# Interview: Participation 3

# I: I don't think we have told you anything about this project I'm trying to look into helping make a tool that could aid social science researchers when they are doing research around social media. And basically, before I start, I thought the easiest thing to do would be to actually speak to people who have done some research with social media and to discuss a little bit about your project, what you did and why. Like what tools you used or if you used anything and what you would like to be able to do and what you did with your data, if that makes sense?

M: Yes, sure. basically using this big theoretical framework to look how it transformed these communities and how it has changed the way they operate. And so there was several ideas how to do this. to make my task easier and to focus on the online element only, so not to go anywhere. But then I was kind of – the problem was that it's quite complicated to build a strong argument on an online data, you have to put too much assumptions so sometimes, sometimes – just because when you are focusing on – not on the quantitative side of the question and try to research meanings, you actually have too much to suggest on what happens online and to give too much of interpretation to this. the attention should be paid to.

# I: So you discussed the fact that you've done a little bit with Facebook and Twitter and then you've tried to do stuff with other social media sites that are big in Russia. So when you were gathering the data from these sites, you said you used Social Baker, when you were doing your first project, how did you collect the information from Facebook?

M: It was in total – I analysed the structures and it was thematic analysis of ten thousand five hundred and forty something posts so I've made –it was all made sort of manually! So it took me a really long time. And at the other end of – you know, when it comes down to some visual materials, at the moment I cannot see any kind of software – maybe it will allow us to find something but to make sense of this visual materials I think we are quite distant from something to – the (*meaning)* and you build your argument that this picture represents something and has this cultural references. It still requires a kind of additional – personal effort as a researcher, software won't do this for you.

# I: When you did your thematic analysis, what did you do that in or did you just do it quite literally by hand and paper?

M: I did it, yeah, basically just two levels of abstraction so I sort of put them in kind of separate categories to see what the deviations with this categories, it gave me several central topics and then from this several central topics I made another kind of step to general interest of these communities, tried to define what is the central – the core interest of this community and this produced several cases with deviations and then you can build your argument, a comparison with different cases. That's how it worked for me**.**

# I: So you've said that you've done thematic analysis, did you analyse Twitter data or your current project data in any other way or how are you doing your analysis for your current project?

M: Actually this social media monitoring tools, I used only to look at the dynamics. And what I've seen …you know, I was searching for some kind of unexpected deviation or something unexpected but it turned to be that you know, the online activity, it followed the same horizon of events as offline events. And when you look at the topics at this point and then interpretations of what happened. In this sense nothing like really revolutionary. So in a way I tried to visualise how these communities positioned online and then to build my argument on sort of link-analysis and maybe it's where you have to look at basically some tool which would allow to analyse and define the links between communities online. Then it will allow us to – (not be) frightened to speak about different forms of social capital. I think something like this would be interesting and useful, so I will suggest some visualisation tool which would allow us to define the relationship between members of groups and between groups with each other. So different level of (*nodes), (nodes*) as people and *(nodes)* as communities. So I think it will be kind of interesting, their reaction to look at. And then maybe something exists, there are constant updates, I've seen this visualisation global Tweets and so on, so sometimes it exists but there is no substantial analysis which allow us to look at different kinds of relationships within communities.

# I: So you mentioned a bit before – what other sort of information or data do you gather around as well as the social media? You said before you did actual interviews and ethnographic, do you…?

M: Altogether methods, so offline methods**?**

# I: Yes.

M: It was expert interviews with *(members)* of this diaspora communities. And yeah, they were quite important, I have to say – just because these people are either responsible for this online resources or they define general policy and so on. So they explain to you how they use social media and so on. And well then I used participant observation so, for instance, I see on Facebook and then I go there and then I try to see which communities make open or closed events like this, who are the gatekeepers and so on so just see how community operates and to which extent it is open, what is the relationship between members and so on. And online methods was this link analysis so I tried to I also made a difference on the level of community and individual levels. And I came to the conclusion that on the level of community, the boundaries are really sharp and clear and communities are, for instance, , you know. But I found that on community level, they are really clear-cut, they don't interact on the level of communities so I found that conflict at that time.. So it kind of was not that straightforward and this data came from biographical interviews with ordinary members of the diaspora and then I also tried to explain why some people, you know, stick to one community and one kind of ethnical national group and who are more cosmopolitan and so on. So, yeah, on the internet – online ethnography, I called it qualitative content analysis. Just because I was thinking about quantitative content analysis but it was quite complicated for me to find sort of precise meanings you could quantify so I struggled with this so I went to qualitative sort of representational and it's another kind of aspect or direction you can take it to, maybe it could be some integration of (*00:20:12)* and online analysis. When we could set the group and then put sort of (rods) and so on and then to analyse the whole content of the group, so it would be quite cool.

# I: Has there been anything you've not really been able to do with social media data that you really want to be able to do? So other than access sites in other languages, which is obviously a big issue?

M: Actually – there are some things I would be….quantitative side was quite clear, for instance – like membership and then you can see how it decreases and decreases and so on.. Maybe some other – what I wasn't able to do: for instance, you can get like gender groups from the – it would be quite interesting to pull out from groups like pure quantitative indicators and put them straightforward to *(00:22:10)* or (…), this would be quite cool! When we can take these demographics and start quantitative analysis, more substantial rather than – this obviously I wasn't able to do and I think this would be, when we can drag the demographic data and put this as independent variables and then take some other variable from the group and to see straightforwardly how they correlate and so on. This would be interesting. But also this procedure, they are really time consuming so I'm really slow and sometimes it's quite disappointing but to build the argument to say that – the prevailing arguments and so on within the group are 'this', it takes me ages to go over comments and to find sort of the scope of deviation within some kind of discourse or whatever. It takes me ages and I cannot figure out how to make it quicker and I hope that I will do sometime.

# I: That's really helpful. If you had a dream research tool that you could use for, say, your current project, how would it work and what would it do?

M: This is completely a good question, I don't know. I would say that, at the moment, I would be really happy with this Social Bakers tool which would allow us to analyse and *(mine)* historical data which is two or three years old, so it would be just a dream to just for now. So you could check this Social Bakers to see, you would understand more clearly what I am dreaming about.

# I: This has been really helpful, thank you. What I'm finding is everybody I speak to uses a different tool and has a different 'oh, I use this one because it does this', I'm slowly compiling a list of tools to look at and what their features are to see what it is that people find really helpful.

M: As I said before, it's absolutely clear that it's really related to particular research. Because if you speak to political scientists, for them maybe some figures, just membership numbers would be enough to build some sort of argument just because they sort of prefer to look at – like structural aspects rather than this kind of ethnographic value meaning, this sociological thing. So I would say that, yeah, this…

# I: So it's really being able to do the more qualitative analysis, it's understanding what people were meaning rather than simply counting ten people used a word, sort of thing?

M: Yeah, the tool which allows us to extract qualitative data from the group, in a really fast and coherent way. When we – for instance, in each group there is a separate discussions but if you imagine the tool when we sort of look at the group and we put some kind of origin of some phrases and so on and it allows us to structure this group, not in the way the group administrators structure it but in the way we are interested in the structures. So this would be quite useful…it will allow us to look at the actual – what is happening and not on how it's constructed or seen by the group participants. To provide our own vision rather than the self-perception or own activities of the group members. I would say this would be quite helpful as well.

# I: Thank you very much, this has been really helpful. Would you mind – it depends where the research goes, if possibly I could contact you again in the future to ask you…?

M: Yes, for sure, feel free. Yes, what you are trying to develop, it's really important as well. I feel I put too much work in what could be done easier. So that's why I feel that what you are doing is really important and another big thing, as social researchers we need something different from *(00:33:30*) research tool, it's obvious and that's why what you are doing is also like really timely.

# I: Yes and it's trying to make something that fits with how social media is growing because social media keeps changing in itself which means stuff is out of date or changes, what you are allowed to access, what you are allowed to store changes and it's making it more and more complicated but it's such an invaluable resource to look at.

M: Very true, very true. Please feel free to contact me.

**(…)**

**END**