Using Facebook in Cultural Research.
Case Studies:
The eCULTFOOD and e-FestMemoria Projects[1]

Ioana Boghian
Petronela Savin
"Vasile Alecsandri" University of Bacău
Romania

Abstract

Our paper discusses the use of Facebook as a cultural research tool. In literature, Facebook use has more often been discussed in relation to teaching, learning, advertising, communication etc. and less to cultural research. The literature on using Facebook as a cultural research tool is scarce and non-specific. Our aim is to provide a real example on how Facebook may be used in cultural research based on the practical findings resulted from implementing the PN-III-P2-2.1-BG-2016-0390, *Digitization of Cultural Food Heritage. The Bacău Region eCULTFOOD* (2016-2018) project and *e-FestMemoria. Capitalizing on immaterial heritage. The winter holidays in Bacău County*, no. ROCJBC 350 2017 001 12151, both coordinated by lecturer Petronela Savin, PhD (Savin 2014; Savin 2015). Our conclusions highlight the potential of using Facebook in cultural research in terms of: promotion of research and dissemination of research results, cultural education, user-generated content, connection between researchers and target groups.

Keywords: *Facebook, cultural research, cultural education, cultural content development, user-generated content*

1. Introduction

As promoter of communication, interaction and user-generated content, personality, individuality, self-expression and self-assertion, Facebook responds well to the particularities and requirements of a modern, digital approach to cultural research. The number of people using social networking sites has grown to such an extent that their power of communication, establishing and maintaining connections has drawn the attention of academics and researchers in various domains: industry and the associated sciences, the arts and everything related to culture, the natural sciences, etc. (Boghian 2013). Facebook supports collaboration and interaction of researchers by its special features: posts and comments on posts that may include photos, videos, links to related Facebook pages, groups or other Internet sites connected to the topic; the Share button is an essential tool in disseminating the initial post either for a public audience or as a private message; the Follow button enables anyone with a Facebook account to keep track of the matter. The user-friendly and easy-access approach to communication and interaction provided by Facebook has made it the worldwide market leader of social networking site as of July 2018, ranked by number of active accounts: it is the first social network to surpass 1 billion registered accounts and 2.2 billion monthly active users; its availability in multiple languages enables users to connect with friends, professionals etc. across geographical, political or economic borders; as mobile device usage and mobile social networks are increasingly gaining traction, such figures are expected to grow (Statista 2018).

The literature on Facebook and cultural research is yet scarce; we have identified some recent studies focusing on: the role of social media in the process of 'culture sharing', meaning the "exchanges or mutual exposures of preferred lifestyles via social ties between users from different cultural backgrounds" (You et al. 2017: 347); the use of Facebook means, generally, entering a shared – and predefined – cultural world to which the Facebook users tend to adapt (Manzi et al. 2018); comparative analysis on college student Facebook pages in different countries (Egypt, Qatar, the U.S.) to show how students from

different cultures use Facebook to stay connected with their various groups of 'friends,' and engage in identity construction (Elmasry, Auter & Peuchaud 2014); the impact of new social media on intercultural adaptation: social media connects people to their host and home countries, strengthening relationships, supporting people to overcome adjustment challenges and build a sense of community and belonging (Sawyer 2011).

In the following section we shall highlight and illustrate the use of Facebook as a cultural research tool in two cultural research projects. The methodology of this paper relies on an observative study based on a qualitative-quantitative type of analysis of the content posted, promoted and generated by researchers and users on the Facebook pages of the projects *eCULTFOOD* and *e-FestMemoria*.

2. Facebook and cultural research
2.1. The eCULTFOOD project

Communication and interaction on Facebook are a continuation of real-life communication and interaction – interaction briefly defined as mutual action or influence. People use Facebook: to maintain existing relationships and meet new people; because Facebook is fun and cool; to make oneself more popular; to pass time; to express oneself; for learning purposes; as a task management tool; for activism and research purposes; shopping (Hew 2011: 664-665).

The project PN-III-P2-2.1-BG-2016-0390, *Digitization of Cultural Food Heritage. The Bacău Region eCULTFOOD* (2016-2018), funded by UEFISCDI – P2 - Increasing the Competitiveness of the Romanian Economy through RDI, Line 1 – Transfer of Knowledge to the Economic Agent, was aimed at creating a digital resource of the food heritage of Bacău County (http://ecultfood.ub.ro/) and entering it into the property of the economic agent, the Cultural Association "Art-Traditions-Heritage without Borders" to create a cultural education program. The resource was generated by a team coordinated by Petronela Savin that brought together researchers from "Vasile Alecsandri" University of Bacău and "Alexandru Ioan Cuza" University of Iaşi. In this project, the educational component and

social involvement of the community have been key components (Savin et al. 2016; Savin 2018).

The *eCULTFOOD* project aims to create an *Ethnolinguistic audio-visual atlas of the cultural food heritage of Bacău County* as a comprehensive database containing the results of field research and scientific documentation on cultural food traditions in the region. The project intervenes in the area of the intangible cultural heritage of traditional food, fulfilling the function of protection (research, promotion), dissemination (diffusion, including via new online models) and support of education as cultural intervention. Its main aim is to preserve, in cartographic and computerized form, a representative corpus of audio-visual documents recording the traditional food cultural heritage based on surveys involving the older generation from rural areas of Bacău (Savin 2012 a, 2012 b, 2012 c). The *eCULTFOOD* project addresses the stringent need for documentation of the Cultural Association "Art-Traditions-Heritage without Borders" that aims to implement an experiential model of cultural education for youth and adults by exploiting the regional traditional food heritage. This objective will be achieved by creating and maintaining a space for training, investigation and exchange of best practices that allow deepening the knowledge related to traditional food culture, with effects on the socio-economic and cultural levels (Boghian 2016; Boghian 2017).

A key project component that contributed to its sustainability was the achievement, by master students, of two internships at the Cultural Association "Art-Traditions-Heritage without Borders" in Bacău. The two 120-hour internships took place between February 20-May 28, 2017 and February 19-May 13, 2018, being attended by 35 master students from the Faculty of Letters, "Vasile Alecsandri" University of Bacău. These students participated in both the production of local food heritage data and the implementation of the cultural education strategies at the level of the partner association, being an important vector for the dissemination of the innovation element proposed by the project.

In building and developing the educational component of the project, a key role was played by the social media page, https://www.facebook.com/ecultfood/, that has attracted more than 1000 followers so far and has been linked with the direct communication group – the students involved in the research stage. The use of Facebook has been a mechanism for involving students and the entire community in building, preserving and promoting the cultural heritage from the region of Bacău. Promoting research and educational experiences in the online environment has changed the perspective on the relationship between tutors and trainees.

The eCULTFOOD Facebook page followers have enriched the cultural content of the project by their comments: they posted high evaluations for the project's novelty and interesting approach and also added their own versions of recipes, name varieties for the same dish and suggestions for further investigations. A significant number of followers highlighted in their comments the relevance of the project in rediscovering, preserving and promoting the cultural food heritage from the region of Bacău.

Although direct interaction ceased at some point, the relationships and connections with students have continued on the social media page of the project as users can ask questions, complete the information, add comments, intervene when they think it is the case, thus constantly changing the interrelationship with the researcher, respectively with the mentor. The possibility to share a video recording of how a Romanian traditional dish is prepared on Facebook, YouTube and the project's online platform created under the official institution page of "Vasile Alecsandri" University of Bacău has resulted in interactions measured in number of post and video views, likes, comments and shares (e.g. the honey mushrooms zacusca video that reached 1,839 views on YouTube[2] in less than 3 months). Even after the project's completion, the eCULTFOOD Facebook page is active by a regular post called *Thursday's recipe* which shares a video

[2] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wz3oZSm1PLM, accessed November 10, 2018.

from the project's online platform that includes 1111 resources, namely the same number of recipes of Romanian traditional dishes from the County of Bacău. The Facebook page has also enabled the promotion and visibility of the book written by the project coordinator (Savin 2018) and based on exploiting research material obtained during the project. The eCULTFOOD Facebook page promotes the project's website, ensures and supports interaction with the website.

2.2. The e-FestMemoria project

The project *e-FestMemoria. Capitalizing on immaterial heritage. The winter holidays in Bacău County*, no. ROCJBC 350 2017 001 12151, aimed at documenting the winter holiday discourses based on answers obtained in the villages from Bacău County to questionnaires elaborated more than a century apart by: B.P. Haşdeu (1884), Ion Muşlea (1931-1941) and Petronela Savin (2016-2017). The article presenting the project methodology[3] highlights the importance of the involvement of the local community in the promotion of the immaterial patrimony and the need to raise awareness and interest in the traditional culture in school.

Ensuring project sustainability through community involvement was one of the priorities of the implementation team. The audio-visual documents on winter traditions and customs, produced within the *eFestMemoria* project, formed the basis for creating and promoting a social media page (https://www.facebook.com/eFestMemoria/), designed to contribute to active involvement of the community from Bacău in identifying the elements of intangible cultural heritage, but also in promoting and, implicitly, safeguarding them. The members of the investigated communities uploaded information on this page, added comments, intervening when they thought they had something

---

[3] Savin, P.; Timoce-Mocanu, C.; Jicu, A. (2017): "Proiectul e-FestMemoria. Valorificarea patrimoniului imaterial. Sărbătorile de iarnă din judeţul Bacău", in *Studii şi cercetări ştiinţifice. Seria filologie*, no. 38, 2017, pp. 109-116.

to say about the practices and traditions that they assumed to be community values (Savin et al. 2017b: 111).

A selection of discourses from the villages of Bacău County on the winter holidays, accompanied by photos taken in the late 19th-century investigation, during the interwar period, as well as during 2016-2017, was published in the volume *"That was…the power of bread rings!". Celebrated holidays, recounted holidays in localities from the county of Bacău* (Savin et al. 2017a). This volume and the database with the field investigations were designed as educational materials and promoted on the project's Facebook page. Despite the short time span of the project implementation (August-November 2017), the Facebook page gathered 420 followers.

To ensure project sustainability, the research instrumentalization was designed to benefit education. The obtained results were also approached as a means of developing a cultural education methodology. All these were aimed at using social media in promoting education centred on involving the community in the research. A cooperation agreement between the Patrimonium Bacoviensis Association and the "C. Sturdza" County Library of Bacău was established for the continuation of the project after the end of the funding, through educational activities meant to bring children closer to the cultural heritage of the region. The first activity was represented by the conference *The Story of the 'Bears' from Dărmăneşti. Traditions from Bacău County*, that took place on December 8, 2017; the event was announced, promoted and subsequently presented on the project's Facebook page. At this event, four of the heroes-storytellers of the book *That was ... The power of bread rings! ...*, Ion Moghior (the oldest 'bear' from Dărmăneşti), Ştefan Ion Vizitiu (folk artist), Vasile Vizitiu (drummer), Ştefănel Bortoş ('bear' performer) and Iustina Hazaparu (coordinator of the "bears school" from the Dărmăneşti Technological Highschool) told and showed pupils "what the 'bears' dance' custom means". The event was an opportunity to solidify the connection between the research and the social and cultural environment, contributing to enhanced awareness of the importance of involving citizens in the construction, preservation and promotion of cultural

heritage (Savin et al. 2017b: 114). Additionally, in this event, Facebook played an essential role in developing the learning experience beyond the spatial boundaries of the meeting, its online impact generating numerous reactions from the young public. The video that presents the event through a slideshow of photos has reached 3,767 views.

The project's Facebook page contributed to disseminate the results and involve citizens in building, preserving and promoting the cultural heritage from Bacău County. Promoting research experiences and results in the social media has generated a change in the team's view in relation to the research field. The relationship with the informants did not end with leaving the investigation site but continued on the Facebook page of the project as they filled in information, added comments, intervening when they thought it necessary, and thus changing the way of interrelation with the researcher. We have also recorded a category of virtual informants who confirm or transmit information that can be analysed and verified by the researcher.

In the case of the Facebook pages of both projects, the page followers became generators of cultural content.

Conclusions

The implementation of the projects PN-III-P2-2.1-BG-2016-0390, *Digitization of Cultural Food Heritage. The Bacău Region eCULTFOOD* (2016-2018), and *e-FestMemoria. Capitalizing on immaterial heritage. The winter holidays in Bacău County*, no. ROCJBC 350 2017 001 12151 has generated quantifiable results (published volumes, an online database, two social media pages of the projects) and built a community active in promoting immaterial heritage through professional interests and common learning experiences, as well as a community of researchers and practitioners with expertise in the development of socially useful research products. The patrimonial resource continues to be harnessed through educational activities designed to bring together senior generations and young people through creative and experiential learning tools. Human resources and the accumulated know-how will

make it possible, through the exchange of best practices, to continue these preoccupations also within a regional and/or national network.

Computerization of the traditional food heritage meets the aspirations of EU policies regarding the digitization of cultural resources as a key factor that contributes to improving accessibility and undivided flow of information in a knowledge-based society and economy. Once transposed into electronic format, the cultural food heritage of Bacău County becomes a resource for a broad spectrum of activities impacting sectors such as education, economy and tourism.

Our paper showcased the potential of using Facebook in cultural research in terms of: promotion of research and dissemination of research results, cultural education, user-generated content, connection between researchers and research groups. Facebook has enabled the project and research teams to connect easily with target groups and other audience groups interested in the topic. Facebook project pages have made it possible to interconnect research activities, products and results from two different projects. The Facebook project pages will be maintained even after project completion, so that the present research results may be constantly disseminated and improved, augmented, complemented. For the *eCULTFOOD* and *e-FestMemoria* project teams, Facebook has turned out to be an essential, indispensable research tool.

Via Facebook, education is achieved in a less canonical manner, everything happens openly, the researcher, the trainer, the student and the public become generators of information and knowledge; they produce user-generated cultural content.

Bibliography
Boghian, I. (2017): "Ritualistic Values of Romanian Kitchen Tools", in *Cultural Perspectives*, no. 22, pp. 49-62.
Boghian, I. (2016): "The Space of the Romanian kitchen. Cultural practices and Significations", in *Cultural Perspectives*, no. 21, pp. 9-33.
Boghian, I. (2013): "Using Facebook in Teaching", in Pătruț, B.; Pătruț, M. (eds.): *Social Media in Higher Education: Teaching in Web 2.0*, Hershey, USA: IGI Global, pp. 86-104.

Elmasry, M. H.; Auter, P. J.; Peuchaud, S. R. (2014): "Facebook Across Cultures: A Cross-Cultural Content Analysis of Egyptian, Qatari, and American Student Facebook Pages", in *Journal of Middle East Media*, vol. 10, Atlanta: Georgia State University, pp. 27-60.

Hew, K. F. (2011): "Students' and Teachers' use of Facebook", in *Computers in Human Behavior*, no. 27(2), pp. 662-676, available online at http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S07475632100036 51, accessed on 26th of September 2018.

Manzi, C.; Coen, S.; Regalia, C.; Yévenes, A. M.; Giuliani, C.; Vignoles, V. L. (2018): "Being in the Social: A cross-cultural and cross-generational study on identity processes related to Facebook use", in *Computers in Human Behavior*, 80, pp. 81-87.

Morărașu, Nadia-Nicoleta; Drugă, Luminița (2015): "The Symbolic Functions of Culinary Practices Shaping Romanian Gastronomic Identity", in *Cultural Perspectives.Journal for Literary and British Cultural Studies in Romania*, 20, pp. 98-115.

Savin, P. (2018): *Bucate din bătrâni. Frazeologie şi cultura românească*, Iaşi: Institutul European.

Savin, P.; Timoce-Mocanu, C. (coords.); Jicu, A.; Cuceu, M. (2017a): *"That was…the power of bread rings!". Celebrated holidays, recounted holidays in localities from the county of Bacău*, Cluj-Napoca: Casa Cărţii de Ştiinţă.

Savin, P.; Timoce-Mocanu, C.; Jicu, A. (2017b): "Proiectul e-FestMemoria. Valorificarea patrimoniului imaterial. Sărbătorile de iarnă din judeţul Bacău", in *Studii şi cercetări ştiinţifice. Seria filologie*, no. 38, pp. 109-116.

Savin, P.; Nedeff, V.; Timoce-Mocanu, C.; Drugă, L. (2016): "Digitalizarea patrimoniului cultural alimentar al judeţului Bacău. Aspecte metodologice", in *Caietele ASER*, no. XIII/2016, pp. 103-111.

Savin, P. (2015): "Experiential Education by Digitalizing the Live Food Patrimony", in B. Pătruţ, D. Andone, C. Holotescu, G. Grosseck (eds.) *Social Media in Academia: Research and Teaching*. Timişoara: Editura Medimond, pp. 319-324.

Savin, P. (2014): "Romanian traditional food heritage in the context of urban development" in *Globalization and intercultural dialogue: multidisciplinary perspectives*, Târgu-Mureş: Editura Arhipelag XXI, pp. 920-923.

Savin, P. (2012a): *Romanian Phraseological Dictionary*, Iaşi: Institutul European.

Savin, P. (2012b): *Universul din lingură. Despre terminologia alimentară românească*, Iaşi: Institutul European.

Savin, P. (2012c): *Un univers dans une cuillère. Sur la terminologie alimentaire du roumain*, Iaşi: Institutul European.

Sawyer, R. (2011): "The Impact of New Social Media on Intercultural Adaptation", in *Senior Honor Projects*, Paper 242, available online at https://digitalcommons.uri.edu/srhonorsprog/242/?utm_source=digitalcommons.uri.edu%2Fsrhonorsprog%2F242&utm_medium=PDF&utm_campaign=PDFCoverPages , accessed on 26 September 2018.

Statista. The Statistics Portal (2018): Most famous social network sites worldwide as of July 2018, ranked by number of active users (in millions), https://www.statista.com/statistics/272014/global-social-networks-ranked-by-number-of-users/ , accessed on 26 September 2018.

You, Q.; Garcia-Garcia, D.; Paluri, M.; Luo, J.; Joo, J. (2017): "Cultural Diffusion and Trends in Facebook Photographs", in *Proceedings of the Eleventh International AAAI Conference on Web and Social Media (ICWSM 2017)*, Palo Alto, California: The AAAI Press, pp. 347-356.

Ioana Boghian

affiliation: "Vasile Alecsandri" University of Bacău
position: Lecturer, PhD
email: boghian.ioana@ub.ro
research interests: cultural and literary studies, didactics of foreign languages
selected publications:

(2018): *Houses in Victorian Novels. A Semiotic Approach* (Ioana Boghian), 2nd edition. Iaşi: LUMEN.

(2018): *Methodological Guide for Language Students and Language Teachers. English, French, Romanian* (Ioana Boghian), Cluj-Napoca: Casa Cărţii de Ştiinţă.

(2018): "Values Promoted by Intercultural Education" (Ioana Boghian) in *Proceedings of CIEA 2018, Education for values-continuity and context*, Bologna: Editografica, pp. 383-390.

(2014): "The methodological aspects of a Romanian-English contrastive collection of food idioms and proverbs" (Petronela Savin; Ioana Boghian) in *Studii şi cercetări ştiinţifice. Seria Filologie*, 32, pp. 99-107.

Petronela Savin

affiliation: "Vasile Alecsandri" University of Bacău
position: Lecturer, PhD
email: savin.petronela@ub.ro
research interests: cultural studies, phraseology, terminology, didactics

selected publications:

(2018): *Bucate din bătrâni. Frazeologie şi cultură românească* (Petronela Savin), Iaşi: Institutul European.

(2012a): *Romanian Phraseological Dictionary* (Petronela Savin), Iaşi: Institutul European.

(2012b): *Universul din lingură. Despre terminologia alimentară românească*, (Petronela Savin), Iaşi: Institutul European.