

UNCOVERING THE VALUE OF DIGITAL SCHOLARSHIP

Gale Digital Scholar Lab Impact Report 2019–2020

THE SITUATION

Launched in 2018, *Gale Digital Scholar Lab* was created in direct response to the need for greater digital humanities and social sciences research support. For the first time, academic libraries could offer researchers of all experience and skill levels a resource that combines data analysis tools with the depth and breadth of primary archive material from *Gale Primary Sources*.

Within the first year of launch, institutions in China, Hong Kong, and Singapore were quick to recognize the potential of *Gale Digital Scholar Lab*, alongside leading universities in Australia, Europe, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Among the initial requests from many of these institutions were for more contextual information, greater content on the wider digital humanities themes, and techniques to support their implementation of the *Lab*. In response, Gale developed the Learning Center in 2019 to provide pedagogical support for teaching and learning in the *Lab*. The Learning Center includes teaching materials, engaging videos, and case studies designed by digital humanities experts.

Gale Digital Scholar Lab quickly proved to be popular with colleges and universities around the world. By the end of 2019, more than 100 academic institutions worked with the *Lab* in some capacity.

ASSESSING USAGE SHIFTS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The 2020 academic year was unique in higher education. Globally, colleges and universities had to address the implications of varying degrees of lockdowns and shutdowns, develop online teaching provision at extremely short notice, and find ways to keep students and staff healthy and safe.

The global higher education sector felt the immediate effects of the COVID-19 pandemic strongly, and universities around the world made structural changes to support remote researchers and students by investing in digital primary sources. Increasingly, institutions viewed *Gale Digital Scholar Lab* as a tool that provided valuable benefits in a time of crisis by supporting the growing number of those that prioritized the teaching of digital research and analytical skills.

During a time when disrupted classes, cancelled exams, and interrupted research became the norm, it would have been expected to see resources like *Gale Primary Sources* or *Gale Digital Scholar Lab* experience a decline in usage, since module leaders had less time to teach students and researchers how to use them. Instead, the opposite has been true.

Usage of *Gale Primary Sources* increased globally by 20 percent in 2020 when compared with 2019. The **number of users of *Gale Digital Scholar Lab* increased by 20 percent** as well, but their actual usage increased disproportionately: **content sets increased by 71 percent in 2020, while the number of primary source documents analyzed in the *Lab* increased by 134 percent.** This suggests that even with a tool designed to make digital humanities techniques and analyses available to everyone, regardless of programming skill, familiarity with the tool and time to become familiar with techniques are still necessary for institutions to maximize their investment.

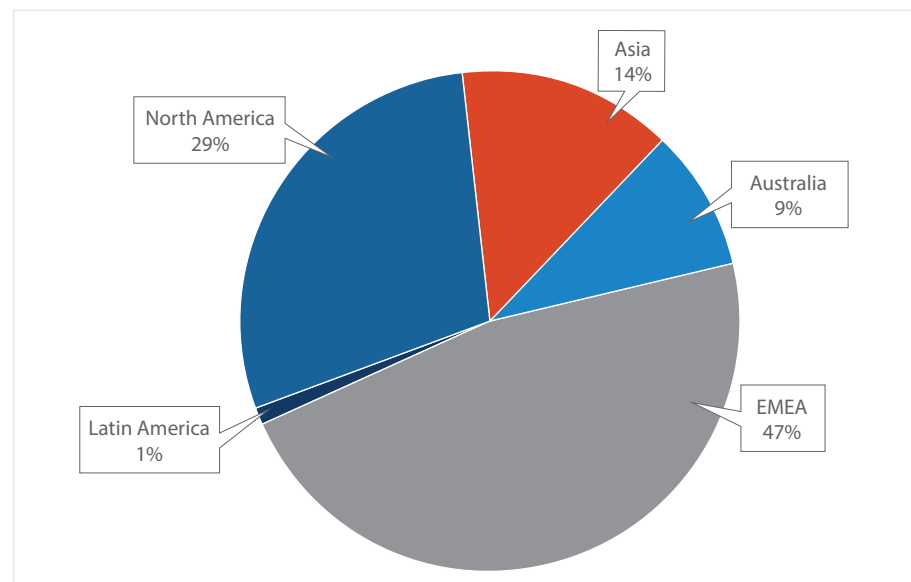
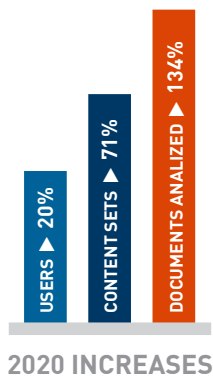


Fig. 1. Content sets created in 2020, by region.

REFLECTING ON GALE DIGITAL SCHOLAR LAB USE IN 2020

In 2020, newspapers were the most popular content type mined in *Gale Digital Scholar Lab*. This could be for several reasons. One is that newspapers are more accessible historical primary sources that allow students and researchers to track events over time, a common theme in digital humanities research. In terms of topics researched, social issues, such as women's rights and geography-specific research like perceptions of China and trade in Singapore, were popular.



Fig. 2. Most commonly occurring words in content set titles, lifetime to December 2020.

The age of the archive was not a factor when students and researchers chose documents for their content sets, with some of Gale's oldest archives appearing at the top of the most-used list. Given that newer archives are likely to have better quality OCR (optical character recognition) due to the use of newer, more refined OCR software, user data suggests that OCR quality is not an impediment to text and data mining.

The most popular tool was the Ngram visualization, possibly due to its simplicity and the ease of understanding its output for a beginner. Other tools that helped identify themes or group documents within content sets, such as Topic Modeling, were also popular with students and researchers.

There were some regional differences in tool use. In EMEA (Europe, the Middle East, and Africa), Sentiment Analysis was the most popular tool in 2020. This may reflect a slightly different user base, possibly featuring more literature researchers, in this region.

Finally, an analysis of archive use metrics suggests one of the major benefits of using *Gale Digital Scholar Lab* for institutions: it helps them derive more value from their existing archives in terms of increased usage. By analyzing archive use of the top 20 most-prolific users of the *Lab* in 2020, growth can be seen in all *Gale Primary Sources* usage metrics.¹

Gale Primary Sources Usage Metric	Average Year on Year Change, 2020
Sessions	49%
Searches	69%
Retrievals ²	8%
Minutes	5%

Fig. 3. Change in 2020 usage compared to prior year for selected institutions.

1. Actually, the top 19. One of the top 20 was removed from the analysis, as they had only started using *Gale Primary Sources* in 2020 and would therefore have skewed the results.
 2. Due to a change to COUNTER 5 compliant reporting midway through 2020, "Retrievals" is now a more stringent metric.

GOING FORWARD TOGETHER

As the world of higher education adapts to life post-pandemic, Gale's focus will remain on supporting digital humanities and digital scholarship globally. To be successful in this goal, it is crucial for Gale to understand *Gale Digital Scholar Lab* users and their needs for researching, teaching, and learning—as these continue to be the driving forces behind further developments to the *Lab*.

Consider what's next for your academic institution. Find out how Gale can help you support digital scholarship.

[Learn More about Gale Digital Scholar Lab](#)

Launch, enhance, or accelerate digital scholarship programs on your campus. This intuitive, cloud-based platform helps scholars and students use *Gale Primary Sources* to create custom content sets with tens of thousands of scholarly articles and analyze their findings for publication selection and rights retention. The *Gale Digital Scholar Lab* allows you to offer solutions to common challenges facing researchers in the digital humanities today.

[About Gale Primary Sources](#)

Get immediate, firsthand accounts from the people who saw history happen. *Gale Primary Sources* brings hundreds of years of history to the forefront of the digital humanities with a vast selection of academic resources that are powered by thoughtfully developed search technologies.