA
Through articles about archaeology, I have supported or am willing to support (financially, non-financially) archaeological projects.	IA
Articles about archaeology are issue making.	NS
Articles about archaeology omit critical details and facts.	NS

#### 3.2. Data Analysis

Responses to the archaeology experience section were added for each participant (possible score range: 4 ~ 24) to evaluate the archaeological level of each participant. The minimum score was 4 and the maximum score was 22 ( $M$  score = 11.8). Based on the scores, participants were assigned to either high-level group

(HL) or low-level group (LL) with the criteria score of 14, the middle point score within score range. The HL and LL groups were assigned with 21 and 39 participants, respectively.

The main analysis measured the three critical scores for each media type: appeal, archaeological-impact and sensationalism. Each score was calculated based on the predetermined questions that linked to the types of scores (Interest-MA, Archaeological-Interest: IA) and were standardized to 4~20 score range. Sensationalism was calculated by adding the appeal score and the responses for NS questions. Importantly, based on the definition of sensationalism that it should be appealing with the intent of building excitement, media types that passed above middle point (average response above 3) in both MA and NS questions were categorized as depicting 'sensationalism'.

After calculated the scores, comparison analyses were conducted. To determine which type of media has stronger influence, mean scores for each media type were calculated and compared. Moreover, to examine whether participants' level of prior experience in archaeology contributed to medial impacts, the three types of scores for each media type were again calculated by submitting the mean score for each group of participants.

## 4. Result

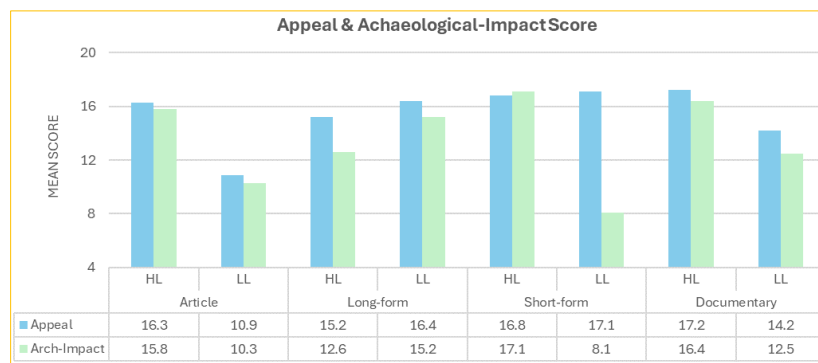
### 4.1. Media-Type Comparison

The results revealed notable differences in the appeal of the various media types, with short-form videos being the most popular format among participants. Appeal score was highest in short-form videos with a mean score of 16.9, followed by documentary ( $M = 15.7$ ), long-form ( $M = 15.6$ ), and article ( $M = 13.4$ ), showing the highest general interest for short-form videos. These findings suggest that short-form videos captured the highest general interest from participants, highlighting their potential effectiveness in attracting attention and engaging viewers. The strong appeal of short-form videos may be attributed to their concise, easily consumable format, which aligns with current media consumption habits. Despite this, when assessing the archaeological impact of each media type, there were no significant differences found between the formats, indicating that all types of media had a similar influence on participants' understanding and perception of archaeology.

For the archaeological-impact score, however, results showed no significant difference between the media types. This suggests that while short-form videos were more appealing, they did not necessarily offer a deeper or more impactful understanding of archaeology compared to other formats. Sensationalism score for short-form video was highest and the only media type that passed the criteria score for sensationalism diagnosis. This indicates that while short-form videos attracted the most attention, they may also have been perceived as more prone to exaggeration or misrepresentation, potentially distorting the portrayal of archaeological topics. This highlights the delicate balance between capturing attention and maintaining accuracy in the representation of archaeological research.

### 4.2. Archaeological-Level Comparison

Different media rankings were found between HL and LL (Figure 1). In HL group, documentary ( $M = 17.2$ ) showed the highest appeal score among the media types followed by short-form video ( $M = 16.8$ ), article ( $M = 16.3$ ), and long-form post ( $M = 15.2$ ). Critically, archaeological-impact score showed the same order of rankings as appeal score, implying that the media contents that has the strongest appeal also led to strongest archaeological interest and actions. No media type was diagnosed as depicting sensationalism. All four media did not fulfill the criteria of passing 3 points in average from both MA and NS questions.



**Figure 1.** Mean appeal (in blue) and archaeological-impact scores (in green) for media types per group.

In LL group, on the other hand, the rankings differed between appeal and archaeological-impact scores. Short-form video ( $M = 17.1$ ) ranked the highest in appeal score, followed by long-form post ( $M = 16.1$ ), documentary ( $M = 14.2$ ), and article ( $M = 10.9$ ). However, in archaeological-impact score, short-form video ranked the lowest ( $M = 8.12$ ). Long-form post ( $M = 15.2$ ) showed the highest score, followed by documentary ( $M = 12.5$ ) and article ( $M = 10.3$ ). Short-form video showed above-average score in both MA and NS, indicating sensationalism.

## **5. Discussion**

The current study suggests that archaeological content can vary in its strengths and effects depending on the format and the characteristics of the media content itself. Overall, short-form videos were shown to be the most appealing media type, with the highest average appeal score. However, interest in this form was found to be closely linked to use of sensationalism, a common tactic used to attract attention in a short amount of time. Interestingly, a comparative analysis between participants with high-level (HL) and low-level (LL) backgrounds revealed that sensationalist characteristics were only found in the LL group. For the HL group, the high appeal for short-form videos translated into meaningful contributions to archaeology, while for the LL group, the appeal remained as mere interest without significant action or contribution. This finding suggests that susceptibility to sensationalism may not solely depend on the nature of the media content but also on the audience's level of expertise. For individuals with lower knowledge of archaeology, short-form videos may be appealing due to their accessible format, but these viewers lack the depth of archaeological understanding that may prompt further engagement or action. In contrast, for more knowledgeable audiences, their existing interest and understanding of archaeology allowed them to connect more meaningfully to the content, fostering more substantial contributions and engagement.

The study also revealed significant differences in the rankings of media types between the HL and LL groups, with documentaries showing a stronger appeal and greater impact on the HL group than on the LL group. Documentaries, with their highly focused, detailed, and expert-driven content, were more effective in reaching those with higher levels of knowledge. In contrast, long-form posts, which ranked lowest in both appeal and impact for the HL group, were ranked higher by the LL group, suggesting that more casual and free-form content might be more effective at attracting newer audiences to the field. This divergence in results highlights the importance of tailoring media content to the characteristics and interests of different audiences. It suggests that while more specialized, expert-level content like documentaries can engage high-level audiences, formats such as v-logs or blogs, which offer a more casual and accessible approach, may be better suited for introducing newcomers to archaeology. The varying levels of engagement based on media type and audience expertise underscore the need for a strategic, audience-focused approach when communicating archaeological research through different media formats.

## **6. Conclusion**

This study highlights the importance of tailoring media content to different audience groups in order to effectively promote archaeology. While sensationalism is often used to attract attention, the study found that, while it may increase initial interest, it does not necessarily foster deeper engagement or contribute meaningfully to public understanding of archaeology. Specifically, for non-specialist audiences with limited knowledge, short-form videos, despite their high appeal, were seen as lacking depth, and thus were less likely to drive significant engagement or action. In contrast, more experienced audiences responded more positively to content that provided depth, accuracy, and focus, suggesting that sensationalized media may not resonate as strongly with knowledgeable audiences.

The study also emphasizes the need for a nuanced approach to media strategies, considering the varying levels of engagement and expertise across different audience groups. While sensationalism can boost visibility, it is not sufficient for long-term educational impact or meaningful contributions to archaeology. The results indicate that more detailed, well-researched content, such as documentaries, was more impactful for audiences with higher levels of expertise. Thus, content creators must balance attention-grabbing elements with accurate and informative content to ensure long-lasting engagement, especially when targeting non-specialists.

The broader implications of this study extend to society as a whole. Archaeology is integral to understanding our shared history and cultural identity. By fostering public interest in the field, media can bridge generational gaps, enhance cultural awareness, and encourage collective responsibility for preserving our heritage. As global challenges such as climate change and the destruction of cultural sites persist, an informed public will be crucial for the long-term protection of archaeological records. Therefore, the study

underscores the power of media in shaping the future, fostering a deeper connection to our past, and ensuring the preservation of cultural heritage for future generations.

#### **Declarations**

**Acknowledgments:** I appreciate all research participants and mentors.

**Author Contribution:** I confirm the responsibility for the following: study conception and design, data collection, analysis and interpretation of results, and manuscript preparation.

**Conflict of Interest:** The author declares no conflict of interest.

**Consent to Publish:** The author agrees to publish the paper in International Journal of Recent Innovations in Academic Research.

**Data Availability Statement:** The datasets used or analyzed during the current study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

**Funding:** This research received no external funding.

**Institutional Review Board Statement:** Not applicable.

**Informed Consent Statement:** Written informed consent has been obtained from the participants to participate in this study.

**Research Content:** The research content of manuscript is original and has not been published elsewhere.

#### **References**

1. Chambers, E. 2023. Archaeo-media: Breaking the binary and building agency in archaeological news reporting. *World Archaeology*, 55(2): 247-258.
2. Clack, T. 2007. *Archaeology and the media*. Left Coast Press.
3. Ransohoff, D.F. and Ransohoff, R.M. 2001. Sensationalism in the media: When scientists and journalists may be complicit collaborators. *Effective Clinical Practice*, 4(4):185-188.
4. Schablitsky, J.M. 2014. Media and archaeology. *Encyclopedia of Global Archaeology*, 4730–4736.
5. Uzuegbunam, C.E. and Udeze, S. 2013. Sensationalism in the media: The right to sell or the right to tell. *Journal of Communication and Media Research*, 5(1): 69-78.

**Citation:** Aidan J Hong. 2024. Assessing the Impact of Media Types on Public Engagement and Sensationalism in Archaeological Discourse. *International Journal of Recent Innovations in Academic Research*, 8(12): 44-48.

**Copyright:** ©2024 Aidan J Hong. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.