RESEARCH ARTICLE

Social media through mobile devices in the service of archival ethnographic research: The roads & places of Greek (Magnesia) migration to the USA

Alexandros Georgios Kapaniaris

Department of Political Science and International Relations (PSiR), University of the Peloponnese, Corinth, GR 20132, Greece

Abstract: This publication is carried out in the context of the research "Archival Ethnography with the Perspective of New Technologies: From the Land of Magnets to the Promised Land - Following Overseas Migration to the USA from the Late 19th Century to the Present" as a Visiting Research Fellow at the Department of Political Science and International Relations of the University of Peloponnese. In particular, the social media and the group entitled "The roads & places of migration of residents of Greece (Magnesia) to the USA" on Facebook constituted another research tool. The interested members (relatives of immigrants and citizens of Magnesia in Greece) posted documents for investigation (photographs, letters, newspaper clippings, advertising brochures of the time, birth certificates, manuscripts, letters, *etc.*). The group members quickly posted relevant material via mobile devices (smartphones). At the same time, via messenger, some conversations resulted in oral testimonies (interviews in phases). Social media and the corresponding groups that can be created can be used in humanities research (history, folklore, archival ethnography) as digital notebooks using smartphones at any time and from various parts of a country. This article presents social media as internet technologies that can be used in collecting and digitizing evidence that can be useful in the analysis and elaboration of evidence-based research (archival ethnography).

Keywords: archival ethnography, migration, social media

1 Introduction

The research "Archival Ethnography through the Perspective of New Technologies: From the Land of Magnets to the Promised Land - Tracking Overseas Migration to the USA from the Late 19th Century to the Present" involves recording, digitizing, studying, interpreting and the emergence of the history of the migration of the Magnesians (Regional Unit of Magnesia & Northern Sporades) to the USA at the end of the 19th century until today as a cultural, economic and social phenomenon.

The research will look for and study human stories of immigration, critical biographies of active people in America (economic immigrants), and investigate the political, social, and economic context of the time associated with Magnesian economic immigrants in America. Finally, there will focus on the gender perspectives of relatives and immigrant women.

In addition, the research will focus on the political and economic reasons that directed the people of Magnesia to America for a better future. The main questions that the research will try to answer are: a) why did the men and women of Magnesia immigrate to America at that time? b) what were the economic conditions prevailing in Magnesia and Greece? and c) what were the conditions of their stay in America, employment, and return home?

The research will also be based on using technology as a methodological tool and as a means of recording, documenting, and highlighting archival material. The material will be collected and processed, an experience that also exists in similar research and practices (Kapaniaris, 2020a; Kapaniaris, 2020b; Kapaniaris, 2022; Kapaniaris & Varvounis, 2002).

Additionally, the use of the internet and social media applications using mobile devices can enhance such research to draw and display evidence, oral histories and digital narratives (Aguayo et al., 2022; Kapaniaris & Zampetoglou, 2021; Mohammed, 2022). Internet technology and technologies will also be used in the digitization stage and in creating a website and a repository of oral testimonies – evidence (Drolia et al., 2020; Tallou, 2022).

2 From field notes to digital research notebooks

The types of rough research notes during an investigation that were used by generations of researchers and are still used today were and are personal journals, various rough manuscripts,

and hasty introductory notes (heading words) written in pencil on paper (Kastriti et al., 2022). With the development of technology, new recording technologies began to be used, as well as photographic and audio "rough impressions", with mobile devices (smart mobile phone and tablet computer), contributions in social media (blogs, websites, Facebook groups) and communication (messenger, skype) (Kalogiannakis & Papadakis, 2017a, 2017b, 2020). Of course, technology's rapid development brought even more complex digital technologies, such as online applications (apps) for field notes and recording maps (Karakose et al., 2022; Kapaniaris & Varvounis, 2019a, p. 11).

3   The role of social media in research (Facebook groups)

Social media was gradually associated with interaction and communication between groups of people through online communities (Kosinski et al., 2015). During empirical research, social media's primary purpose is related to the social interaction between people who create, share or exchange information and ideas within virtual communities and networks (Franz et al., 2019).In particular, the use of groups (*e.g.* on the social network Facebook) is helpful during the collection, recording, documentation and highlighting of historical records and associations, as well as for the correlation and completion of the sources and documents that make up a file or a collection. Publicizing research involving archival evidence, a person or a family, an event, or a biography several times can cause the participation of relevant people who, through social networks, network and contribute together to the research requests, ultimately enriching the data available to the researcher (Kapaniaris & Varvounis, 2019b, p. 12).

4   The role of online communication media in research

The possibility of recording a friendly and relaxed conversation or an even more organized, structured interview which can then be transcribed with the interviewee's consent, can be achieved through online communication. Especially when the research does not lend itself to a face-to-face meeting, such as working through Facebook groups after the interviewee's consent to use video or voice calls through Facebook tools. We are gradually creating a digital notebook with this kind of online communication that can be a recorded conversation or an interview through messenger through Facebook with the members of a group or a friend (Papadakis, 2018; 2021). Often, these discussions on social media can develop into long-winded texts (sheets) that are authentic recordings and are usually not completed once, leaving open pending for continuation always, depending on the mood of the interviewed group member on Facebook. Also, another essential element is that the discussion is not removed and can be continued from where it had stopped as if it had been recorded in a notebook (Kapaniaris & Varvounis, 2019b; Jaring & Bäck, 2017; Smith, 2019).

5   The identity of the Facebook group "The roads & places of migration of residents of Greece (Magnesia) to the USA."

Blogs and social media groups such as Facebook can enhance research in humanities studies across diverse topics, archives, and associations (Kapaniaris & Varvounis, 2019a; Kapaniaris & Varvounis, 2019c). The group "The roads & places of migration of residents of Greece (Magnesia) to the USA" was created on September 21, 2021. (see Figure 1)
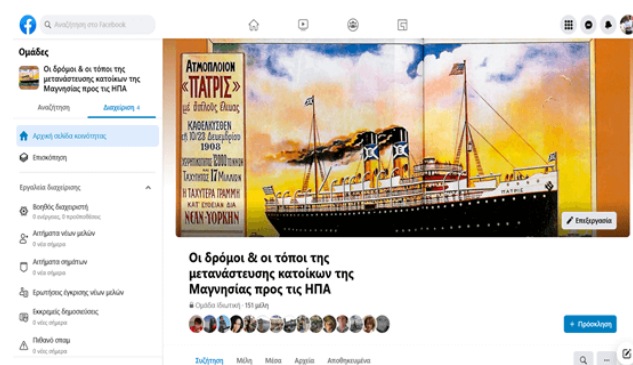

Figure 1   The group "The ways & places of migration of residents of Greece (Magnesia) to the USA" on the social network Facebook

Until November 2022, it consisted of 151 members who were relatives of old immigrants, citizens from various villages of Magnesia in Greece and citizens from Volos. The group is at https://www.facebook.com/groups/ameriki/ and is private, requiring registration and approval by the creator and researcher. During one year of operation of this expert group, there were 17 crucial publications, eight relevant comments and 236 reactions to the publications. One hundred twenty-eight members remained active, while on average, members posted, commented or reacted the most at 8:00 PM and 12:00 PM. On average, members posted, commented or reacted the most on Friday.

Suppose one considers that the group's information was listed, the reasons for the creation of this group purely researched with what this implies in limitations. In that case, one realizes that the group moved in perfect sizes concerning the participation and contribution of its members.

6   Evidence and stories of migration through group members' posts

To give us the quality of the posts and the contribution of the team members, either with migration stories or with rare evidence accompanied by short descriptions, we have chosen something like metadata and present you illustrative cases: (see Figure 2)

Figure 2   The agency of the famous ship that transported immigrants from Greece to America under the title "AUSTROAMERICANA" in the city of Volos with agent Mr Lakerdas around 1900-1910 (Archive of Meni Partheni).

Evidence 1: According to the post (Meni Partheni) of evidence 1: *"Until 1907, the Greek emigration wave to America was handled by foreign steamship companies that transported the passengers to Marseilles and from there by rail to Havre or Cherbourg, where and embarked on the deep oceans of the North Atlantic. Nevertheless, the Austrian company "Austroamericana" and the German "Hamburg American Line" started from the port of Patras".* (see Figure 3)

source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hamburg_America_Line

Figure 3   The Greatest Steamship Company in the World, Twin Screw Express Service 1899 ad in The Mail and Express (New York City), from A pictorial description of Broadway from The Mail and Express Advertisement 14.

This post gave us essential information about the transport networks of immigrants from Greece, from Volos, through a corresponding agency in America. Also, the rare photo where the agency is distinguished is essential.

After that, another member of the group (Vasilis Kaounas) additionally posted another relevant document from the local newspaper of Volos, "Thessalia", on 11/05/1906 about the ship "AUSTROAMERICANA", as if he wanted to document the above post. It works in a complementary way, as a volunteer offers another piece of the puzzle, restoring a way of tinning a story about to unfold. The publication of the local newspaper of Volos mentions information about the regular line between Greece and North America through the company

"AUSTROAMERICANA". The information relates to the days and times of departure, the seats on board (1200 third class and 75 first class seats), the conditions on board, the respective preparations of passengers and the way tickets are issued. (see Figure 4, 5)

Figure 4   Publication of the local newspaper of Volos, "Thessalia", on 11/05/1906 about the ship "AUSTROAMERICANA" (Archive V. Kaounas)

Figure 5   Advertisement for the ship "AUSTROAMERICANA", which ran the Greece-America route from the Port of Patras.

Immigration history 1: According to the post (Yiannis Koniordos), which refers to two letters and a photo:

The following letters from February 23, 1904, bore the signature of the well-known political leader of Volos Georgios Filaretos and were sent to his nephew Giannis Grammenos in Argalasti. The brother of Yiannis Grammenos, Athanasios, with his relative Argalastiotis Nikoleris (from the village of Argalasti), requested a letter of recommendation to travel to New York. G. Filaretos addressed his letter to Miliotis (from the village of Milies Pelion) K. Kamilaris, who was already in America to help the new immigrants. At the same time, in his "transmission" to G. Grammenos, he informs him that when they "pass through Athens", he will also introduce them to someone from Schina in Athens to get a letter of recommendation. (see Figure 6)
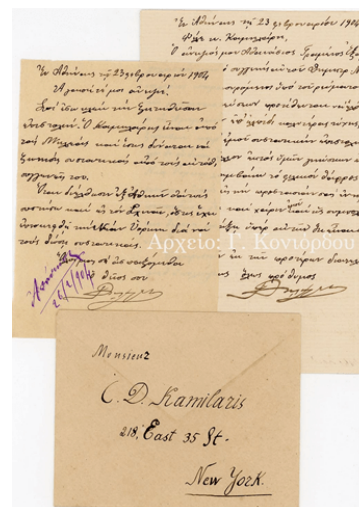

Figure 6   The letters and the envelope of the well-known political leader Georgios Filaretos sent to K. Kamilaris (from the village of Milies Pelion), who was already in America (Archive of G. Koniordou)

Letter 1:

"In Athens on February 23, 1904

Friend Mr Kamilaris,

My nephew Athanasios Grammenos Exargalasti and his relative Dimitr. Nikoleris, carried away by the current of emigration, intending to come to America in the hope of a better fortune, asked me for a recommendation letter. I, none other than you, who know me in New York, take the friendly courage to recommend them to your protection in the belief that and for my sake and as a fellow citizen, you want a deed in their favour that is possible.

Thanks in advance; I am willing to accept

G. Filaretos" (see Figure 7)

Figure 7   Athanasios Grammenos in America (Archive of G. Koniordou)

Letter 2:

"In Athens on February 23, 1904

My dear nephew,

Enclosing the letter of recommendation. Kamilaris is from Milea and may be able to request recommendations from his relatives.

When they pass through Athens, I will also introduce them to Schinan, who has visited New York, to give them recommendations.

We all embrace you

your uncle

G. Filaretos"

These documents shed light on the ways and networks used to make the experience of migrating to an unknown place smoother. According to the member (Yiannis Koniordos) who made the post, it is possible the letter was not used after it was found in Argalasti. However, Athanasios Grammenos and Nikoleris finally managed to go to America. The former stayed and died there, and the latter returned.

Immigration History 2: The following post (Argyris Zafeiridis) refers to a family photograph of A. Zafeiridis, from a relative (grandfather's brother), led to the creation of a remote interview in the photograph below. (see Figure 8)

Figure 8   George N. Ploumistos in America (Archive A. Zafirides)

From the post's text that went with the above photo, *"The Zagorians (from the village of Zagora Pelion) did not thrive only in Egypt but carrying the DNA of Odysseus found themselves in many places such as the USA. They worked diligently to get back on their feet and return proudly to their homeland. In the photo, George N. Plumistos, brother of my maternal grandfather, was in America in the interwar period.* The opportunities that can arise for a researcher based on a photographic testimony is that he can search for relatives and record an oral testimony providing new findings for his research.

7   Conclusions

Considering that the social media Facebook is still used by many active users over the age of thirty, the possibility of exploiting the data generated by Facebook users also increases. Thus, a large part of the activity of Facebook users in groups consists of creating (and commenting on) written posts, thus increasing the potential use of data for research. However, we must remember that conducting a content analysis of Facebook user posts requires adapting research methods for more traditional qualitative data sources (Franz et al., 2019).

There is also a reflection on whether we can use other social media, such as blogs or Twitter, in humanities studies. According to Terras (2012), academics must work using social media to have a digital presence and help disseminate their research to colleagues and the wider community.

As Ross (2011) also mentions, social media is increasingly attracting the attention of researchers interested in their potential and impact. Social networks, blogs, podcasts, and crowd-sourcing are now at the centre of research in the digital humanities (Lavidas et al., 2022; Papadakis, et al., 2021).

In the case of our research "Archival Ethnography Through the Perspective of New Technologies: From the Land of Magnets to the Promised Land - Tracking Overseas Migration to the USA from the Late 19th Century to the Present", by making use of the feature of the private group on Facebook through the contribution of the members either with stories of migration (oral testimonies) or with rare documents accompanied by short descriptions, something like metadata (metadata) we were given the possibility to expand the scope of our archival research (new evidence – new stories, a new conversation with the archival material) and the group acted as an ambassador and mediator in subsequent live encounters with relatives of immigrants who travelled to America in the early 19th century.

Indeed, using other social media (*e.g.*, blogs) could be the next step in searching for even more stories and evidence. Also, can be used as a tool to make our research known to society by attracting even more collaborators – relatives of migration stories and residents of Magnesia.

Conflicts of interest

The author declares that they have no conflict of interest.

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