The Use of Library Video Tutorials and YouTube as Educational and Promotional Tools about Historical Newspapers

Marek Sroka

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Library

Introduction

Microfilming and digitization have made historical newspapers more easily accessible to patrons who formerly would have been reluctant users. Many of these patrons, however, lack the necessary skills and knowledge to use this source material of historical news successfully and to interpret it in a broader cultural and historical context. Too often, users simply apply to historical newspapers (and news disseminated by the newspapers) the same search strategies and interpretive heuristics they use when working with 21st-century newspapers. As a result, there exists an unmet need for reference assistance and instruction in using digitized historical newspapers. To address this need, in 2011, the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC) History, Philosophy, and Newspaper Library (HPNL) began to produce a series of video tutorials on "American Newspapers, 1800-1860." The purpose of the video tutorials is to help users of historical newspapers develop a better understanding of American newspapers, from the period of 1800 to 1860, than they had before. After watching the video tutorials, users will hopefully be better able to use American newspapers from this period as primary sources for historical research.

The use of video instruction has become increasingly popular over the last two decades.[1] Videos allow students to learn at their own pace as they can watch and re-watch video content regardless of the time of day or night.[2] This may be particularly helpful for students who prefer to learn independently. Videos enhance support for teaching and learning programs, promote active learning, encourage

discovery and use of information, and increase awareness of instructional and scholarly support services by including information about online research guides such as LibGuides and reference service offered by a given library or research center. Visual and auditory learners, students who learn best through observation and listening, can greatly benefit from videos.[3] Visuals such as videos can help to make the information more memorable for many learners. Finally, video tutorials promote use of hidden collections, both the newly hidden ones that fall outside the scope of the web-scale discovery services and those that have traditionally been hidden, such as newspapers in print- and micro-formats that have never been indexed.[4] Since the vast bulk of historical newspapers remains undigitized, researchers need to be made aware of print collections through video tutorials (so that the print material is discoverable).

As social media become increasingly popular, academic libraries turn to sites such as YouTube to host and promote their video tutorials (and for a good reason). Founded in 2005 and purchased by Google in 2006, YouTube "allows billions of people to discover, watch, and share originally-created videos."[5] It is a real global tool with 80 percent of YouTube traffic coming from outside the United States.[6]

YouTube usage statistics are staggering. The site claims that "more than one billion unique users visit YouTube every month and over six billion hours of video are watched each month."[7] Videos are keyword searchable through YouTube's search engine as well as Google searches. More and more libraries are setting up their own YouTube accounts. According to a 2011 survey conducted by the Primary Research Group, 51.22 percent of public libraries and 42.22 percent of college and university libraries maintained one or more YouTube accounts.[8] A similar survey conducted in the following years confirmed the importance of YouTube, especially for college and university libraries. When asked about the usefulness of YouTube in library work, 30 percent of college and university libraries said that they found YouTube useful and 36.67 percent of college and university libraries said that they found it occasionally useful.[9] All of that makes the use of YouTube for educational and promotional purposes highly recommended.

Antebellum Newspapers and Need for Video Tutorials

The growth of the American press between 1783 and 1833 was significant as the American press "developed from the small operations of the colonial period to the large-scale productions of the penny press era."[10] According to some estimates, in 1776 there were just thirty-seven newspapers published in the United States.[11] By 1840, the number had grown to over 1,400.[12] In 1776, the American press was primarily located in the Atlantic coastal areas, and consisted primarily of "weekly news sheets."[13] By 1840, the press expanded to the Great Plains, and types of publications ranged from dailies (newspapers) to monthly magazines. By then, their content had become much more specialized.[14]

The amazing growth continued during the antebellum period, the name given to the decades preceding the Civil War (1820-1860). By 1860, about 3,000 newspapers were published on a regular basis, "with circulation reaching nearly 1.5 million."[15] Newspapers played an important role in shaping the political views of readers resulting in the increased number of eligible voters participating in presidential elections. Some scholars characterized the press's role in American politics during the antebellum period as "one of partisanship and patronage."[16] Politics was not the only subject of the day as the press became the perfect venue for discussing moral, ideological, social, and religious issues, including slavery. It is worth mentioning that before the Civil War about forty black newspapers were begun.[17] During the antebellum period Americans were introduced to a new revolutionary product-the penny paper. Although the penny papers did not abandon partisanship in their content, they included more sensational news such as police reports and tried to appeal more to everyday Americans, rather than to social elites.[18] The growth and evolution of American newspapers during the antebellum period is fascinating and has been well researched. Thanks to microfilming and digitization many of those historical newspapers can now be studied by an ever growing number of users.

Historical newspapers represent excellent primary source materials for literary scholars, historians, genealogists or any history enthusiasts, but until recently difficulties in gaining access to the

materials have hindered research. However, recent microfilming and digitization programs for historical materials have renewed interest in historical newspapers and allowed for the preservation of print originals. With so much historical newspaper content available on microfilm and electronically libraries face a new challenge of helping patrons with newspaper research and educating them about the history of the sources researchers are eager to study. Online tools such as video tutorials and research guides (LibGuides) can make such research more effective as long as they are relatively simple to use and meet basic scholarly standards.

In 2011, the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC) History, Philosophy, and Newspaper Library (HPNL) began to produce a series of video tutorials on "American Newspapers, 1800-1860." By 2013, the series included the following tutorials: "American Newspapers, 1800-1860: An Introduction," "American Newspapers, 1800-1860: City Newspapers," and "American Newspapers, 1800-1860: Country Papers."[19] Moreover, an online research guide (LibGuide) to understanding and using antebellum American newspapers, titled "American Newspapers, 1800-1860" was created to accompany video tutorials.[20]   In February, 2013 HPNL conducted an internal assessment of the video tutorial "American Newspapers, 1800-1860: An Introduction."[21] The purpose of the assessment was to determine whether or not the video tutorial, which is the first in a series of three, helped patrons achieve the learning objectives for the series. The series learning goals included the improved understanding of American newspapers from the period 1800 to 1860 and better usage of newspapers from this period as primary sources for historical research. The assessment questions were divided into pre- and post-video and the assumption was that after watching the video focus group participants, including faculty members and undergraduate students, would be able to answer more questions correctly than they did before watching the video. Both the quantitative and the qualitative data collected from the focus group suggested that the video helps viewers achieved the two learning objectives set for the tutorial series introduced by to this video. On the knowledge tests, participants performed significantly better after watching the video than they did before watching the video: before watching the video, participants answered (on average) only 54 percent of the questions correctly. After watching the video, participants

answered (on average) 95 percent--almost 100 percent--of the questions correctly.

This improvement speaks greatly to the quality of the video and underscores the need for the production of the tutorial. Participants also indicated before watching the video that, in general, they were only "somewhat confident" in their ability to use antebellum American newspapers as primary sources for historical research, suggesting that participants perceived a need for some level of assistance or instruction. Furthermore, after watching the video, all participants felt that they had learned either a moderate amount, or a great deal. Finally, all participants from the History Faculty strongly agreed that this video, and others like it, would be very useful in preparing students to use newspapers as primary sources for historical research.[22]

Structure and Content of Video Tutorials and Online Research Guide

The three video tutorials are on average twenty minutes long. Some studies suggest keeping videos short and to the point and breaking videos into brief segments with a table of contents for quick and easy navigation.[23] Considering the amount of information included in the three video tutorials making the videos shorter might have deprived them of important information and making the understanding of complex historical era in which newspapers were produced less effective.

Consequently, the videos include rather detailed information about the newspapers and their historical context. The videos utilize numerous scans of title pages and news items of newspapers from the antebellum period as well as digital reproductions of old photographs and prints to better illustrate the historical context. For example, the "American Newspapers, 1800-1860: City Newspapers" video uses approximately seventy images, including one of the first photographs of the Morse telegraph key. The newspaper images used in the video come from many sources, including publications such as *National Intelligencer*, *Working Man's Advocate*, *Freedom's Journal*, *Die Alte und die Neue Welt*, *Cherokee Phoenix*, *New York Herald*, *New York Weekly*, *New Orleans Picayune*, *The Ram's Horn*, *Albany Argus*, *Chicago Democrat*, *Chicago Tribune*, etc.[24]

The videos also use comparative graphics to make particular points about the development of the antebellum newspapers. For example, the "American Newspapers, 1800-1860: City Newspapers" video

employs cleverly the image of growing stacks of newspapers to illustrate the expansion of newspapers between 1820 and 1860. Another image compares the physical size of different papers by placing the papers side by side (for example, the comparison of *The Sun* from 1833 and its eight-column weekly edition from 1846).[25] These visuals help to illustrate the points made by the narrator and make the information more memorable. All the videos are narrated and transcribed. Transcripts include both footnotes and bibliographies which make them useful for researchers. For example, the "American Newspapers, 1800-1860: Country Papers" video includes sixty-six footnotes and a bibliography listing over forty publications.[26]

Finally, there is a link to the HPNL research guide about American newspapers (1800-1860) included at the end of the transcript.[27] The guide includes a lot of supplementary materials to the video tutorials such as antebellum newspaper statistics and data visualization, an online photo gallery featuring job printing examples (such as broadside advertisement, circulars, handbills, leaflets), and a glossary. There is also an extensive bibliography of secondary sources regarding American historical newspapers. The guide is an excellent addition to the video tutorials.

Conclusions

The main purpose of the HPNL historical newspapers videos has been to educate the user about American historical newspapers and promote library collections of newspapers. The latter function is performed by the HPNL research guide about American newspapers (1800-1860) that specifically addresses the question of "finding historical newspapers."[28] One of the most significant features of the videos discussed here is their visual appeal. The use of scanned page images from historical newspapers helps the users to familiarize themselves with the original content of the antebellum newspapers, including some eye-catching illustrations published in *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*.[29] The visual experience is also enhanced by the use of comparative graphics to emphasize the dramatic growth of newspapers between 1820 and 1860 or change in the physical size of different papers. As previously mentioned, the videos are narrated and transcribed and the transcripts include both footnotes and bibliographies providing users with a well-researched introduction to the topic of historical newspapers.

YouTube analytics provides data that may be used to evaluate the performance of the videos, including views, traffic sources, and discovery.[30] "American Newspapers, 1800-1860: An Introduction" is by far the most popular with 1,064 views and estimated 4,550 total minutes watched since its creation in August, 2012.[31] It is followed by "American Newspapers, 1800-1860: Country Papers" (with 424 views since March 2013) and "American Newspapers, 1800-1860: City Newspapers" (with 208 views since July 2013).[32] On average the videos were watched for about five minutes, however relative audience retention was higher or at the same level when compared to all YouTube videos of similar length.[33]

One of the most interesting findings of YouTube analytics is the number of international users accessing the videos. On average, 20 percent of all the views came from countries other than the United States, and "American Newspapers, 1800-1860: An Introduction" had as many as 33 percent of non-US views.[34] It was watched by viewers from over fifty countries, the largest number of views (after the United States) coming from Canada, the United Kingdom, India, France, Turkey, Italy, and Australia. As far as traffic sources for HPNL YouTube videos are concerned, YouTube and Google searches were the most popular ways of finding the videos.

Based on the data available through YouTube Analytics, it can be concluded that the videos have been accessible not only to US users but international users as well. There is no doubt that the global exposure of HPNL videos has been greatly enhanced by their inclusion in YouTube, which claims that over six billion hours of video are watched each month on its website.[35] The data also suggests that the videos might have benefited from being shorter. Perhaps breaking down the videos into more distinct parts and providing the table of contents at the beginning of each tutorial would be more appealing to a user who might be interested in just one aspect of the tutorial but not be willing to sit through the whole video.

Finally, the question remains about how effective the video tutorials are in educating the public about antebellum newspapers in an engaging manner. Even though, there is some evidence (based on a small-scale internal study) suggesting educational value of such videos, more research on online video tutorials is needed to determine the best practices related to their educational and instructional

effectiveness, including a larger-scale study of users affiliated with academic institutions (e.g. students

and faculty) as well as users outside of academia (e.g. genealogists, independent scholars, etc.).

---

[1] Yuen May Chan, "Video Instructions as Support for Beyond Classroom Learning," *Procedia Social and Behavioral Sciences* 9 (2010): 1313-1318.

[2] Geoffrey Little, "The Revolution Will be Streamed Online: Academic Libraries and Video," *The Journal of Academic Librarianship* 37(1) (2010): 70-72.

[3] Melissa Bowels-Terry, Merinda Kaye Hensley, Lisa Janicke Hinchliffe, "Best Practices for Online Library Tutorials in Academic Libraries: A Study of Students Preferences and Understanding," *Communications in Information Literacy* 4(1) (2010): 17-28. http://hdl.handle.net/2142/18671 accessed January 21, 2014.

[4] For a brief discussion of web-scale discovery services, see Marshall Breeding, "Web-Scale Discovery Services: Finding the Right Balance," *American Libraries* (January/February 2014): 25.

[5] "About YouTube," http://www.youtube.com/yt/about/ accessed January 13, 2014.

[6] "YouTube Statistics," http://www.youtube.com/yt/press/statistics.html accessed January 13, 2014.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Primary Research Group, *Library Use of the Mega Internet Sites, 2011-12 Edition: Google, Facebook, Yahoo!, Twitter, YouTube, Wikipedia, and More* (New York: Primary Research Group, 2011), 30, 124. It should be noted that libraries have been using Facebook more and more to post videos.

[9] Primary Research Group, *Library Use of the Mega Internet Sites, 2013 Edition: Google, Facebook, Yahoo!, Twitter, YouTube, Wikipedia, and More* (New York: Primary Research Group, 2013), 90.

[10] Carol Sue Humphrey, *The Press of the Young Republic, 1783-1833* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1996), 155.

[11] James E. Smalldon, *Early American Newspapers: A Guide to Collecting* (Alhambra, California: Paper Americana Press, 1964), 48.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Humphrey, *The Press of the Young Republic*, 155.

[14] Ibid.

[15] David A. Copeland, *The Antebellum Era: Primary Documents on Events from 1820 to 1860* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2003), 1.

[16] Ibid., 6.

[17] Ibid., 7.

[18] Ibid., 13.

[19] "American Newspapers, 1800-1860: An Introduction," http://www.library.illinois.edu/hpnl/guides/newspapers/american/1800-1860/introduction.html or YouTube http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6E8c8t55oZE ; "American Newspapers, 1800-1860: City Newspapers," http://www.library.illinois.edu/hpnl/guides/newspapers/american/1800-1860/city.html or YouTube https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gQpZTeewHKw ; "American Newspapers, 1800-1860: Country Papers," http://www.library.illinois.edu/hpnl/guides/newspapers/american/1800-1860/country.html or YouTube http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XCWC0MZn1Po accessed January 16, 2014.

[20] Historically, the antebellum period began in 1820 and ended in 1860, but both the guide and video tutorials deal with American newspapers from the period 1800-1860. See the guide, "American Newspapers, 1800-1860," http://uiuc.libguides.com/content.php?pid=240860&sid=2731617 accessed January 16, 2014.

[21] It should be noted that the results of this internal assessment are limited to the focus group, which was rather small, so they may not necessarily reflect a national trend. However, they seem to confirm the "anecdotal" evidence that users are generally not that familiar with newspapers from the antebellum period.

[22] Examples of some post-video questions: who were the primary consumers of newspapers before the 1830s? (multiple choice), where in a newspaper from this time period (1800-1860) can you look to find evidence of its

political affiliation? (multiple choice), historians have been unable to identify any American Indian newspapers that were published during the period covered by this video (1800 -1860) (true or false?), etc.

[23] Bowels-Terry, Hensley, Lisa Hinchliffe, "Best Practices for Online Library Tutorials in Academic Libraries."

[24] See image credits at the end of the "American Newspapers, 1800-1860: City Newspapers" video at http://www.library.illinois.edu/hpnl/guides/newspapers/american/1800-1860/city.html   accessed January 21, 2014.

[25] Ibid.

[26] See transcript, notes, and bibliography of "American Newspapers, 1800-1860: Country Papers" at http://www.library.illinois.edu/hpnl/guides/newspapers/american/1800-1860/country.html accessed January 22, 2014.

[27] "American Newspapers, 1800-1860," http://uiuc.libguides.com/content.php?pid=240860&sid=2731617 accessed January 16, 2014.

[28] Ibid. See the guide's section titled, "Finding Historical Newspapers."

[29] It should be noted that illustrations did not become common until the 1850s.

[30] To learn more about YouTube Analytics see, "YouTube Analytics," https://support.google.com/youtube/topic/3025741?hl=en&ref_topic=1115985   accessed January 24, 2014.

[31] I would like to thank Sarah Hoover, HPNL graduate assistant, for compiling YouTube statistics about HPNL videos.

[32] A relatively large number of views of "American Newspapers, 1800-1860: An Introduction" can speak to its popularity, but it can also be attributed to its "age" as it became available on YouTube in August 2012, other videos became available in 2013.

[33] Relative audience retention shows video's ability to retain viewers during playback by comparing it to all YouTube videos of similar length.

[34] It confirms YouTube's claim that 80 percent of its traffic comes from outside the United States. See, "Statistics" at http://www.youtube.com/yt/press/statistics.html   accessed January 24, 2014.

[35] Ibid. It should be noted that state censorship in some countries may prevent Internet users from accessing YouTube content.