Karen J. Trivette[1]

TO TRUST OR NOT TO TRUST: ARCHIVAL RECORDS AND MEASURING RESEARCHERS' CONFIDENCE IN THEM

Abstract

Purpose: *In his 1996 work, Archive Fever, philosopher Jacques Derrida offered the Greek term arkhe as meaning, in part, the concept of commandment. As such, he posited that those persons who manage archival records are duty-bound or commanded to secure them so completely that the information they hold would remain authentic, credible, and with integrity. The aim was (and is) to instill confidence in those who consult archival records as being carriers of trustworthy information. Thirty years later, the theme of the 2026 'It's About People' Conference was, 'Answering Current Challenges in Society, Health and Technology.' Regarding one challenge in today's archival science enterprise-that being the measure of confidence in the validity of information contained within archival records-I administered a survey of researchers and analyzed its results. My purpose was to quantitatively determine and/or measure if researchers can not only trust but also have confidence in the evidence espoused via archival records that purport to accurately represent past human experience.*

Method / Approach: *In order to fulfill the purpose of this research, I implemented both qualitative and quantitative research approaches. I conducted a scientific literature review and developed and distributed a survey; then, I analyzed the results. I was aided in my efforts regarding the survey's development by Associate Professor Dr. Nadja Plazar, Alma Mater Europaea University (Maribor, SLOVENIA). I appreciate Prof. Dr. Plazar's kind input and immense expertise.*

Results: *The survey responses revealed researchers who are generally experienced archival users. They have moderately high confidence in archival records and overwhelmingly reject the idea that archives tell only one story. They*

[1] Karen J. Trivette, MLS, PhD earned her Doctorate in archival sciences from Alma Mater Europaea University in 2025. She is an active, independent, international archival science practitioner, researcher, and educator, currently serving as the International Council on Archives Section on University and Research Institutions Archives, Chair, 2026-2030 and as a contract Adjunct Instructor at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill (USA). Email: karenjtrivette@gmail.com.

strongly believe that the same records can support multiple interpretations and simultaneously believe that researchers have an ethical obligation to represent the past authentically. Trust in archives is substantial, but trust is directed more toward the records themselves and professional archival practices than toward the completeness of the historical record.

Conclusions / Findings: *While the results of my survey should be interpreted as exploratory and descriptive rather than generalizable to all archival users, due to a limited number of respondents, themes emerged worth investigating. The dominant theme from my research is that archival records are generally trustworthy, but interpretation is inherently subjective and influenced by context, bias, missing evidence, and researcher perspective. Survey respondents exhibited substantial confidence in archival authenticity and evidential value while simultaneously recognizing that archival records may support multiple legitimate interpretations. Trust and interpretive plurality are not perceived as contradictory; rather, trustworthy records provide the evidentiary foundation upon which multiple interpretations may be responsibly constructed.*

Keywords: *archival records; archives trustworthiness; archives users; trust; user confidence*

ZAUPATI ALI NE ZAUPATI: ARHIVSKO GRADIVO IN MERJENJE ZAUPANJA RAZISKOVALCEV VANJ

Izvleček

Namen: *Filozof Jacques Derrida je v svojem delu Archive Fever iz leta 1996 grški izraz arkhe med drugim razlagal v pomenu zapovedi. Na tej podlagi je zagovarjal stališče, da so osebe, ki upravljajo arhivsko gradivo, dolžne oziroma »zavezane«, da ga varujejo tako dosledno, da informacije, ki jih vsebuje, ohranijo avtentičnost, verodostojnost in celovitost. Namen tega je bil – in še vedno ostaja – pri uporabnikih arhivskega gradiva vzbuditi zaupanje, da je to nosilec verodostojnih informacij. Trideset let pozneje je bila osrednja tema konference It's About People leta 2026 »Odzivanje na aktualne izzive v družbi, zdravstvu in tehnologiji«. V povezavi z enim izmed izzivov sodobne arhivske znanosti, in sicer merjenjem zaupanja v veljavnost informacij, ki jih vsebuje arhivsko gradivo,*

je bila med raziskovalci izvedena anketa, njeni rezultati pa so bili analizirani. Namen raziskave je bil kvantitativno ugotoviti oziroma izmeriti, ali raziskovalci zaupajo dokazom, ki jih posreduje arhivsko gradivo in ki naj bi verodostojno predstavljali človekove izkušnje iz preteklosti.

Metoda/pristop: *Za dosego namena raziskave sta bila uporabljena kvalitativni in kvantitativni raziskovalni pristop. Izvedeni so bili pregled znanstvene literature, priprava in razdelitev anketnega vprašalnika ter analiza pridobljenih rezultatov. Pri pripravi ankete je s svojim strokovnim znanjem sodelovala izr. prof. dr. Nadja Plazar z Univerze Alma Mater Europaea v Mariboru, za kar se ji avtor iskreno zahvaljuje.*

Rezultati: *Odgovori kažejo, da so sodelujoči raziskovalci večinoma izkušeni uporabniki arhivskega gradiva in da je njihova stopnja zaupanja vanj razmeroma visoka. Velika večina zavrača trditev, da arhivi pripovedujejo le eno zgodbo. Anketiranci so trdno prepričani, da lahko isto arhivsko gradivo omogoča več različnih interpretacij, hkrati pa menijo, da imajo raziskovalci etično dolžnost verodostojno predstavljati preteklost. Zaupanje v arhive je precejšnje, vendar je bolj usmerjeno v samo arhivsko gradivo in strokovne arhivske postopke kakor v popolnost ohranjenega zgodovinskega zapisa.*

Sklepi/ugotovitve: *Osrednja ugotovitev raziskave je, da je arhivsko gradivo na splošno vredno zaupanja, vendar je njegova interpretacija po svoji naravi subjektivna ter odvisna od konteksta, pristranskosti, manjkajočih dokazov in raziskovalčevega pogleda. Anketiranci so izrazili visoko stopnjo zaupanja v avtentičnost in dokazno vrednost arhivskega gradiva, hkrati pa priznavajo, da lahko isto gradivo omogoča več legitimnih interpretacij. Zaupanje in pluralnost interpretacij se ne izključujeta; nasprotno, zaupanja vredno arhivsko gradivo zagotavlja dokazno podlago, na kateri je mogoče odgovorno oblikovati različne interpretacije.*

Ključne besede: *arhivsko gradivo; verodostojnost arhivov; uporabniki arhivov; zaupanje; zaupanje uporabnikov.*

FIDARSI O NON FIDARSI: I DOCUMENTI D'ARCHIVIO E LA VALUTAZIONE DELLA FIDUCIA DEI RICERCATORI NEI LORO CONFRONTI

Abstract

Scopo: *Nella sua opera del 1996, *Archive Fever*, il filosofo Jacques Derrida ha proposto il termine greco *arkhe* per indicare, in parte, il concetto di comandamento. In tal senso, egli ha sostenuto che coloro che gestiscono i documenti d'archivio hanno il dovere, o ricevono il comando, di custodirli in modo così completo da garantire che le informazioni in essi contenute rimangano autentiche, credibili e integre. L'obiettivo era (ed è) quello di infondere fiducia in coloro che consultano i documenti d'archivio, presentandoli come portatori di informazioni affidabili. Trent'anni dopo, il tema della conferenza del 2026 "It's About People" era: "Rispondere alle sfide attuali nella società, nella salute e nella tecnologia". Riguardo a una delle sfide odierne nel campo della scienza archivistica - ovvero la misura della fiducia nella validità delle informazioni contenute nei documenti d'archivio - ho condotto un'indagine tra i ricercatori e ne ho analizzato i risultati. Il mio scopo era determinare e/o misurare quantitativamente se i ricercatori possano non solo fidarsi, ma anche riporre fiducia nelle prove fornite dai documenti d'archivio che pretendono di rappresentare accuratamente l'esperienza umana del passato.*

Metodo / Approccio: *Al fine di raggiungere l'obiettivo della presente ricerca, ho adottato approcci sia qualitativi che quantitativi. Ho condotto una revisione della letteratura scientifica e ho elaborato e distribuito un questionario; successivamente, ho analizzato i risultati. Nell'elaborazione del questionario sono stato coadiuvato dalla Prof.ssa Nadja Plazar, dell'Università Alma Mater Europaea (Maribor, SLOVENIA). Ringrazio la Prof.ssa Plazar per i suoi preziosi contributi e la sua immensa competenza.*

Risultati: *Le risposte al questionario hanno rivelato che i ricercatori sono in genere utenti esperti degli archivi. Essi nutrono una fiducia moderatamente elevata nei documenti d'archivio e respingono in modo schiacciante l'idea che gli archivi raccontino una sola storia. Credono fermamente che gli stessi docu-*

menti possano supportare molteplici interpretazioni e, al contempo, ritengono che i ricercatori abbiano l'obbligo etico di rappresentare il passato in modo autentico. La fiducia negli archivi è sostanziale, ma è rivolta più ai documenti stessi e alle pratiche archivistiche professionali che alla completezza della documentazione storica.

Conclusioni / Risultati: *Il tema dominante emerso dalla mia ricerca è che i documenti d'archivio sono generalmente affidabili, ma la loro interpretazione è intrinsecamente soggettiva e influenzata dal contesto, dai pregiudizi, dalle prove mancanti e dal punto di vista del ricercatore. Gli intervistati hanno dimostrato una notevole fiducia nell'autenticità e nel valore probatorio dei documenti d'archivio, pur riconoscendo al contempo che tali documenti possono supportare molteplici interpretazioni legittime. La fiducia e la pluralità interpretativa non sono percepite come contraddittorie; al contrario, i documenti affidabili forniscono la base probatoria su cui è possibile costruire in modo responsabile interpretazioni multiple.*

Parole chiave: *documenti d'archivio, affidabilità degli archivi, utenti degli archivi, fiducia.*

1 INTRODUCTION

In March 2025, I delivered a presentation entitled, 'Lest We Forget: Archives and Sustainable Memory' to the 'It's About People' conference hosted by Alma Mater Europaea University. The presentation led to a subsequent scientific paper of the same title, which was published in the journal, *Arhivi Ukraïni* in April 2026.

In the course of that presentation's and paper's research, I interviewed Dr. Geoffrey Yeo, Honorary Senior Research Fellow in archives and records management in the Department of Information Studies at University College London; we met online on 16 January 2025. I posed to him various questions on my topic including: how can an archives user's confidence be measured in that what they found was in fact what they were searching for? And can archivists accurately gauge the matching of material to memory?

Of special interest to me was our discussion about 'confidence' as a measure of a memory foothold and its being analogous to a carbon footprint as a measure of sustainability. While confidence-adjacent terms such as 'trustworthy,' 'integrity,' 'authenticity,' and 'credibility' are wildly overused, they nevertheless remain landmarks towards securing confidence in the archival record (Trivette, 2025).

I concluded that perhaps in addition to identifying a memory foothold, I also should attempt to classify a confidence quotient.

As a preface, in his 1996 work, *Archive Fever*, philosopher Jacques Derrida offered the Greek term *arkhe* as meaning, in part, the concept of *commandment*. As such, he posited that those persons who manage archival records are duty-bound or *commanded* to secure them so completely that the information they hold would remain authentic, credible, and with integrity. The aim was and is to instill confidence from those who consult archival records as being carriers of trustworthy information (Derrida, 1996).

My investigation included a survey instrument, which allowed me to solicit answers from archives users to such questions as:

- To what extent do users of archives trust the documents preserved in archival repositories?
- Do they think that it is possible to reconstruct different interpretations of results based on the same archival records? and

- Which factors influence the interpretation of events in relation to the evidence available in archival records?

1.1 SOME MEANINGFUL TERMS

While 'confidence' is far less discussed in the archival science literature, 'trust' is quite common. And although the terms are aligned, they are distinct.

Reflective of Duranti (1995, 6), MacNeil (2000a, 54), and Donaldson & Conway (2015, 2), **confidence** can be construed as an archival technical and empirical concept, which may arise from:

- transparent provenance or what entity is responsible for the record's creation;[2]
- documented chain of custody;
- professional standards or predictable archival science business modalities;[3]
- consistent descriptive practices; and
- successful past experience

Confidence in the field of statistics refers to the degree of assurance associated with an estimate or inferential procedure, typically expressed as a confidence level indicating the long-run proportion of similarly constructed intervals expected to contain the true population parameter (Neyman, 1937, 347-350).

Whereas **trust** extends beyond technical competence and includes beliefs that archivists:

- have acted ethically,
- have not intentionally altered or concealed records,
- steward records faithfully, and
- deserve reliance as custodians of cultural memory (MacNeil, 2009, 104 ; Donaldson, 2019, 57).

Thus, a user might have confidence that an archives repository and its staff accurately preserve records while lacking trust that the institution represents all communities fairly or without bias.

---

2 Duranti stresses that reliability is in direct relation to a record's process of creation. By extension, reliability informs confidence by supplying the evidentiary basis for expecting something to perform consistently or to merit reliance.

3 MacNeil notes that standards are established to better ensure measures of records' authenticity and authenticity informs confidence by providing evidence that a record is what it purports to be.

According to the Society of American Archivists' *Dictionary of Archies Terminology*, **trustworthiness** is 'defined in terms of reliability and authenticity. This definition loses its apparent circularity when the reliability[4] of records is understood in the diplomatic sense, 'created with appropriate authority, according to established processes, and being complete in all its formal elements' (SAA, 2026).

In more distilled terms, confidence is an evidence-based expectation that something will perform reliably whereas trust is the willingness to rely on that expectation while accepting a certain amount of vulnerability. Following Luhmann (1988, 97-98), confidence concerns expectations regarding reliable performance, whereas trust concerns willingness to rely despite uncertainty.

Confidence can often be grounded in demonstrable archival processes (provenance, authenticity, preservation, transparency, standards), whereas trust encompasses the broader ethical and relational judgment that archives and archivists are worthy custodians of society's documentary heritage. This distinction provides a useful conceptual framework for examining why users may regard archival records as technically reliable yet still question the institutions that preserve them (Duranti, 1995, 6; MacNeil, 2000b; and Donaldson & Conway, 2015,2).

Where these two concepts overlap is in the form of **trustworthiness**; this can be of records, archivists, and/or institutions. Trustworthiness supports **confidence** through evidence of reliable performance and confidence can contribute to **trust** vis-à-vis a willingness to rely on or believe despite residual uncertainty. Yet trust is never reducible to confidence, because trust still entails vulnerability, ethical judgment, and the possibility of betrayal (Luhmann, 1988, 97-98; MacNeil, 2000a, 54; and Donaldson, 2019, 57).

This framework has the advantage of integrating classical social theory (especially Luhmann), archival concepts such as authenticity and provenance, and recent critical scholarship on power and accountability (Donaldson, 2019, 57).

[4] Another often used term within this semantic universe of concern is 'reliability.' Merriam-Webster's online dictionary defines reliability as 'the extent to which an experiment, test, or measuring procedure yields the same results on repeated trials' (Merriam-Webster, 2026). For our purposes, think in terms of predictability and probability.

2 METHOD

2.1 LITERATURE REVIEW

While much has been written in the archival science scientific literature on the matters of trustworthiness, security, and records' integrity, very few times has the situation warranted use of the term 'confidence' vis-à-vis archives content and user perception. A cursory search of the *American Archivist, Archivaria,* and *Atlanti/Atlanti+* journals for the term 'confidence' through this lens yielded very few results. Therefore, I felt compelled to explore this phenomenon given the importance of archives users having a sense of measurable certainty regarding the archival records they consulted.

2.1.1 Essential Foundational Sources (Older but Indispensable)

Apart from the archival science scholarship, I was compelled to investigate the on-point work of Niklas Luhmann (1988). Luhmann was a German sociologist, philosopher of social science, and systems theorist and is considered one of 'the most influential sociologists of the twentieth century' (Wikipedia, 2026). One of his most important contributions was proposing that 'societies are not merely composed of individuals or [their] actions but are instead autopoietic systems driven by communication or an entity that continually produces and renews itself [from] within' (EBSCO, 2026). Luhmann emphasized that 'understanding in communication is paramount, arguing that the meaning derived from interactions is more significant than the intended messages' themselves (EBSCO, 2026).

Luhmann argued that society is an autopoietic social system because communication recursively reproduces further communication. Human beings participate in communication, but they are not the elements of the social system itself. Rather, society is reproduced through its own ongoing communicative operations (Luhmann, 1992, 253).

In his chapter entitled, 'Familiarity, Confidence, Trust,' Luhrmann declared that both concepts of confidence and trust refer not only to certain levels of expectation but also the potential lapse into disappointment. 'The distinction between confidence and trust thus depends on perception and attribution' (Luhrmann, 1988, 97).

The distinction between confidence and trust depends on our ability to distinguish between dangers and risks, whether remote or a matter of immediate concern. The distinction does not refer to questions of probability or improbability. The

point is whether or not the possibility of disappointment depends on our own previous behavior (Luhrmann, 1988, 98).

Turning to the archival science literature, Heather MacNeil authored, 'Providing Grounds for Trust: Developing Conceptual Requirements for the Long-Term Preservation of Authentic Electronic Records' (2000a). In the article, she provides a landmark InterPARES-related work establishing requirements for preserving authentic electronic records.[5]

MacNeil (2000b) strikes again that same year with 'Trusting Records in a Postmodern World.' As such, she provided a classic theoretical examination of reliability, authenticity, and evidence and she challenged assumptions that records are inherently trustworthy; she also explores trust as a socially constructed phenomenon.

In 'The Logic of Archival Authenticity: ISO 15489 and the Varieties of Forgeries in Archives' (2015), Julia Kastenhofer examined authenticity, reliability, and trustworthiness through the lens of forgery and records management standards.

In 2019, Devan Ray Donaldson delivered an important empirical archival trust study (2019). In his article, he developed the 'Trust in Archives–Trust in Digital Archival Content' framework and demonstrated a measurable, positive relationship between trust in archival institutions and trust in archival content. This point will prove most relevant within and aligned with one key finding from the survey responses.

2.1.2 Recent Core Sources (2021–2026)

Focusing on archival description, Carrie Hintz and Sarah Quigley's 'A Matter of Trust: Practical Strategies for Writing User-centered, Values-driven Description' (2021) directly links archival practice and user trust in that it explores how archival description influences user perceptions. The authors emphasize transparency, contextualization, and values-driven descriptive practice as mechanisms for enhancing confidence in archival materials.

Salvador Sánchez-Alonso et al. wrote 'A Metadata Model for Authenticity in Digital Archival Descriptions' (2023). Their work develops a framework for representing authenticity within digital archival systems. The article explicitly defines authenticity, reliability, integrity, and trustworthiness and discusses how these concepts can be communicated to users.

---

5 InterPARES is the International Research on Permanent Authentic Records in Electronic Systems series of projects.

In their work, 'Establishing Multicultural Validity: A Culturally Responsive Approach to Trustworthiness in Archival Research' (2025) Jori N. Hall and Maya S. Anderson examine trustworthiness within archival research from a multicultural perspective. They argue that trustworthiness is shaped by cultural context and researcher positionality. Their article is particularly relevant for studies investigating whether users perceive archival records as objective representations of the past or as socially mediated evidence. Their work also entertains questions concerning confidence in archival evidence and interpretation.

Lais Barbudo Carrasco, Tove Sofia Engvall, and Felix Dobslaw wrote 'A Conceptual Crosswalk between Trustworthy Records and Trustworthy AI' (2026) in which they connect archival concepts of trustworthy records with emerging frameworks for trustworthy AI. They revisit archival notions of reliability, authenticity, accountability, and transparency and demonstrate their continued relevance.

In Rebecca Hastings and Andrew Weymouth's 'Transparent practices: OCR and AI in the Archives' (2026), they investigate archival ethics, transparency, accountability, authenticity, and integrity in AI-assisted archival workflows. The article argues that transparency regarding technological interventions is essential to maintaining user trust in archival systems and the records inherent to them.

Perla Olivia Rodríguez-Reséndiz (2026) focuses explicitly on archival credibility and trustworthiness in digital preservation environments in her article, 'The Credibility and Trustworthiness of Archives: Evaluation of Digital Sound and Audiovisual Preservation Systems' (2026). She explores mechanisms by which preservation systems establish confidence in digital objects and archival repositories. Her work is one of the few recent publications directly addressing archival trustworthiness as researched through the audiovisual lens.

2.2 Archives Users' Survey

Given a noticeable and surprising lack of the term 'confidence' in earlier research, I decided to develop and distribute a scholarly survey to probable users of archives. I requested participation from the circa 5,500 members of the American Association of State and Local History and distributed the survey three times over the course of five weeks (AASLH, 2026).

I also distributed the survey to various historical research-centric entities via the social network platform, LinkedIn. My own LinkedIn follower count measures

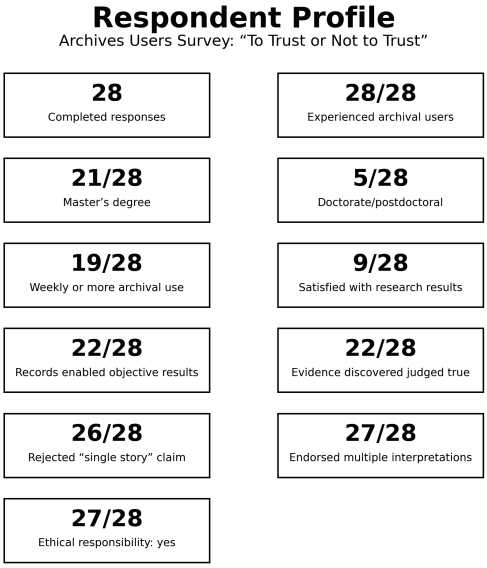
1,434 and I approached directly members of the American Historical Association, the Costume Society (UK), and the European Business History Association collectively with member rosters measuring in the thousands.

However, even with multiple outreach efforts, over the course of three months' time, my efforts resulted in twenty-eight responses. This number of responses is far below a standard threshold to generalize the results, so the results of this study should be interpreted as exploratory rather than representative. Even still, the survey's generous opportunities for respondents to offer narrative answers to many of the questions yielded valuable information.

3 RESULTS

This section reports illustrative and investigative results from my pilot survey of archives users. Again, the analytic sample included twenty-eight completed responses. Because the sample is small and several closed-ended items produced sparse cells or multi-selected responses, the results should be interpreted as exploratory and descriptive rather than generalizable to all archival users. For ordinal analyses, Likert-type responses were scored from 1 to 5. Multi-selected ordinal responses were averaged across the selected categories for correlational analyses, while exact multi-selected responses are preserved in frequency tables.

Figure 1: A breakdown of elements regarding the survey's respondent profile (Trivette, 2026).



As a preliminary, let's review the elements of the respondents' profile (Figure 1) and consider just who responded to the survey. Most of these measures are rather expected; however, I'd like to explore the fact that only 9 out of 28 said that they were satisfied with their experience of archival research.

The question read: Are you satisfied with the results of your research after accessing archival records and consuming the information contained within them?

According to the voluntary comments, researchers appear broadly willing to place confidence in archival records while simultaneously recognizing profound limits in what the archival record can represent. Researcher uncertainty is directed less towards the authenticity of individual records than towards completeness, discoverability, mediation, context, and representativeness.

That distinction is extremely useful in my analysis of **confidence versus trust**. The comments suggest that confidence may operate at several levels such as: confidence that a record is authentic; confidence that its content is credible; confidence that the archival collection is sufficiently complete; confidence that the discovery system accurately represents the holdings; and confidence that the archival institution or archivist can facilitate access.

Perhaps most importantly, **these levels do not necessarily rise and fall together**. A researcher may have very high confidence in the authenticity of a document while having very low confidence that the surviving archive provides a complete account of the historical phenomenon being studied.

Ultimately, respondents reported relatively high confidence in the authenticity, credibility, and integrity of archival records, while also expressing caution about the extent to which archival records permit objective reconstruction of past events. Nearly all respondents rejected the claim that historical sources permit only a single reflection and endorsed the view that historical sources may be interpreted in multiple, even contradictory, ways. Thematic analysis of open-ended responses showed that respondents' trust judgments were conditioned by provenance, context, corroboration, archival practice, the completeness of collections, creator bias, researcher subjectivity, and emerging concerns about digital and AI-mediated evidence. These findings suggest that archival users do not simply trust or distrust archival records; rather, they evaluate trustworthiness as a situated relationship among records, repositories, creators, description, and interpretation.

The ordinal descriptive statistics show consistently high confidence in archival records, especially in terms of authenticity, credibility, and integrity. The mean score for confidence in authenticity was 4.02 on a 5-point scale, with confidence in credibility and integrity both near the 'Much' range. Respondents were less emphatic about the possibility of objective and accurate historical reconstruction from archival records, with a mean of 3.45.

Table 1: Ordinal descriptive statistics (Trivette, 2026a).

Variable	N	M	SD	Median	IQR	Min	Max
Frequency of archival use	28	3.804	1.141	4	2	1	5
Objective/accurate reconstruction possible	28	3.446	0.809	4	1	1	5
Confidence in authenticity	28	4.018	0.673	4	0.125	3	5
Confidence in credibility	28	3.804	0.671	4	1	3	5
Confidence in integrity	28	3.839	0.653	4	1	3	5

Likert-type items were scored from 1 = very little to 5 = very much. The frequency item was scored from 1 = once per year to 5 = two or more times per week.[6]

Tables 2-4 highlight responses to various questions in the survey that attempt to measure a confidence level in researcher experience using archival records.

Table 2: Objective/accurate historical reconstruction possible (Trivette, 2026b).

Response	N	%
Much	14	50.0
Neutral	10	35.7
Little	1	3.6
Very little	1	3.6
Very much	1	3.6
Little; Neutral	1	3.6

Table 3: Records enabled objective results (Trivette, 2026c).

Response	N	%
Yes	20	71.4
No	6	21.4
No; Yes	2	7.1

Table 4: Evidence discovered is true (Trivette, 2026d).

Response	N	%
Yes	22	78.6
No	6	21.4

[6] *N* = sample size; *M* = mean; *SD* = standard deviation; *IQR* = interquartile range. Likert-type items were scored from 1 (*very little*) to 5 (*very much*). The archival-use frequency item was scored from 1 (*once per year*) to 5 (*two or more times per week*).

The presence of survey-design critiques is itself important: respondents objected to questions that treated 'archives' as a single, uniform category, noting that confidence depends on repository type, professional practice, provenance, and record context.

4 DISCUSSION

The seed of this topic's interest is a result my aforementioned earlier investigation in 2025. In my work entitled, 'Lest We Forget: Archives and Sustainable Memory,' I examined how 'society has and can depend on archival records to meet the challenges of the present and to inform and influence the opportunities in the future' (Trivette, 2026e, 1).

My earlier investigation resulted in more questions than answers and more importantly, it led to my discovery of a little-covered topic in the literature, that being if or how one can measure confidence as achieved by researchers when they engage in their discovery via archival records.

Given that archives underpin evidence, memory, and accountability, confidence in evidence, memory, and accountability should be measurable. If that is true, then shouldn't confidence receive far more scholarly attention than it does? My study explores whether confidence in archival records can indeed be measured.

The survey questions were deliberately both qualitative and quantitative in nature. For several questions, I asked respondents to explain their Likert-ranged and short answers with comments amounting to no more than 1000 characters.

Coincidentally enough, as there were twenty-eight respondents, there were twenty-eight questions of which eighteen were required. In all, there were six binary or very short answer questions; five Likert scale questions; and twelve comment opportunities, some associated with other questions and some that stood alone. Key thematic concepts emerged from respondents' qualitative comments; they are discussed below and certain quotes from respondents are provided as well.

CONTEXT MATTERS

Context was the most frequently mentioned thematic concept. Respondents stressed historical context, social context, creator intent, and the various circumstances of creation. In sum, the measurement of confidence is considered fully contextual.

'We definitely look at things within the context of our current lives, even if we know that situations were very different over history. Everyone comes to research with their own bias and their own desires of what they're going to find. A really good researcher is going to keep asking questions and be surprised by what they're learning, but often people also try to validate their thoughts.'

'Context is so important and depending on subject area, expertise can really influence how different people interpret different records.'

'Certain archival sources with little preserved context can be interpreted by researchers in very contradictory directions. This is especially evident in ideologically or politically relevant topics. Another example is court archival materials. The contents of such documents can be fundamentally full of untruths or half-truths, and the judgments in these cases are also not objective. This fact can lead to different interpretations.'

BIAS IS UNAVOIDABLE

Bias was mentioned repeatedly in reference to record creators, archivists, and researchers. Bias was viewed as inevitable rather than exceptional and that it undermines confidence in user experiences.

'Again, everyone is biased. The source of the archive and the researcher. If someone has an agenda, which seems to be everyone today, there are no objective interpretations. Objectivity requires one to simply report and not interpret.'

'Researchers need to be aware of the sources and their biases. It's that simple. That why it's important to compare multiple sources of single events. What contradicts is noise. What doesn't tends to be true.'

ARCHIVES ARE INCOMPLETE

Numerous comments referenced missing records, lost collections, selective preservation, and silences in the archives. It is my opinion that confidence measures increase proportionately to the completeness of an archives unit (fonds, series, file, etc.).

'This survey implied a trust or distrust of archives as a whole. Some are great resources while others are incomplete and unreliable at best. The wide variety of quality of archives as a whole defeats the concept that all archives can be rated in this manner. Even the best have gaps, holes and institutional errors. And the quality of the material may be impacted with new discoveries in human knowledge.'

'I think it's usually possible to reconstruct the past/ events, but sometimes details will be missing. Though these usually appear eventually... And I think archival record keeping has become better and documenting the lives, history, and culture of minority groups, though it has a way to go...'

'Historical records cannot ever be counted on to tell a complete version of events or a single story. There are baked-in biases in how historical records are created, those that get preserved, those that make it into an archival collection, and those that are retained long term.'

'Much of what is contained in archives is what has been donated, or what past archivists/donors have deemed worth saving. There is much that we don't know due to gaps in what remains. It is our job as historians to interpret the information that still exists to construct our understanding of the past.'

AUTHENTICITY DOES NOT EQUAL TRUTH

Respondents repeatedly differentiated authentic records from accurate information. This distinction implies an advanced archival literacy and reflects the writings of Luhmann (1988, 1992, 1995).

'Certain archival sources with little preserved context can be interpreted by researchers in very contradictory directions. This is especially evident in ideologically or politically relevant topics. Another example is court archival materials. The contents of such documents can be fundamentally full of untruths or half-truths, and the judgments in these cases are also not objective. This fact can lead to different interpretations.'

'Historical sources, depending on interpretation, can provide multiple versions. As the saying goes, there's multiple versions of any event- each person's POV and the truth. Hopefully my reviewing multiple POV accounts, we can get a semblance of the truth.'

'There is truth to be found, but more so in the accuracy that the record is authentic to the time and not so much the accuracy of events recorded.'

PROFESSIONAL ARCHIVISTS INCREASE TRUST

Many respondents explicitly cited confidence in archival standards, provenance practices, and professional ethics. Trust appears directed toward archival institutions, and their inherent operations and staffs, as much as toward records themselves.

'I believe that archivists in general follow proper procedures and do their best to preserve archival records while making them available to researchers.'

'I believe that most archivists want to preserve and protect the records in their care, so I have confidence in the integrity of the records.'

'Archival records have integrity when their cataloging information and provenance are properly maintained. Because the archives profession did not emerge in its modern form until the twentieth century (emerging unevenly over time and place across at least the first half of the century), complete provenance may not be available, but professional archivists will include the lack of information as a flag for researchers. Collections held by private individuals and organizations are often entirely lacking in provenance and rarely maintain a catalog, unless their collection concerns items of high monetary value. Monetary value, however, is not a substitute for integrity (or credibility). I tend to assume that professionally managed archives will have integrity according to current professional standards and ethics.'

5 CONCLUSION AND FUTURE DISCOVERY

The dominant conclusion from my research is that archival records are generally trustworthy, but interpretation is inherently subjective and influenced by context, bias, missing evidence, and researcher perspective. Survey respondents exhibited substantial confidence in archival authenticity and evidential value while simultaneously recognizing that archival records might support multiple legitimate interpretations. Trust and interpretive plurality are not perceived as contradictory; rather, trustworthy records provide the evidentiary foundation upon which multiple interpretations may be responsibly constructed.

Ultimately, trustworthiness of records, archivists, and institutions supports confidence through evidence of reliable performance and confidence can contribute to trust or a willingness to rely on the archival record despite any residual uncertainty. Yet trust is never reducible to confidence, because trust still entails some measure of vulnerability, ethical judgment, and the possibility of betrayal (Luhrmann, 1988, 57).

The archival literature has certainly evolved from treating trust as an outcome of professional custodianship to treating trustworthiness as an ethical, technical, and relational achievement that must be continually demonstrated through authentic records, transparent processes, accountable institutions, and inclusive stewardship.

I also think there is an opportunity for further discovery and contribution by examining this evolution systematically. A review tracing the development of *trust*, *confidence*, and *trustworthiness* across archival scholarship-from Jenkinson and Schellenberg through Duranti and MacNeil to Donaldson, Caswell, Gilliland-and the emerging literature on trustworthy AI and archival records could provide a conceptual map that the field does not yet have in a single, comprehensive treatment.

Another central finding is that respondents generally trust archival records as evidence while remaining skeptical of any simple claim that archival records can transparently reproduce the past. This distinction between evidentiary trust and interpretive certainty is visible across both the closed-ended and open-ended responses. Most respondents expressed confidence in the authenticity, credibility, and integrity of archival records, yet they also overwhelmingly rejected the proposition that historical sources allow only one version of events and endorsed the proposition that historical sources can be interpreted in multiple, even contradictory, ways.

The qualitative responses clarify why these positions are not contradictory. Respondents frequently argued that archival records are shaped by provenance, sheer survival, description, institutional practice, creator perspective, and researcher interpretation. Several respondents described archival research as a process of corroboration rather than simple retrieval. Others emphasized missing records, silences, and the limits of collections.

These findings support a carefully delimited claim: even within this small sample, archival users tended to distinguish the trustworthiness of records from the objectivity of historical narratives derived from those records. The results also suggest that users' confidence in archival authenticity, credibility, and integrity may operate as a related cluster of attitudes.

Just as with my earlier research in 2025, I am again left with more questions than answers. Reflecting on this research and the resulting discoveries, my most favored takeaway was the nearly uniform support archivists and archives institutions received from seasoned archives users/survey respondents and how the field, in operational terms, instills a high level of confidence by virtue of the profession and the professionals who practice, teach, and study it.

Our work continues and our professional objective should be to instill the highest levels of confidence in those who benefit from our work.

REFERENCES

American Association for State and Local History. (2026). Membership. Retrieved at https://aaslh.org/membership/.

Barbudo Carrasco, L., Engvall, T. S., & Dobslaw, F. (2026). A conceptual crosswalk between trustworthy records and trustworthy AI. *Philosophy & Technology, 39*(1). Retrieved at https://doi.org/10.1007/s13347-026-01112-6

Caswell, M. (2016). The archive is not an archives: On acknowledging the intellectual contributions of archival studies. *Reconstruction: Studies in Contemporary Culture, 16*(1).

Derrida, J. (1996). *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression; Trans. by Eric Prenowitz.* Univ. of Chicago Press.

Donaldson, D. R. (2019). Trust in archives-Trust in digital archival content framework. *Archivaria, 88*, 50–83. Retrieved at https://archivaria.ca/index.php/archivaria/article/view/13697

Donaldson, D.R. and Conway, P. (2015). User conceptions of trustworthiness for digital archival documents. *Journal of the Association for Information Science and Technology, 66*, 2427-2444. Retrieved at https://doi.org/10.1002/asi.23330

Duranti, L. (1995). Reliability and authenticity: The concepts and their implications. *Archivaria, 39*, 5–10.

EBSCO Information Services, Inc. (2026). Niklas Luhmann. Retrieved at https://www.ebsco.com/research-starters/history/niklas-luhmann.

Gilliland, A. J. (2014). *Conceptualizing twenty-first-century archives*. Society of American Archivists.

Hall, J. N., & Anderson, M. S. (2025). Establishing multicultural validity: A culturally responsive approach to trustworthiness in archival research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 24*. Retrieved at https://doi.org/10.1177/10778004251387071

Hastings, R., & Weymouth, A. (2026). Transparent practices: OCR and AI in the archives. *Collections: A Journal for Museum & Archives Professionals, 22*(2), 130–152. https://doi.org/10.1177/15501906261439241

Hintz, C., & Quigley, S. (2021). A matter of trust: Practical strategies for writing user-centered, values-driven description. *Journal of Archival Organization, 18*(1–2), 1–21.

Kastenhofer, J. (2015). The logic of archival authenticity: ISO 15489 and the varieties of forgeries in archives. *Archives and Manuscripts, 43*(3), 179–194.

Luhmann, N. (1992). What is communication? *Communication Theory, 2*(3), 251–259.

Luhmann, N. (1988). Familiarity, confidence, trust: Problems and alternatives. In *Trust: Making and Breaking Cooperative Relations*. 94-107.

MacNeil, H. 2009. Trusting description: Authenticity, accountability, and archival description standards. *Journal of Archival Organization 7*(3): 89–107. Retrieved at https://doi.org/10.1080/15332740903117693.

MacNeil, H. (2000a). Providing grounds for trust: Developing conceptual requirements for the long-term preservation of authentic electronic records. *Archivaria, 50*, 52–78.

MacNeil, H. (2000b). Trusting records in a postmodern world. *Archivaria, 51*, 36–47.

Merriam-Webster. (2026). "Reliability." *Dictionary*. Retrieved at https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/reliability.

Neyman, Jerzy. 1937. Outline of a theory of statistical estimation based on the classical theory of probability. *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London. Series A, Mathematical and Physical Sciences 236*(767): 333–380.

Rodríguez-Reséndiz, P. O. (2026). The credibility and trustworthiness of archives: Evaluation of digital sound and audiovisual preservation systems. *Investigación Bibliotecológica*.

Sánchez-Alonso, S., et al. (2023). A metadata model for authenticity in digital archival descriptions. *Archival Science, 23*(4), 587–612.

Society of American Archivists. (2026). Trustworthiness. *Dictionary of Archival Terminology*. Retrieved at https://dictionary.archivists.org/entry/trustworthiness.html.

Trivette, K. (2026). User Survey, Figure 1: A breakdown of elements regarding the survey's respondent profile.

Trivette, K. (2026a). User Survey, Table 1: Ordinal descriptive statistics.

Trivette, K. (2026b). User Survey, Table 2: Objective/accurate historical reconstruction possible.

Trivette, K. (2026c). User Survey, Table 3: Records enabled objective results.

Trivette, K. (2026d). User Survey, Table 4: Evidence discovered is true.

Trivette, K. (2026e). Lest we forget: Archives and sustainable memory. *Arhìvi Ukraïni*, *346*(1), January-March, 2026, 49-65. Retrieved at https://doi.org/10.47315/archives2026.346.

Trivette, K. (2025). Interview with Prof. Dr. Geoffrey Yeo, conducted 16 January 2025 by the author.

Wikipedia. (2026). Niklas Luhmann. Retrieved at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Niklas_Luhmann.

SUMMARY

In his 1996 work *Archive Fever*, philosopher Jacques Derrida interpreted the Greek term *arkhe* as encompassing, among other meanings, the notion of command or authority. From this perspective, those responsible for archival records are entrusted with the obligation to preserve them in such a way that the information they contain remains authentic, reliable, and complete. The underlying purpose of this responsibility is to establish and maintain confidence among users that archival records constitute trustworthy sources of information and evidence.

Three decades later, the 2026 *It's About People* conference focused on "Responses to Current Challenges in Society, Health and Technology." Against this broader context, the present study addresses one of the continuing challenges in archival science: how trust in the validity and evidential value of archival information can be identified and measured. The research therefore sought to determine, in quantitative terms, the extent to which researchers trust archival records and have confidence in their ability to provide reliable evidence of past human experiences.

The study employed a mixed-methods approach combining qualitative and quantitative research methods. A review of relevant scholarly literature was conducted to establish the theoretical background of the research. This was followed by the preparation and distribution of a questionnaire and a subsequent analysis of the

responses. The questionnaire was developed with the professional assistance of Associate Professor Nadja Plazar of Alma Mater Europaea, Maribor, Slovenia.

The survey results indicate that the respondents are generally experienced users of archival institutions and archival records. Overall, they demonstrate a moderately high level of trust in archival records and strongly reject the notion that archives communicate only a single version of the past. Respondents firmly believe that the same archival records may support several different and legitimate interpretations. At the same time, they recognise that researchers have an ethical responsibility to represent the past as authentically and responsibly as possible.

The findings further suggest that trust in archives is directed primarily towards the records themselves and towards professional archival practices rather than towards the assumption that the historical record is complete. Researchers recognise that archival collections may contain gaps, silences, biases, and incomplete evidence.

The central conclusion of the study is therefore that archival records may generally be regarded as reliable sources of evidence, while their interpretation remains inherently influenced by context, perspective, bias, and the availability or absence of evidence. Trust in archival records and interpretative plurality are not perceived as contradictory. On the contrary, reliable and authentic records provide the evidential foundation upon which multiple responsible interpretations of the past can be developed.

Typology: 1.01. original scientific research

APPENDIX A: SURVEY INSTRUMENT QUESTIONS

1. Are you experienced with using archival records for research purposes? If no, then you may stop answering the questions and thank you for your interest. If yes, then please continue and state how often you use archival records to satisfy research needs.
2. What is your highest academic degree?
3. Are you satisfied with the results of your research after accessing archival records and consuming the information contained within them?Please explain your response to the previous question in no more than 1000 characters (with spaces).
4. How objectively and accurately can one reconstruct past experience or events on the basis of archival records? Please explain your response to the previous question in no more than 1000 characters (with spaces).
5. After completing your research, did the archival records enable you to reach objective results? Please explain your response to the previous question in no more than 1000 characters (with spaces).
6. Is it possible to reconstruct different interpretations of results based on the same archival records? Please explain your response to the previous question in no more than 1000 characters (with spaces).
7. Are you confident that the evidence you discovered within the archival records you accessed for your research is true? If not, then why not? Please explain your response to the previous question in no more than 1000 characters (with spaces).
8. Is the following statement false or true?
   Historical sources allow us to discern only one version of events, a single story.
   Please explain your position in no more than 1000 characters (with spaces).
9. Is the following statement false or true?
   It is possible to interpret historical sources in multiple, even contradictory, ways.
   Please explain your position in no more than 1000 characters (with spaces).
10. What do you think influences interpretations of facts in light of the evidence available via archival records? Please explain in no more than 1000 characters (with spaces).

11. Is it an ethical responsibility of those who interpret the past to do so authentically and as reflected in the archival record? If no, then please explain your position in no more than 1000 characters (with spaces).
12. How confident are you in the authenticity of archival records? Please explain your response to the previous question in no more than 1000 characters (with spaces).
13. How confident are you in the credibility of archival records? Please explain your response to the previous question in no more than 1000 characters (with spaces).
14. How confident are you in the integrity of archival records? Please explain your response to the previous question in no more than 1000 characters (with spaces).
15. In what zip or postal code do you work or perform research most often? Please feel free to comment further in no more than 1000 characters (with spaces).
16. Please feel free to comment further in no more than 1000 characters (with spaces).

APPENDIX B: SUGGESTED FURTHER READING

Carbajal, I. A., & Caswell, M. (2021). Critical digital archives: A review from archival studies. *American Historical Review, 126*(3), 1102–1120.

Cook, T. (2013). Evidence, memory, identity, and community: Four shifting archival paradigms. *Archival Science, 13*(2–3), 95–120. Retrieved at https://doi.org/10.1007/s10502-012-9180-7

Duranti, L. & Rogers, C. (2012). Trust in digital records: An increasingly cloudy legal area. *Computer Law & Security Review*, *28*(5), 522–53.

Duranti, L. & Rogers, C. (2011). Educating for trust. *Archival Science*, *11*(3–4).

Duranti, L. (2007, March 22). *It is all about trust: The reliability, accuracy, and authenticity of digital records* [Presentation slides]. InterPARES Project, University of British Columbia.

Gorzalski, M. (2016). Archivists and thespians: A case study and reflections on context and authenticity in a digitization project. *The American Archivist, 79*(1), 161–180. Retrieved at https://american-archivist.kglmeridian.com/view/journals/aarc/79/1/article-p161.xml

Harris, V. (2002). The archival sliver: Power, memory, and archives in South Africa. *Archival Science, 2*(1–2), 63–86. Retrieved at https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02435631

Roeschley, A., et al. (2026). An archival responsibility: A scoping review of literature regarding the documentary burdens of refugees. *Journal of Contemporary Archival Studies, 13*, Article 5. Retrieved at https://elischolar.library.yale.edu/jcas/vol13/iss1/5/

Romanova, E. (2016). Regulation of access to personal data in the archives: Issues, trends and challenges. *Atlanti, 26*, 67–76. Retrieved at ttps://journal.almamater.si/index.php/Atlanti/article/view/68

Schwartz, J. M., & Cook, T. (2002). Archives, records, and power: The making of modern memory. *Archival Science, 2*(1–2), 1–19. Retrieved at https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02435628.