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ARCHIVES: PRIME CHAMPIONS OF AUTHENTICITY

Abstract

Purpose: *In an era marked by misinformation, algorithmic hallucinations, and the widespread erosion of intellectual property rights, the concept of authenticity has become increasingly contested and fragile. This paper examines the role that archives can play in public and institutional responses to digital falsification and generative AI, arguing for a more visible and proactive archival contribution to contemporary information ecosystems.*

Method/Approach: *The paper adopts a conceptual and analytical approach grounded in core archival principles, including provenance, original order, metadata integrity, professional appraisal, evidentiary value, and long-term stewardship. It considers how these principles can be applied across analogue and digital environments to address challenges arising from falsification, manipulation, unreliable information, and misuse of intellectual property.*

Results: *The analysis shows that archival institutions possess a distinctive combination of methodological rigor, contextual understanding, accountability, and preservation expertise that enables them to support the validation of records and their evidentiary contexts. Archival expertise can therefore contribute to strengthening democratic resilience, legal certainty, digital literacy, trustworthy information environments, and the responsible and ethical use of generative AI.*

Conclusions/Findings: *The paper concludes that archives should move beyond a predominantly custodial and historical role and position themselves more visibly as champions of authenticity and trustworthy information. Such a shift requires strategic repositioning, stronger advocacy, and greater archival presence in policy-making, governance, digital preservation, AI-related debates, and public discourse.*

Keywords: *Archives, Authenticity, Information Ecosystems, Provenance, Metadata Integrity, Generative AI, Digital Preservation, Trustworthy Repositories.*

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ARHIVI: KLJUČNI ZAGOVORNIKI AVTENTIČNOSTI

Izvleček

Namen: *V času, ki ga zaznamujejo dezinformacije, algoritemske halucinacije in vse bolj razširjeno kršenje pravic intelektualne lastnine, postaja pojem avtentičnosti vse bolj sporen in ranljiv. Prispevek obravnava vlogo, ki jo lahko imajo arhivi pri javnem in institucionalnem odzivanju na digitalno ponarejanje ter generativno umetno inteligenco, pri čemer zagovarja vidnejšo in dejavnejšo vlogo arhivov v sodobnih informacijskih ekosistemih.*

Metoda/pristop: *Prispevek temelji na konceptualnem in analitičnem pristopu, ki izhaja iz temeljnih arhivskih načel, med drugim načela provenience, prvotne ureditve, integritete metapodatkov, strokovnega vrednotenja, dokazne vrednosti in dolgoročnega upravljanja. Obravnava možnosti uporabe teh načel v analognem in digitalnem okolju pri soočanju z izzivi, ki izhajajo iz ponarejanja, manipulacije, nezanesljivih informacij in zlorabe intelektualne lastnine.*

Rezultati: *Analiza kaže, da arhivske institucije združujejo metodološko doslednost, razumevanje konteksta, odgovornost in strokovno znanje na področju dolgoročnega ohranjanja, kar jim omogoča, da pomembno prispevajo k preverjanju avtentičnosti dokumentov in njihovih dokaznih kontekstov. Arhivsko strokovno znanje lahko zato prispeva h krepitvi demokratične odpornosti, pravne varnosti, digitalne pismenosti, zaupanja vrednih informacijskih okolij ter odgovorne in etične uporabe generativne umetne inteligence.*

Zaključki/ugotovitve: *Prispevek ugotavlja, da bi morali arhivi preseči pretežno skrbniško in zgodovinsko vlogo ter se izraziteje uveljaviti kot zagovorniki avtentičnosti in zaupanja vrednih informacij. Takšen premik zahteva strateško prepozicioniranje, močnejše zagovorništvo ter večjo prisotnost arhivske stroke pri oblikovanju politik, upravljanju, digitalnem ohranjanju, razpravah o umetni inteligenci in v javnem diskurzu.*

Ključne besede: *arhivi, avtentičnost, informacijski ekosistemi, provenienca, integriteta metapodatkov, generativna umetna inteligenca, digitalno ohranjanje, zaupanja vredni repozitoriji.*

GLI ARCHIVI: PRINCIPALI PROMOTORI DELL'AUTENTICITÀ

Abstract

Scopo: *In un'epoca caratterizzata dalla disinformazione, dalle allucinazioni algoritmiche e dalla diffusa erosione dei diritti di proprietà intellettuale, il concetto di autenticità è diventato sempre più controverso e fragile. Il presente contributo esamina il ruolo che gli archivi possono svolgere nelle risposte pubbliche e istituzionali alla falsificazione digitale e all'intelligenza artificiale generativa, sostenendo la necessità di un contributo archivistico più visibile e proattivo all'interno degli attuali ecosistemi informativi.*

Metodo/Approccio: *Il contributo adotta un approccio concettuale e analitico fondato sui principi fondamentali dell'archivistica, tra cui il principio di provenienza, l'ordine originario, l'integrità dei metadati, la valutazione archivistica professionale, il valore probatorio e la conservazione a lungo termine. Viene esaminato il modo in cui tali principi possono essere applicati sia negli ambienti analogici sia in quelli digitali per affrontare le sfide derivanti dalla falsificazione, dalla manipolazione, dall'inaffidabilità delle informazioni e dall'abuso della proprietà intellettuale.*

Risultati: *L'analisi evidenzia che le istituzioni archivistiche possiedono una combinazione distintiva di rigore metodologico, comprensione del contesto, responsabilità e competenze in materia di conservazione, che consente loro di contribuire alla verifica dell'autenticità dei documenti e dei relativi contesti probatori. Le competenze archivistiche possono pertanto contribuire a rafforzare la resilienza democratica, la certezza giuridica, l'alfabetizzazione digitale, gli ambienti informativi affidabili e l'uso responsabile ed etico dell'intelligenza artificiale generativa.*

Conclusioni/Risultati: *Il contributo conclude che gli archivi dovrebbero superare un ruolo prevalentemente custodiale e storico e posizionarsi in modo più visibile come promotori dell'autenticità e dell'affidabilità delle informazioni. Tale cambiamento richiede un riposizionamento strategico, una più incisiva attività di sensibilizzazione e una maggiore presenza della professione archivistica nei processi di definizione delle politiche, nella governance, nella conservazione digitale, nel dibattito sull'intelligenza artificiale e nel discorso pubblico.*

Parole chiave: *archivi, autenticità, ecosistemi informativi, provenienza, integrità dei metadati, intelligenza artificiale generativa, conservazione digitale, repository affidabili.*

1. INTRODUCTION: AUTHENTICITY IN CONTEMPORARY INFORMATION ENVIRONMENTS

The contemporary digital landscape is characterised by an unprecedented epistemological crisis. It raises important questions about how convincing information should be evaluated. The rapid proliferation of generative artificial intelligence, automated synthesis engines, and deepfake technologies have eroded public confidence in shared informational milieus. In an era where digital text, audio, image, and video content can be dynamically modified, spoofed, or synthesised at creation phase without leaving overt visual or technical artifacts, traditional informal heuristics for determining truth have proved overwhelmingly inadequate. Society increasingly finds itself navigating a hyper-mediated landscape where the boundary between authentic documentation and algorithmic invention is continuously blurred.

Parallel to this systemic erosion of verifiable truth is a widespread challenge to intellectual property rights (IPR). Automated data harvesting pipelines and large language model (LLM) scrapers routinely ingest human creative, literary, and scientific output without attribution, contextual authorisation, or structural rights management. This wholesale extraction decontextualises intellectual property, detaching knowledge from its creators and rendering ownership lines virtually untraceable. When synthetic media models generate derivative work derived from uncredited human intellectual output, they accelerate both epistemological confusion and legal ambiguity.

Within this volatile atmosphere, the concept of *authenticity,* understood in archival science as the quality of a record being genuine, uncorrupted, untampered with, and definitively embedding an unbroken traceability to its claimed author or administrative provenance, has transformed from an abstract theoretical consideration into an urgent socio-political imperative. While academic bodies, journalistic networks, and technology firms attempt to deploy algorithmic verification tools to counter synthetic distortion, these technical countermeasures often suffer from the same vulnerabilities as the systems they seek to monitor.

Memory institutions, and archives in particular, offer a structural solution that remains vastly underutilised in current public policy and digital governance debates. This paper contends that archives must assertively reposition themselves in

public discourse as the primary institutional guardians and champions of authenticity. Departing from passive, back-office custodial traditions, archival science possesses a mature, time-tested methodological framework engineered explicitly to protect evidentiary value. Notwithstanding the rapid changes in technology, no other typology of institution has managed to develop the culture and tools to guarantee contextual integrity against manipulation, loss, and falsification across both analogue and digital paradigms.

On order to delve into the equation of to what extent are archives indispensable champions of authenticity, the method used in this paper embarked on a review of the main archival principles and the way these were applied by a number of theoreticians. It supplements this with the personal experience of the author who has worked in a national archive for 37 years. In the various office held, the author could see archives reacting the socio-political changes and a whole technological change. All these observations are subtly integrated into the assessment of the readings and leading to the tabulation of the changes the sector is envisaging.

2. THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS: ARCHIVAL PRINCIPLES AS EPISTEMIC ANCHORS

Archival science does not evaluate information based on superficial plausibility, statistical frequency, or engagement metrics. Instead, it measures the trustworthiness of information through structural relationship, context, and organic creation. At a time when information is routinely consumed as isolated, floating data points, archival methodology grounds records within their operational networks. Having worked in the archives sector for almost four decades I do feel that at times we do lack the assertiveness needed to make the point that the traditional tenants of archival theory and practice still provide us with the best guarantees in today's information wilderness. Thus, this study argues in favour of four fundamental principles of archival science serve as vital safeguards against contemporary information degradation:

2.1 PROVENANCE

The principle of provenance dictates that records created, received, or accumulated by a specific entity must remain unified and distinct from those of other entities. In the digital domain, provenance forms the foundational backbone of

chain-of-custody tracking. By ensuring that every document, dataset, or record remains permanently attached to its organisational or individual origin, archives prevent the uncontextualized appropriation and floating re-use that characterise modern digital disinformation campaigns. There is no doubt that such a principle does receive widespread acceptance, however, can it be applied with the same vigour of before in an environment of rapid data flows, shared information backbones and mutation of data?

2.2 ORIGINAL ORDER

Original order demands that records be preserved in the sequence and structural arrangement established by their creator during their active administrative life. This principle protects the functional relationships connecting individual files. In digital environments where bad actors can selectively extract, rearrange, or truncate genuine records to fabricate misleading narratives, original order preserves systemic context, ensuring that evidentiary value is evaluated holistically rather than in isolated fragments. Now in traditional environment archives used to intervene years after the creation of records. We still have most national archives in Europe applying a closure period of 20, 25, 30 or even 50 years. What relevance has such intervention by the archives if it is not carried out *pari passu* with the creation of the record. Am I advocating for archival institutions to merge themselves with the creators of records? That is not the argument of this study. Rather than pulling down forever the boundaries between the sciences of records management and archives studies (an argument which dominated a lot the Schellenberg vs Jenkinson theoretical frameworks), this study advocates towards a general repositioning of archives (especially national ones) as public digital literacy leadership institutions focusing on critical source evaluation and verification.

2.3 METADATA INTEGRITY AND TECHNICAL AUDITABILITY

Authenticity in digital records cannot rely on visual appearance alone. Archival management requires comprehensive administrative, technical, and structural metadata logging. By recording detailed lineage metadata, checksum hashes, migration histories, and access logs, archival workflows establish tamper-evident recordkeeping architectures. Any unauthorised modification, structural corruption, or synthetic alteration becomes immediately detectable when measured against documented preservation baselines. While even this principle is widely held, it

is worth turning on archives to verify to what extent they are involved in such processes. The various projects that I have witnessed so far by other archives tend to tackle the ever present dilemma of how to give access to kilometres of records that are not catalogued, at times not even at item level. While such processes have a noble end and do present innovative solutions to unimaginable levels of access, on its own it does not solve the issue of authenticity, especially for records that might still be used for decision making.

2.4 PROFESSIONAL APPRAISAL AND CONTEXTUALIZATION

Unlike automated search indexing that indiscriminately ingests content across the web, archival appraisal is an intentional, disciplined, and scientifically proven evaluation process. Archival professionals evaluate records for their enduring legal, fiscal, historical, and evidentiary value. This human-driven, professional appraisal isolates verified primary sources from unvetted background noise, deliberate falsifications, and self-referential web content. Yet, archives had already moved away from file-by-file appraisal to more agile systems such as retention policies. And here AI does pose benefits. Extensive appraisal work can be done in an automated manner, following the human induced process of retention schedule creation.

3. ARCHIVES IN THE AGE OF GENERATIVE AI

The widespread adoption of generative AI systems has introduced systemic vulnerabilities into the global information infrastructure. One of the most prominent challenges is “algorithmic hallucination”, the phenomenon wherein AI models generate factually incorrect, false, or entirely invented statements, citations, historical events, and legal precedents with high linguistic confidence.

As AI-generated content continues to saturate the public internet, digital search engines and automated scrapers increasingly ingest synthetic data to train subsequent generations of machine learning models. This feedback loop creates a compounding risk: synthetic errors are re-indexed as factual inputs, steadily degrading the baseline accuracy of public digital knowledge repositories. Without external, immutable reference points, information ecosystems risk self-referential corruption.

Thus, the new data generation landscape poses the ever-growing reality of Generative AI Models (LLMs) that will infiltrate different levels of governance. These

will continuously generate synthetic content and algorithmic hallucinations. Public web and search indexing will provide a wide basis of automated web scraping with the resulting ingestion of synthetic data. An intrinsic process of this environment is model retraining and iteration which will support the compounding of truth degradation. In all this, we need to guarantee the archival intervention which should provide the ground truth baseline. Archival institutions have performed such function and continue to be well positioned to play this role affectively through primacy of immutable primary sources and provenance of metadata.

In this environment, archives serve as essential, independent "ground truth" anchors. By maintaining immutable primary sources with verifiable chains of custody, archival repositories provide the foundational baseline against which synthetic claims and machine outputs can be verified.

Furthermore, archival adherence to clear metadata standards offers a direct solution to ongoing IPR erosion. Archival repositories systematically preserve rights metadata, licensing conditions, and creator provenance. When training datasets are filtered through archival standards, the intellectual property rights of human creators can be accurately recognised, credited, and protected against unauthorized algorithmic exploitation.

4. TRADITIONAL PRINCIPLES VS. CONTEMPORARY DIGITAL CHALLENGES

The struggle to maintain record authenticity across technological transitions is a core theme in contemporary archival scholarship. Within the pages of *Atlanti* and *Atlanti+*, the journals of the International Institute for Archival Science Trieste-Maribor (IIAS), archival theorists have systematically evaluated how classical principles must evolve to meet the demands of digital transformations.

In his foundational work published in *Atlanti*, Lajos Körmendy (2015, 146) emphasises the preservation of essential elements of electronic records, including their content, identifier, context and structure. His discussion also recognises the difficulty of keeping electronic records unchanged over time and considers migration as a preservation response (Körmendy, 2015,143, 148–149). This distinction is important here: maintaining authenticity should not be reduced to keeping every file permanently unchanged.

Expanding on this imperative, Peter Pavel Klasinc (2015, 43–45) argues for continuity between classical and contemporary archival approaches. He warns that "archivists must not fall under the dependence of IT in archives" (Klasinc, 2015, 45), while also stressing appraisal and the quality of professional archival work. His discussion of electronic preservation includes integrity, accessibility, usability and authenticity among its objectives (Klasinc, 2015, 44). For the present argument, the significance of this discussion is the need to retain professional judgement when adopting technical solutions.

Addressing the operational challenges of digital transactions, Thi Hoa Doan (2017, 100–103) highlighted in *Atlanti* the intersection of legal frameworks and electronic recordkeeping. Examining requirements for electronic records within the Vietnamese legal framework discussed at the time of publication, Doan (2017) addresses reliability, integrity, identification of the originator, accessibility and usability, rather than an exclusively cryptographic test. It provides a jurisdiction-specific illustration of the relationship between legal requirements and electronic recordkeeping, not a universal statement of current law

Taken together, these perspectives support the argument that preserving the authenticity of digital records requires active, continuous stewardship. Preserving authenticity requires aligning technical preservation, legal mandates, and archival methodologies.

5. STRATEGIC ACTION FRAMEWORK FOR MODERN ARCHIVAL ADVOCACY

To transition from passive preservation repositories into proactive champions of authenticity, archives must update their strategic priorities across public policy, legal structures, educational outreach, and technological implementation.

Action Domain	Traditional Archival Role	Modern Strategic Imperative
Public Policy	Internal compliance with records legislation and static retention schedules	Active advocacy in AI governance, data privacy standards, and public information policy
Legal Certainty	Historical recordkeeping and institutional reference	Provision of admissible digital forensics, cryptographic proof of custody, and verified evidence
Public Education	On-site reading room support and specialised archival research guidance	Public digital literacy leadership focusing on critical source evaluation and verification

Action Domain	Traditional Archival Role	Modern Strategic Imperative
Technology Deployment	Ad-hoc digitisation of physical holdings for access	Implementation of immutable, audit-ready digital archival systems (OAIS-compliant)
IPR Safeguarding	Manual copyright clearances for physical collections	Dynamic rights metadata management protecting creator intellectual property against unauthorized AI scraping

The above table sums up the modern strategic imperative that can help archives maintain their primacy as champions of authenticity. Archives need to amend laws and strategies to make them take an active advocacy in AI governance, data privacy standards, and public information policy. The necessary tools for the same archives to embrace provision of admissible digital forensics, cryptographic proof of custody, and verified evidence need to be sought. This has also to be reflected in the curricula or archival training. The gap in this sector is highlighted in the recent work by Ponichtera and Huddleston (2026), whereby they argue that "the most surprising gap in the recent archival literature is the relative lack of attention paid to cybersecurity in the professional discourse, particularly among North American archivists". The authors commented on the terrain they studied but it is probable that similar deficiencies do exist in other geographical jurisdictions. Another strategic imperative is that public digital literacy leadership becomes focusing on critical source evaluation and verification. Concurrent with this, the implementation of immutable, audit-ready digital archival systems (OAIS-compliant) is highly recommended while dynamic rights metadata management protecting creator intellectual property against unauthorized AI scraping is to be a desideratum.

6. ARCHIVAL METHODOLOGY AS A PILLAR OF DEMOCRATIC RESILIENCE

The erosion of trust in public information threatens democratic governance, social stability, and legal certainty. When citizens can no longer distinguish between genuine civic documentation and synthetic manipulation, democratic accountability degrades.

By guaranteeing the authenticity of public records, legal instruments, and historical documents, archives provide the evidentiary framework necessary for open governance. They hold institutions accountable, protect human rights, safeguard

land and property registries, and preserve the historical memory of nations. Repositioning archives as champions of authenticity is therefore not merely an internal professional concern, but a fundamental societal necessity.

7. CONCLUSION

As society confronts the dual challenges of algorithmic hallucination and digital falsification, the need for verifiable, authentic information has never been more urgent. Archives are uniquely positioned to meet this challenge. Through the rigorous application of provenance, original order, metadata integrity, and professional appraisal, archival science offers a proven framework for maintaining trust in complex information ecosystems.

To fulfil this mission, archives must step beyond traditional boundaries and actively advocate for their role in policy, legal, and technological spheres. Elevating archives as the prime champions of authenticity requires strategic investment, updated policy frameworks, and sustained public engagement. While in the past archives have already focused on this role, what emerges from the literature is that the approach must be a strategic one. The strong emphasis on outreach and visibility in the past aimed and widening the use base. In the current and envisaged future environment and for archives to become prime champions of authenticity they have to form part of the core of government. Our main targets are no longer just users who will our reading rooms or populate our online followers. They are the politicians, top public officers and all those moulding the future of governance. Only in such a way can archives survive the era dominated by synthetic media. While in the past the business of archives was mainly as guardians of memory, they should now be shapers of memory and verifies of authenticity. This should guarantee that archival integrity remains an indispensable defence for legal certainty, intellectual property rights, and human memory.

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SUMMARY

The rapid development of digital technologies, generative artificial intelligence, and increasingly complex information ecosystems has intensified concerns regarding authenticity, reliability, and evidentiary value of information. Misinformation manipulated digital content, algorithmic hallucinations, and the misuse of intellectual property have all contributed to a growing crisis of trust. Within this context, archives possess a particularly important role because their professional principles and practices are fundamentally concerned with authenticity, provenance, context, integrity, and long-term preservation.

This paper argues that archives should assume a more visible and proactive position in contemporary debates concerning digital authenticity and trustworthy information. Archival institutions have traditionally been associated with custody, preservation, historical research, and access to records. However, the principles that underpin archival practice extend far beyond these traditional functions. Provenance, original order, appraisal, metadata management, contextual description, and preservation strategies provide a methodological framework that can contribute directly to the verification and interpretation of information in both analogue and digital environments.

The archival profession is therefore uniquely positioned to address some of the challenges created by generative AI and digital falsification. By preserving records together with their context, documenting relationships between creators, functions, processes, and records, and maintaining evidence of authenticity and integrity over time, archives can provide essential support for legal certainty, accountability, and institutional transparency. These functions are particularly significant in environments where the origin and reliability of digital information may be difficult to determine.

The paper further emphasizes the broader societal value of archival expertise. Strong and trustworthy archival systems can contribute to democratic resilience by supporting access to reliable evidence, enabling accountability, and helping citizens distinguish between authentic records and manipulated information. Archival knowledge can also strengthen digital and information literacy and contribute to discussions concerning the ethical and responsible use of artificial intelligence.

The growing importance of authenticity in digital society requires archives to reconsider how they communicate their role to policymakers, institutions, technology professionals, and the wider public. Archival institutions should no longer be perceived solely as repositories of the past, but also as active participants in the governance of contemporary information.

The paper concludes that strengthening the public role of archives as guardians and advocates of authenticity is increasingly essential. This requires greater professional visibility, strategic advocacy, stronger engagement with policy and governance, and closer involvement in discussions concerning artificial intelligence, digital preservation, intellectual property, and trustworthy information ecosystems.

Typology: 1.02 Review article