

# The Historian - A Special User of Computational and Digital Tools?

## Disintermediation and the Discipline-Based Technological Expertise

Pompilia Burcica, PhD

Graduate School of Library and Information Science, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

### Aim

To examine a path for historians to approach and embrace computational tools.

To harmonize digital tools with the historians' craft.

To **disintermediate** the understanding and use of digital tools

To remove gatekeepers and promote a direct engagement with the computational methods rather than through proxy

### Method

Comparing the literature in information science and computer science to identify new perspectives of integrating technology within the historians' craft

### Background

When seeking information, historians:

- identify and locate their own sources
- bypass reference services (Susan Guest, Deidre Corcoran Stam, Margaret Stieg);
- make minimal use of formal bibliographies
- prefer primary sources more than other sources
- are not dependent on the latest findings or publications, use more retrospective works than recent materials
- lack training in computer science

### Trigger

While historians are using only partially and selectively the online sources of information retrieval and digital humanities, they appear increasingly interested in statistical analysis.

### Context

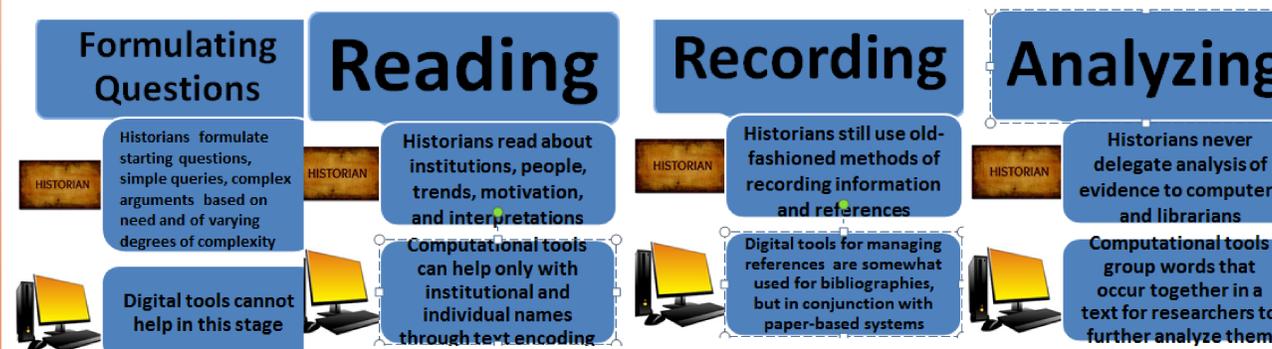


**Librarians and information scientists say:** historians should use digital humanities tools (spatial analysis, text mining, text encoding, and data visualization).

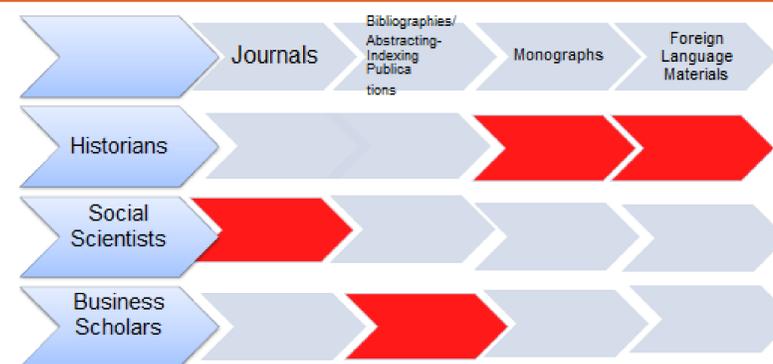
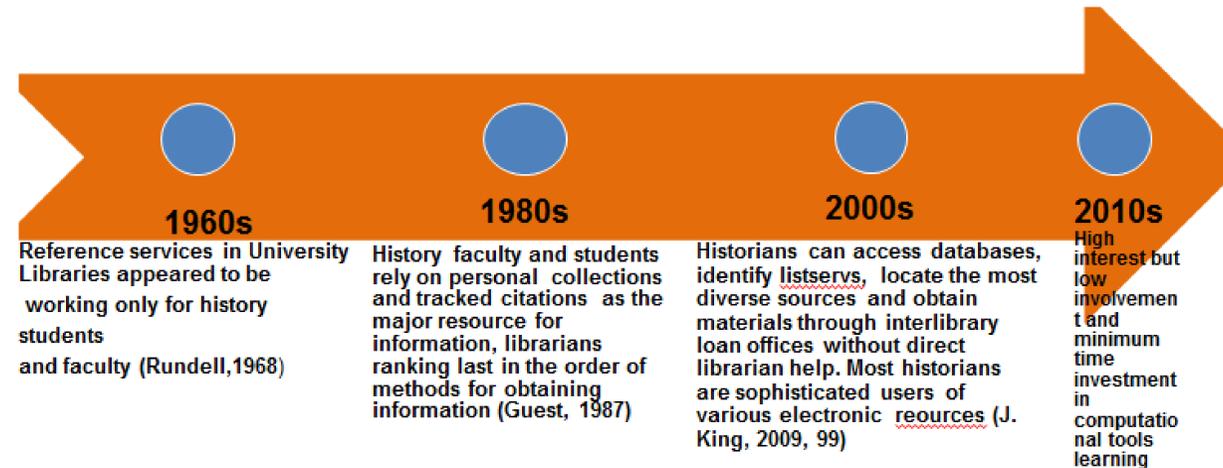


**Computer scientists say:** historians should build a standard quantitative research base, should hire a technology teaching faculty member who should teach to faculty the daily *Hour of Coding* training sessions.

**Historians say:** *we are...*



### TIMELINE: THE HISTORIANS-LIBRARIANS RELATIONSHIP



### The Historian's Toolbox

**They need to learn how:**

-formulate an hypothesis, upload census data, select variables, interpret output, verify questions, report findings.

**They also need to learn how:**

1. To create databases –define the purpose, design the records, the structure
2. To understand how a computer "thinks"
3. To learn what an algorithm is
4. To do data manipulation
5. To run simple programs
6. To create and use spreadsheets
7. To collect data and entry data.
8. To retrieve data and analyze it.

### Conclusions

Historians pursue research differently than other scholars in the humanities and social sciences

Historians need technology for understanding economic, demographic, age, income, education, and gender factors.

Training needs to occur within the department, taught by historians skilled in computational tools, with historical specialization

### Bibliography

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4. Jeff Rydberg-Cox, "Statistical Methods for Studying Literature using R," last accessed on 1/30/2016 at: <http://www.chlt.org/StatisticalMethods/averages-range.html>.
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**Further research:** Study the temporal spread of an old topic between historians.