Online Access to Advertising Films and TV-Commercials

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Abstract

The audiovisual cultural heritage is a valuable collection that both reflects contemporary developments in the 20th century and at the same time is a source material for research. The purpose of this paper is to describe how the State and University Library established a digital archive for Danish film and TV-commercials, why the collection is important, and how it became available online to students and researchers. The process presents a number of challenges including copyright and technical issues. The scalable and integrated service may be used for other audiovisual collections in the future.

Key Words: Archive; audiovisual; commercials; digital; online access

Introduction

> 'Audiovisual sources will play an increasingly pervasive role in our lives, and there will be a growing need to have these sources processed further' (Manovich, 2009).

Digitising the audiovisual cultural heritage is of the utmost importance at the moment. Old materials' decay pushes forward the need to digitise in order to ensure the future of the national heritage. UNESCO estimates that we only have 10–15 years left to digitise the audiovisual cultural heritage collections before it is too late (UNESCO, 2009). Fortunately, new technologies make it easier than ever to preserve different formats, besides text, in digital bits and

bytes. As the quote by Manovich highlights, audiovisual materials of different kinds become more and more important as our lifestyle, surroundings and educational settings become more and more focussed on and affected by audiovisual material. Looking back, audiovisual media have influenced the way we interact and perceive our surroundings in such a way that it would be impossible to retell the history of the 20th century without including the media revolution and in particular the evolution of audiovisual media.

One of the audiovisual sources we need to preserve and process, is advertising films and TV-commercials, even if there is a discrepancy between these sources and those we may define as cultural products in general. Instead of being acknowledged as aesthetic elements, commercials and advertising films have commonly been characterised as interruptive, noisy and disturbing (Bang, 2007). Despite of this, a cultural frame of reference interprets commercials and advertising films as cultural elements and as cultural expressions with a powerful capability to communicate the things we did not know that we needed. Research and cultural institutions are increasingly using them as source material, and as a consequence the need to preserve them and make them easily accessible grows, as has been stressed by several media researchers (Bang, 2007; Kau, 2007; Manovich, 2009).

The Danish collection of advertising films and TV-commercials is preserved by the State and University Library in Denmark. The State and University Library is an institution of the Danish Ministry of Culture and has three important roles to play. It is a national library and among other things receives a copy of all Danish publications (whether in printed or in digital form); it manages the collection of national newspapers and national media and is the national loan centre for public libraries. In addition the library is the main library of Aarhus University with common library services: it buys books, periodicals, digital resources etc. to be used by the university staff and students. Finally the library is a research institution with a future focus on media (Statsbiblioteket, 2010a).

The State and University Library established the National Media Collection in 1987 with the purpose of collecting and preserving broadcasts from Danish radio and television stations. At the time, radio and television were not included in the Danish law of legal deposit. They were included in 2004. Two years after the establishment of the National Media Collection the library began collecting Danish music material (CD-material was included in the law

of legal deposit from 1997) and in 2005 the library began collecting Danish material published on the internet in collaboration with the Royal Library in Copenhagen (in immediate accordance with the law of legal deposit from 2004).

Preserving Danish films (including advertising films and TV-commercials) was included in the law of legal deposit in 2004 and the task was entrusted to the Danish Film Institute. Long before 2004, the State and University Library began building a comprehensive collection of advertising films and TV-commercials to ensure the preservation of Danish media cultural heritage and to accommodate an increasing number of research projects dealing with commercials. The collection was set up in 1996 when a copy of commercials preserved by the Dansk Reklamefilm A/S (Danish Advertisement Film Ltd. – a cinema screen collector) was handed over to the State and University Library.

In most of the cases mentioned above, the law of legal deposit became effective reactively. The national policy concerning preservation of a current media products as cultural heritage was often implemented only after the media had proven its worth. Hence cultural institutions need to act proactively in order to be able to preserve as comprehensive a collection as possible. The late inclusion of media material in the legal deposit law resulted in loss of material. As described by Liam Wylie the Irish broadcast archive (RTÉ) is incomplete due to similar circumstances. Lack of national focus or policy typically results in loss of material and ultimately loss of national heritage (Wylie, 2006).

Commercials as Cultural Heritage and Documentation

The historical, societal and cultural documentation embedded in audiovisual commercials is immense. The collection of Danish advertising films dates back to the beginning of the 20th century and as such captures the development of the modern world and the development of a modern European country. A commercial in the collection produced by a Danish newspaper in the 1940s, for instance, reflects the threat of war, world catastrophes and the freedom of the press, while a newspaper commercial from the 1990s draws attention to national education issues and unemployment among academics. The audiovisual material also documents cultural perspectives in society such as

the contemporary image of the perfect woman, which research conducted by Jørgen Bang of two different dish washing products touches upon. Bang illustrates how one dish washing product in 1963 presents the perfect woman as a housewife, and how another product only three years later presents the woman with opportunities both inside and outside the home (the product makes it possible for her).

Fig. 1: Pictures from a LUX TV-commercial (dish washing liquid).

To sell a product to potential buyers involves many different strategies, and these have also developed throughout the years. One of them is the use of humour, which is very important in Danish commercials. Jørgen Stigel's research on humour in commercials deals with the way humour is used and how it can be used to obtain different communication and marketing goals. One of the key points is that humour generally helps people bring together normally incommensurable objects or concepts and promotes problem-solving thinking (Stigel, 2008). It is not surprising that the use of humour and fiction has increased according to Stigel.

Stigel's research shows an increase in the use of aesthetic dimensions in commercials. This focus is further developed in Edvin Vestergaard Kau's research on persuasive and narrative mechanisms in commercials: commercials use the aesthetics of the cinema to communicate a story and in the end to sell a product (Kau, 2007). Kau argues that persuasive mechanisms in commercials are linked to 'Hollywood' mechanisms such as the use of a recognisable narrative structure (from defeat or misery to victory and happiness) and the use of glamour, singing and known faces. Known faces from the theatres or the movies are used to convey the story being told. Kau argues that the aura of the known person is transferred to the aura of the product (Kau, 2007). The

strong bond between the commercial business and the artistic and cultural business is illustrated throughout preliminary research by Kau. Many pioneers within the arts can be found experimenting with commercials before turning to the cinema. One well-known and self-taught Danish film director, the Oscar winner Joachim Back, has had a long career in commercials before turning to movies. In a recent interview he states that there is no big difference between directing commercials and directing movies — both fields are about storytelling. The director states: 'I do not want to appear arrogant, but I wanted to be really good at making commercials, then movies' (the author's translation) (Bjørnkjær, 2010).

Another perspective would be to analyse the rhetoric, the communication models or the language used in the commercials. For example, it is not uncommon that a commercial gains popularity among the public to such extend that we copy the discourse or phrases used. They become common expressions and have the potential of enriching the national language in many years to come. These examples highlight some of the many topics or research angles found in the material. The challenge is to open up audiovisual treasures such as the commercials collection to even more people [a list of literature references on commercial research is available from the State and University Library's website (Statsbiblioteket, 2010b)].

Digitising an Audiovisual Collection

The online collection of advertising films and TV-commercials hosted by the State and University Library dates back to the 1950s. At the moment the collection consists of approx. 3,500 commercial films shown in Danish cinemas from the 1950s until 1995. Furthermore the library has digitised approx. 45,000 TV commercials aired on the Danish channel TV 2 since the birth of the station in 1988. Most of the digitised material is already included and integrated in the searchable library database, and the aim is to update the collection regularly. Henceforth, the collection will grow in size.

Before this project, gaining access to old commercials was difficult if not impossible. Even though the collection was preserved by the library, special equipment was needed to play the commercials from film reels. The fragility of the material was another challenge. Transforming 'hidden' or not acces-

sible material to online accessible material is an important development for those interested in the material, such as Edvin Kau, researcher from Aarhus University, Department of Media and Information Studies: 'It is extremely important to have the material accessible for analysis and, for instance, not settle for myths or anecdotes about the old and fantastic film commercials' (author's translation). Another testimonial comes from Anne Marie Waade from the same department as Kau. She sees the opportunity to access commercials online as a positive development for her research possibilities: 'The possibility to download commercial films to my computer has been a huge help which has developed and strengthened my research. Among other things I can easily and quickly examine many films […], compare examples, use slow motion and find stills, which in different ways support my research ideas' (author's translation).

The initiative to digitise the collection of TV and cinema commercials and make them available online was taken by partnership between the State and University Library and Aarhus University, Department of Information and Media Studies. The richness of the material and the importance of this somewhat neglected cultural treasure is the reason why the two institutions applied for funding from the Danish Research Council for the Humanities (Forskningsrådet for Kultur og Kommunikation). The project was initiated in 2003 and ended in 2007 — one year late due to complicated negotiations regarding copyright and technological challenges.

The digitisation process was the first step. MPEG 2 was chosen as the preservation format after thorough research by the IT division of the State and University Library. Because a surprising number of films especially from the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s showed discolouration, regular digitisation was not enough and a process of 'digital cleaning' had to be included. Tenders were invited for digitising and cleaning the films.

The metadata for the commercials shown in cinemas are based on information gathered from handwritten index cards from Dansk Reklamefilm A/S. The cards hold bibliographical information about the product category, product name, title, producer, advertising agency, film length and date of premiere. The cards were scanned by an external company. Combining the digital information gathered from the cards and the films was done manually. Further technical and administrative metadata were generated automatically and added during the digitisation process.

The project had to be postponed by a year because it took two years to nego-tiate a new agreement with the collecting society. Fundamentally the library had to ask and get permission from everyone involved in each commercial in order be able to offer researchers and students online access and service. Doing so would be impossible, especially because commercials rarely have a list of credits. The only way was to draw up a completely new agree-ment with the owners of the copyright. Luckily the joint collecting society Copydan/AVU-Kopier offered to negotiate a collective agreement on behalf of the owners. The agreement focuses on online access to the collection for research and reaching institutions. The copyright owners were concerned that that the faces of actors appearing in a commercial would be 'worn out' by online access, as has happened before. Access is therefore, so far, limited to higher educational institutions which, according to the agreement, must have an AVU agreement with Copydan before they can subscribe to the collection. An institution is at the moment defined as the entire educational institute (the university), due to settings in the current technical solution.

In addition an agreement was signed between Copydan, the State and University Library and UNI-C (The Danish IT Centre for Education and Research). This agreement allows upper secondary educational institutions to access 300 commercials handpicked by an educational consultant to be used in teaching and learning situations. The agreement is scalable. This means that there is no limit to the size of the collection and that it may be used in combination with many different collections. The new agreement is a vital step towards opening up the many hidden and 'challenging' collections to an wider audience or user groups.

System Integration and Searching

An important ambition of the library was to include the collection in the gen-eral library database. In the past many technological appendices were added to the catalogue which users had to access separately. The present and future strategy of the library is to offer integrated searches and make all collections searchable in the same system. This strategy was implemented for the col-lection of TV commercials. To find the commercials in the library system the user can perform a normal search from the library's website on, e.g. Toyota. The search returns approx. 1,200 entries of books, articles, sound material and so forth. The user is then able to limit the result to the type 'commercials'

(Danish: *reklamefilm*) which reduces the search results to approx. 100 entries. Alternatively the user can perform a search on 'commercials' (Danish: reklamefilm) *and* 'Toyota'. The results can then be limited to a specific decade, subject and producer. The search procedure can be varied in many different ways, e.g. one can perform a search with a specific actor in mind, for instance the famous Danish comedian Dirch Passer. However, as mentioned earlier we only have limited information about each commercial, which makes it difficult to list all actors appearing in the commercials. Only the very famous and/or recognisable actors are listed in the database. Whenever possible we have also made it possible to search for specific slogans used in the commercials. Thumbnails from the commercials have been added in the back-end system, but these are not visible in the current user interface. A visual indication of the content would definitely help users to identify the commercial.

To access a commercial the user must identify him- or herself via <u>WAYF</u>, which stands for 'Where Are You From'. WAYF makes it possible for users from different institutions to access an external service by logging in at the users' own institutions. In this case WAYF ensures the communication between two institutions: the service provider (in this case the State and University Library) and the educational institution (the university). Users from Aarhus University accessing the collection of commercials are asked to login via the university login before accessing an item in the collection. In addition and as required by the joint collecting society, users must guarantee proper use of the material before viewing it. The validation process is relatively fast (the user only needs to login if not logged in already) and smooth. In contrast to regular home loans the commercials are only available as downloads and users may keep the material on their computer as long as they like. Streaming is not possible. Users from institutions with no license or the general public are able to view the material at the State and University Library free of charge. They are not allowed to download the material to their own computers.

The User-Generated Multimedia Archive — Are We Close?

The TV commercials and cinema advertising project was a collaborative project between a service institution and an educational institution. Teaming up has been mutually rewarding and has strengthened the ties between the institutions. A user-related starting point involving the actual users helps to set

the primary goals and to some extent ensures the use of the final product. For example, tools for tagging and mapping each commercial were tested by the researchers involved. Even though the tools proved to be difficult to implement as they were in conflict with the user validation technology, the tests were valuable as new experiments and they point in the direction of more user-generated content. We anticipate that the need for and willingness by users to put together tailor-made and shareable collections or metadata will grow in the future. Furthermore, the experiments demonstrate that institutional control and user-driven development is difficult to unite at the moment, when dealing with large-scale collections and copyright owners. However, the project has opened up possibilities for new types of copyright agreements. This is an important step towards revitalising library collections with user-generated content combined with standardised and scaleable technical solutions.

Future digital collections will not only consist of text, but also of audiovisual material, internet pages, animations, and so forth. Cultural institutions must be able to present these to the users in a modern and visible way with usable metadata, which may not only be restricted to text descriptions. Identifying audiovisual material via textual metadata or user relevant information (text, pictures, voice and so forth) is one of the challenges. Collecting commercials challenges the old way of thinking about archives, because of the nature of the material and because of the user involvement in the process. The State and University Library's TV commercials and cinema advertising project has made the long life of a media source visible and has demonstrated the different agents and sets of value in the process. Uniting these values is both the challenge and the fuel for innovation.

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