Balancing Moderation and Curation When Using User Generated Content

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1   RESEARCH BACKGROUND

I am a PhD student in the field of Human Computer Interaction researching using digital tools to support local people in exploring and recording local history, as this involves user generated content one of the areas my research is increasingly focussing on is questions of balancing moderation and curation.

1.1   Issues in Heritage Research that Influence my Research

In researching in the heritage field a common problem that is often encountered is how to explore a multiplicity of heritage narratives. Traditionally the field of heritage has been dominated by large overarching heritage narratives which claim to tell *the* story of a nation, area or people and do not welcome or provide an outlet for heritage narratives that do not align with the overarching, prevailing heritage view. Laurajane Smith characterises this problem as that of the 'Authorised Heritage Discourse' (AHD)[1] which is the term she uses for the one single heritage narrative and because there is no space for other heritage narratives in the AHD many groups are excluded from telling their histories, particularly those from marginalised groups such as women, the working class, people of colour and immigrants [2]. By allowing only one narrative and excluding the perspective of those whose stories do not reflect the ASD only certain people are able to tell the heritage narrative. These people become "privileged stewards" of the past and by being lauded as experts make it difficult for others to challenge the AHD [1, 3, 4].

Recently there has been a growing movement to democratise heritage, driven particularly by those who see the creation and uses of heritage as a fluid, social process where meanings and understandings can change over time rather than viewing heritage as something fixed and unchanging [1, 3, 5]. However in practice this often results in museums and other heritage sites engaging in simply 'outreach' programs to encourage more local people to visit and engage with the AHD rather than providing a space for people to challenge this and tell their own stories [6]. [6]. In my research I am seeking to address some of these issues by exploring whether digital tools can provide a space for the sharing and recording of multiple heritage narratives.

2   WHY I'M INTERESTED IN THIS WORKSHOP

In seeking to create tools and platforms through which people can share their own histories I first partnered with a grass roots oral history organisation. However in this research it soon became apparent that a major concern of the organisation's was ensuring that content they record and share was 'appropriate' for the organisation. This became a particular concern when the idea of letting users record and share their own memories in situ and without the mediation of an interviewer was

discussed. I also found in working with this group that what at first seemed like a moderation issue, in removing offensive or otherwise inappropriate content, quickly became an issue of curation with concerns being expressed about whether content reflected well on the local area or was the sort of thing those engaging with the organisation would want to hear. I published this research at the 2022 Participatory Design Conference where I argued that there is a danger of moderation in this scenario creating a local form of Authorised Heritage Discourse rather than being open to multiple narratives as the organisation claimed they wanted to [7]

This has led me into researching how we have the necessary moderation without it becoming a form of curation of the narrative and this is what drew me to a workshop discussing moderation and challenges of user generated content on video sharing platforms, especially as I move onto a further stage of my research which will likely make use of short online videos as a medium for people to share and explore heritage. The blurred line between moderation and curation has been highlighted before, Gillespie has argued that online platforms are the 'Custodians of the Internet' [8] and Seering highlights the double meaning inherent in the word custodian as meaning both keeping clean, in a caretaking sense, and of having custody over what is discussed [9]. The balance between maintaining appropriate content on platforms without shaping the narrative is highlighted as a considerable challenge of moderation research [9].

The challenge of balancing keeping content appropriate with not curating a fixed narrative is, I believe, of particular importance when working in a field with a dominant discourse such as heritage and this is why it is a concern I am seeking to address in my research. Due to my interest in balancing moderation and curation I believe I would have an interesting perspective to add to this workshop as well as it being beneficial to me to explore these issues with others considering the problem from different angles.

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