

**Tradition, Communities and Social Media:
How Tradition of Sewing Romanian Blouse Moved from
Offline Gatherings to Online Communities**

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Abstract: In the modern world, changes are happening with high speed, while traditions and cultural identity of communities are faced with forces that redefine them in many ways. We observe the journey that the tradition of sewing Romanian blouses is having from ancestral village to city life and modern online times. At first, this tradition was part of the mandatory activities that were happening in the Romanian village life back at the beginning of the 20th century, because of the conditions of small communities with homogeneous interests and occupations, and similar time conditions, but with a space limitation in terms of geographical area. Moving to the city, the tradition was lost at the level of common group activity, due to the context of big communities, with a big variety of people and interests, with a bigger space and time limitation, but was somehow re-enacted due to the new context of social media. Despite the existence of heterogeneous communities nowadays, Facebook groups are a perfect opportunity to display Romanian traditions through Facebook groups. In Romania, a special movement began in 2014 when Romanian women started to sew again the Romanian blouses in their homes, and moved the gathering from the village time in the online environment. The purposes of this article are to show how traditions are now subject to a new reinvention due to online communication, to highlight the importance of the active participation of the initiator of the community and its members in the online discussion. They are creating a public discourse that is reshaping an old tradition in new modern ways. Using Beckstein's model of living tradition based on Hobsbawn's theory of invented tradition, I provide an insight into the characteristics of evening gatherings in Romania ("sezatoare") on the Facebook public group of "Semne Cusute in Actiune". Using qualitative content analysis of over 1500 comments, the research defines the main categories of messages that underline its functions, in comparison with the old historic model of evening gathering presented in ethnographic studies. While the economic function is clear in both cases, the social and spiritual functions are different due to the different contexts in which they took place.

Keywords: tradition, living tradition, invented tradition, social media, virtual community, evening gathering, *ia*, Romanian blouse.

1. Introduction

Since 2014, there has been an important movement in the Romanian social media around the traditional products and promotion of Romanian traditions. Since 2012 I have been following the work and activity of "Semne Cusute" (Sewed Signs) that developed now into a big community of over 29.000 people interested to learn about the tradition of sewing a Romanian Blouse (*ia* – in Romanian). All this started with the occasion of the first International Celebration of Romanian Blouse, on June 21, 2014, when the Facebook group "Semne Cusute in Actiune" (*Sewed Signs in action* – abbreviated from now SCiA)

was created with the purpose of helping as many people as possible to sew their own *ia*, as it was done in the traditional Romanian villages.

In this study, I will analyse the ways in which this online behavior can be defined as an invented tradition that is similar with the old ancestral evening gatherings. Using the “living tradition model” developed by Beckstein (2017), based on the work of Hobsbawn, Piper and Payton (apud Beckstein, 2017) and the ethnological definition of the evening gathering, I provided a qualitative content analysis of the messages posted on the Facebook group of “Semne Cusute in Actiune” (SCiA), in order to identify the similarities and differences between the online community and the evening gatherings.

2. Related Work

2.1 The “Living Tradition” Model

We can look at society as a sum of actions and beliefs that were invented and created at a certain time for a specific purpose. “Everything in society and culture begins as an invention. It becomes a tradition when people ignore its origin, inventor and purpose” (Shida, 1999, p.195). Most, if not all, traditions change because of the flow of life and the natural replacement of one aspect that becomes old to another one that is more relevant to the living times. All these are done by other humans who can destroy, re-invent or create new ones according to the needs of a temporal context. “Moreover, people must not only accept the invention as an invention but, at the same time, perceive it as a tradition” (Shida, 1999, p. 195).

Different views upon tradition “have emerged in parallel development with concepts of modernity, nationality, and creativity describing human progress and identity” (Bronner, 1998, p. 48). The author also states that understanding traditions implies understanding the human relationships, from individual to group, society and nation, all these framed in the context of social and historical aspects, of time and space, of the beliefs and opinions about selves and others.

Following the folklorists’ perspectives, Bronner (1998) mentions that, in the end, “meaning resides in the ways people express themselves through shared, local knowledge”. Bronner considers tradition as a tool for linking the past with continuity and convention in order to express the future activities. Most of the times, tradition is seen by him as the primarily source of basic learning, that is starting from early life and continuing throughout one’s life. This is why, in the end, tradition is “for drawing a sense of the self from a social world - that sense of being part of a sequence of generations that many view as desirable for a sense of belonging. Thus being in a tradition suggests being a link in a social chain reaching well back in time.” (Bronner, 1998, p. 10)

Tradition, in Shils’ perspective, was the basis in order for a society to function that was created by the “need to direct action with things, works, words, and modes of conduct created in the past”. (Shils apud Bronner, 1998, p. 43)

Anya Peterson Royce considers that traditions are “expressions less of heritage

than of a style”, in this way considering that heritage can be considered sometime a burden for new generations. (apud Tuleja, 1997, p.4). According to Tuleja (1997), this definition “allows for an appreciation of personal choice and diachronic change, which tradition – the more traditional term – does not.” (Tuleja, 1997, p.4) Thus we can have a broad view in order to include, as well, in the area of traditions practices that “may or may not come trailing ancient glories.” (Tuleja, 1997, p. 4)

The authenticity aspect of traditions is an aspect very closely linked with Hobsbawn and Ranger’s concept of “invented tradition” (1983/ 2000). Their most important finding was that practices and behaviors that are mostly labeled as “primordial, often betray a recent origin – that they have been traditionalized, artificially aged, to serve elite agendas” (Hobsbawn & Ranger, apud Tuleja, 1997, p. 3). Reacting to the fast pace of social change, the invented traditions are in fact “revived customary traditional practices” (Tuleja, 1997) or new ones carefully planned in order to answer to the modern times and to the political objectives.

Understanding this process implies to understand the influences that “social structure has exerted on ritual and ceremony, and to clarify the mutual relation between the inventors of a tradition and its acceptors” (Shida, 1999, p. 195)

The concept of ‘invented tradition’ refers to a set of regulated practices of a ritual or symbolic nature seeking to “inculcate certain values and norms of behaviours by repetition” (Hobsbawn, 2000, p. 1). Invented traditions are connected “to and build on this past” (Hobsbawn & Ranger, apud Wang, 2017), especially when the old ones are weakened in a society that is faced with rapid transformations. They create the framework for people to create groups according to a specific social context and build on the “social cohesion and collective identities” (Hobsbawn apud Wang, 2017, p. 505).

As Beckstein (2017) states, “traditions are usually understood as ‘living’ entities that come in overlapping varieties and evolve over time, the socially valuable functions attributed to tradition tend to presuppose invariability in ways of thinking and acting.” (Beckstein, 2017, p. 491) Understanding the models defined for tradition is therefore important for tracking its evolution in different contexts. For this, Dittman’s definition of tradition is used. A tradition act is called when “a tradent (T) passes on some tradition material (M) to a recipient (R)” (Dittman apud Beckstein, 2017, p. 496). In order to have a tradition we need at least one successful act like this.

In understanding traditions, Beckstein (2017) follows *the static model* that was developed by Pieper, Hobsbawn and Popper (Hobsbawn, 2000, Pieper, 2010, Popper, 1972), in which the tradition material (M) is handled over to the next generations in terms of “causal identity” (Beckstein, 2017, p. 496), in a chain transmission of one-to-one or one-to-many, according to the number of recipients. The material remains the same though, with little variations, in some moderate models, when there was a “replace numerical identity with qualitative identity” (Beckstein, 2017, p. 498).

The living model is presented by Payton with a “criterion for faithful membership in a tradition” (Beckstein, 2017, p 499), which is requiring that the material of tradition to resemble from one generation to another from qualitative aspect. The limitation of this

model is that the material of tradition can change one aspect to another on long periods of time, but in the end the result can differ in a bigger proportion than the original. Beckstein is improving this model, by naming it the “living tradition model”, in order to “to replace the qualitative similarity with equivalence. A tradition act is successful if the set of beliefs, (or customs, etc.) held by recipients/tradents has the same overall point or prima facie purpose in the recipients’/tradents’ respective contexts of living.” (Beckstein, 2017, p. 494), so that the material of one tradition (customs, beliefs etc) is accepted to differ from one generation to another, but there is a relation of equivalence rather than similarity or identity.

Beckstein’s model takes into account two aspects that can influence the authenticity of a tradition over a long period of time: how intra/inter generational alterations are perceived and how tradition is considered authentic or not in terms of equivalence (both of them are a subject to major influences in the context of social media, a point which makes the model relevant for us).

This model is taking into consideration the historical circumstances and how the present generation is somehow obliged to “re-create the tradition material in such a way that it (in)forms the ways of thinking and acting of the present generation of recipients in the face of their current context of living” (Beckstein, 2017, p. 502). This opinion could be associated with the reception theory that supports the model of living tradition, because “tradition materials are polysemic, just like texts in the narrow sense of the word; they lack a discrete and objective structure of signification (Eco, 1979; Holub, 1984).” (Holub apud Beckstein, 2017, p. 500). Taking into account the concept of active audience, in which the receiver is creating a meaning out of the message communicated based on their cultural background and he turns from a listener into a person who is internalizing and creating a personal sense, here, the present generation who is handled over a tradition material, create their own version adapted to the new context that they live in. “The process of internalization of a tradition material, therefore, is one of making sense rather than one of listening. Recipients are active interpreters. Recipients necessarily play a co-constitutive role in the creation of meaning by resolving ambiguities and specifying vagueness in some form or another.” (Beckstein, 2017, p.500)

Bronner’s (1998) ‘creative impulse’ follows the argument presented above. Supporting this argument is also what Bronner (1998) is exposing about the creative impulse. If “invention comes from Latin its reflexive form *se invenire*, it means «to show oneself», to put oneself forward as something discovered or revealed” (Bronner apud Tuleja, 1997, p.4), Bronner considers tradition and creativity as interdependent elements. Also Shils’ perspective is enriching this through the fact that “innovations are dependent on traditions in any cultural setting” (Shils apud Bronner, 1998, p. 44). Actually this is the way in which Bronner refers to folklore, namely as “manipulated knowledge.”

The reference to audiences and reception theory is an important aspect in our study since we are going to position tradition and rituals in the social media framework, where “new media technologies enable a two-way communication, such as mobile phones and the Internet, that make active audience participation endemic to their use”

(Butsch, 2016, p. 6)

When discussing about a living tradition we cannot refer to audience as a static and impersonal collective. We are “audiencing frequently – reading, watching, listening, even cheering or shouting at the performers” (Butsch, 2016, p.1), so when it comes to tradition there is an active involvement and participation that implies the individual mental, emotional, even physical process of understanding the meaning and finding one’s own clear reasons for following or choosing the “handling down” process. In the same manner, Bronner is referring to being a follower for a specific tradition, which “means unconsciously following a severe form of cultural authority or choosing from tradition that which one finds appropriate”. (Bronner, 1998)

Following these ideas, there is a question that arises related in defining the criteria for qualitative equivalence between the actual material of tradition and the one that was inherited from other generations. Because we discuss about meaning and purpose and significance that a tradition has, the recipients’ internalization and understanding being subjective and personal. Therefore, how is the qualitative equivalence defined in order to assure the process of transmission of a tradition and not creating a new one? Which are the characteristics of a tradition that are expressing the equivalence? This limitation is important in our study since the promotion of tradition on social platforms can be easily judged as not conforming by some traditionalist voices, therefore this can raise serious debates because of subjectivity.

Despite this limitation, we will follow Beckstein’s model of living tradition (2017), since it is the one that can easily accommodate the new media in our research and the active involvement of social media users.

2.2 Ethnographic View of Evening Gathering

Having established the model of tradition to be used in this study, we looked at the environment where it is transmitted, in the old and new context: evening gathering and online gathering. Various studies (Bot et al., 2008, Amzar et al., 2013) analyse gatherings as forms of structuring the social life without describing in detail the traditions practiced there. Thus we consider that a proper comparison with the online group should be carried out. However, the information provided is useful in order to explain the functions and meanings of this happening from the village life, providing details about the organizational aspect and the folkloristic elements (related to songs and magical practices).

From an ethnographic perspective, an evening gathering is defined as being “a small gathering, from autumn and winter evenings, at which there participate, according to its nature, girls, women, boys and men. Girls and women work for themselves, and the participants discuss different facts from village life, sing almost all the folkloric repertoire, play dramatic and social games. Girls practice magical rituals in order to bring boys to the evening gathering.” (our transl., Bot et al., 2008, p. 7). These gatherings used

to take place in one house, each night until the spring labors started, and "girls, women or old ladies used to spin wool or hemp, crochets socks and jerseys, sew or spin thread" (Bot et al., 2008, p. 8).

Dumitru Amzar et al. (2013), in an attempt to reinforce the need of continuation of the evening gathering, mention that this type of gathering is, in fact, "the village's school. Here the elders used to say their advice, based on their lives, here the blouses were covered with wonderful embroidery, here the flute was singing the longing, the needs and joys of Romanian soul" (our transl., Amzar et al., 2013, p. 27). The school of the village, they say, is in fact the school of life, where values were transmitted directly, and education was a social phenomenon, compared with the school of books, where education is seen as a cultural process, and values are transmitted indirectly. The process of learning in this context is easy and without the pressure and obligation that are to be found in public schools. "In evening gathering nobody was patronizing the others, and they were learning from each other without knowing that they are learning". (our transl., Amzar et al., 2013, p. 28)

"In all situations of life in the village there are transmitted the traditional values from person to person and from generation to generation, because life always brings together the young with the old; but during evening gatherings this process is extremely powerful, as the tradition would have been set for this reason." (our transl., Amzar et al., 2013, p. 163)

Through these evening gatherings in the old ancestral village there were transmitted the spiritual values (tales, proverbs, riddles, shouts, songs, beliefs, practices, superstitions, games and dances) and the practical work values (stirring, sewing) (Amzar et al., 2013).

Bot, Bot and Benga (2008) mention four types of evening gatherings, each of them with its own role: for little girls (12-13 years old), for youngsters, for young women and for old women. The differences are obvious in terms of the activities performed, so that the gathering for youngsters has a more important spiritual and social role (for example, playing games, doing magical rituals and singing songs), while the gathering for young and old women has a more economic role (for saving gas and being more productive in working in group) and a social role in terms of discussing the life of the village more than socializing. The evening gathering for youngsters had an important role in getting to know the potential marriage candidates, so that in this space there was an opportunity for women to expose their abilities in sewing, spinning and singing.

Another important aspect that Bot et al. (2008) identify in their study is the role of the host, who supervises the behaviour of the young and initiates the participants in songs, games and magical practices. In most of the cases under study, the host was the woman of the house, while the man was missing (not to be disturbed by the noise) or was involved in storytelling. Boys and community men had the role of entertaining the atmosphere through stories, anecdotes and legends.

These happenings responded to different needs in the village life, as Amzar et al. Show (2013): the material-objective of economic need, the pshychological-subjective

need for supporting each other and being more productive, the spiritual need for finding news and folkloric performance. Adding to this, Bot et al. (2008) also mention the social role of the evening gathering for the local community.

Amzar et al. (2013) also highlight that these gatherings are the place of practicing and transmitting the traditions of sewing, stirring or other ancestral handmade work, the place to make the working blouses, “because the ceremonial blouses is good to work on them alone in the house. Nobody to know about!” (our transl., Amzar et al., 2013, p. 157) But it is also mentioned that this is the place that girls learn how to stir the wool, and later on to sew “some flies (crosses) on pieces of cloth for a puppet blouse” (Amzar et al., 2013).

From a labour point of view (Amzar et al., 2013), an ‘evening gathering’ (*sezatoarea*) is different from a ‘helping gathering’ (*claca*). Firstly, people, mostly women come to work for themselves, staying as long as they want, combining work with playing, singing and games. Secondly, people gather to a villager’s house in order to help him/her to a specific work, staying until the job is done. From a spiritual point of view (Amzar et al., 2013), an evening gathering is in the same line with the wedding and burial rituals, but being more complex than these ones, according to Amzar et al., due to the mixture between “two constitutive elements of social life: economic and spiritual; if a wedding and a burial have a specific fixed ritual composition, the structure of an evening gathering comply to more elastic rules” (our transl., Amzar et al., 2013, p. 101). Bot et al. (2008), observe that an evening gathering is more receptive to the new songs, and games, girls who would come with them being more appreciated by the community. In this way, it is visible the process of enriching the tradition by coming to the evening gathering to share “a new song, a new artistic pattern, a new shouting, a tale, a belief or an unknown custom, in order to to be heard and seen, learnt and spread in all the village.” (Amzar et al., 2013, p.164)

Table 1 provides an overview of the functions and different roles that Amzar et al. (2013) and Bot et al. (2008) identified related to evening gathering in the ancestral village life and the activities related to them.

Offline evening gathering functions and roles (Amzar et al., 2018; Bot et al., 2008)	
Function	Activities
Tradition transmission	Learning to sew Sewing working blouses (Ceremonial blouses were sewed in secret in their home)
Social	Getting to know village members, discussions about village life
Spiritual & Folklore	Games, songs and dances, magic practices, storytelling (tales, proverbs, riddles, shouts), beliefs and superstitions
Economy	Savings, gifts

Tabel 1. Offline evening gathering functions and roles
(Amzar et al., 2013; Bot et al. (2008)

3. Semne Cusute in Actiune (SCiA) – A Brief Presentation

Since 2013 the Romanian Blouse has been annually celebrated at a national and international level. Since then, many initiatives have been taking place related to traditional and folk products (perpetualicons.ro, IIANA, Folclorica, Podoabe traditionale, Comori etnografice, Etnografika, Invie Traditia, Iipedia, to name few of them). From all these initiatives, most of them have mainly had a commercial purpose, while the SCiA community has had the declared message of creating the community to pass the tradition in an authentic way¹.

SCiA started as an online support group, providing patterns and information about materials, but things have gradually started to grow. First, the community members proposed to meet in different places of Romania to sew together. Then, a contest-exhibition was done with the pieces that were created by SCiA members (AIDOMA exhibition) that firstly was at a national level and now it reached an international level (in Europe in 2018, in 2019 the exhibition was held at the Romanian Embassy from Japan).

The community also grew offline and online: *workshops and meetings* (2014),

¹ <https://www.facebook.com> accessed on 25.03.2019

online shop with materials and kits (2016), *youtube channel* (2016).

In order to understand the diachronic development of the community, I mention below the online tools² that were used:

- Blog (<http://semne-cusute.blogspot.com>): initiated in July 2012, 3 millions displays, few comments;
- Facebook Page (<https://www.facebook.com/SemneCusute/>): initiated in December 2012, 36.500 likes, some comments;
- Facebook group SciA (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/224922601040515/>): initiated in March 2014, 29.500 members, many comments;
- Web page (<https://semnecusute.ro/>): initiated in 2014, online shop, no information on displays;
- Youtube (<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCV4mtooORZz1HTQgML3hDnA>): initiated in 2016, 39800 views, 1728 subscribed, 31 videos, comments closed;
- Instagram (www.instagram.com/semne_cusute): initiated in 2018, 571 followers, 11 posts, few comments.

4. Research Objectives, Method and Corpus

When focusing on the Romanian blouse sewing tradition and how this is communicated in social media, we analyzed how the social reality is constructed online (community building, communication between the initiator and members, communication between members, stories they tell about their experience and about the tradition's history), what meaning is given to different actions (personal research and learning, communication) and to symbols (materials and tools used, pattern and symbols sewed etc) and how these tradition-related actions are similar with the offline manifestations of that specific tradition.

Using a qualitative method, we will employ a symbolic interactionism theoretical framework (Neuman, 2014), which implies that “people transmit and receive symbolic communication when they socially interact, they create perceptions of each other and social settings” (Neuman, 2014, p 91). Analyzing the community members' interaction we can extract how people position themselves related to the group and which the opinion about themselves is, and which their perceptions of their actions are. We found this approach most appropriate for the study of traditions, since the material of tradition that is passed by from one generation to another is the subject of personal subjectivity and understanding. Therefore, the content analysis of the messages that were posted in the community is an instrument to better understand perceptions of its members related to

² The data were gathered on 19.03.2019.

tradition itself, actions and people involved. Our aim is to understand how one's self is perceived in a group, how people transmit and receive symbolic communication when they socially interact.

The advantage is that in social media we have an archive of messages and groups on Facebook are a great source of social constructs built by people freely on a big variety of subjects. The disadvantage is that they are not easily accessible anymore, due to the changes in Facebook policies. We refer at language as an important way to represent how we see and represent the world, observing the messages from social media, putting them in clusters of symbols and meanings. We may interpret how the members of a group shape their online world based on their views of the offline world (Neuman, 2014).

The specific method used was ethnographic content analysis that better supports the process of interpreting documents from "the context (political and economic), medium, logic, content, format and presentation of the material" (Altheide, Schneider, 2013, p. 6), therefore the documents are becoming reflexive representations of social meanings and institutional relations to be studied. This came as an answer to the need to go beyond studying the content of the mass media, by understanding the process, meanings and key messages from the content, by understanding social meanings created by actors, including social contexts, situations, and emotions (Altheide, Schneider, 2013). Therefore, in accomplishing this research, the analysis focused on key messages (including emotions), on documents which the historic development of the community and on participative observation during the workshops in 2015.

For this study, I chose to analyse the Facebook activity in order to see the various aspects of the interaction inside the community (between the initiator and members, and between the SCiA members). Using instruments from Zelist online media³, I could analyze the activity of the Facebook page from the last year (2018 - 2019): 28 posts, fan base of 26522, fan-page interaction 2650 likes, 54 comments and 380 shares. The overall interaction index for the last year was 0,0844. Therefore, these data were not sufficient in order to carry out my analysis. Therefore I changed my point of interest to the Facebook public group, that had big limitations of interpretation, because of the new changes of Facebook regarding accessing data.

The research was done manually looking for some keywords (as „ie”, „prima ie”, „claca”, „sezatoare”) that revealed the major directions of discussions:

- the process of sewing (with advice, pictures, videos);
- recalling old memories form personal and community history;
- showing one's own work and final pieces to the community;
- involving the community in different contests and activities;
- place for expressing one's opinions about traditions, Romanian identity and current role of the community.

The corpus under study was, therefore, extremely diverse and rich (in 5 years of activity, with tens of exhibitions and workshops and tens of monthly posts). After these

³ <https://www.zelist.ro>, accessed 07.04.2019

insights, I narrowed the research to the first month within the community, in order to analyze how this community was able to develop. The method used was content analysis in order to understand:

- how social media was used in order to create the discourse around the concept of tradition of sewing;
- the degree to which this phenomenon can be called an "online evening gathering", as a continuation of the ancestral evening gathering from the village.

These questions led to an analysis of the posts in the first month of the group, in March 2014. There were 97 posts (March 20 – 31, 2014), each of them with lots of comments, therefore I narrowed again the research to the first week of the first month, having a corpus of 56 posts with a total of 1178 comments, out of which 242 belonged to the administrator of the group and the initiator (see Table 2). Each post was numbered for each day as *P#_day* and each comment was labeled as being made by *user* or by *admin* (e.g. *P2_25 user* is a comment made by an user in post number 2 on March 25, 2014).

The SCiA community members are people from all over Romania (big, medium and small cities) and also from abroad (California - US, Canada, France), Romanians who left the country several years ago and want to re-learn the tradition.

Facebook group <i>Semne Cusute in Actiune</i> March 2014			
Date	Number of posts	Total comments	Comments admin
20.mar.14	5	227	32
21.mar.14	12	132	40
22.mar.14	6	127	37
23.mar.14	1	22	3
24.mar.14	3	67	21
25.mar.14	7	34	14
26.mar.14	8	241	43
27.mar.14	14	300	51
28.mar.14	15		
29.mar.14	8		

30.mar.14	8		
31.mar.14	10		

Table 2. Number of posts and comments in SCiA (March 2014)

Table 3 provides the coding scheme for the analysis of the messages posted by both the administrator and the members.

Coding category	Themes	Main message
Tradition (technical info)	-Technical information about process of sewing -Characteristics for process and end products - Ceremonies	Learning sewing technique and patterns from different regions of Romania Exposing one's own work in process for all products (some worked in secret, as "the old way")
Authenticity	-People -Places -Values	Defining what is authentic tradition and what is kitsch
	Spirituality (as subcategory from values-authenticity)	Mentioning superstitions, stories and ritual related to sewing process
Heritage		Usable past from personal and community history
Emotions		Feelings shared by members related to the process itself
Community	-Identity -Group -Expert -Learning -Social media	How the group is formed around the expert and initiator, through support for learning and mastering the tradition
Economy		Sharing information about materials

Table 3. Coding book for SCiA online community messages

5. Findings

5.1. Comparison between Evening Gatherings and the SCiA Online Community

Six categories were taken into account to compare evening gatherings and the SCiA online community: organizing details, types of gathering, role of the host, role of participants (women, men). Table 4 shows the differences and the resemblances among offline evening gatherings and SCiA online community.

Offline evening gathering (Amzar et al., 2018; Bot et al., 2008)		SEMNE CUSUTE IN ACTIUNE Online community	
Organizing details		Organizing details	
<p><u>when</u>: each autumn and winter evening <u>where</u>: one house in the neighbourhood (few streets, according to size of the village) or at local schools</p> <p>Specific roles for women and men Gatherings differentiated based on age Membership is closed for members from local community, with specific abilities of performing the tradition. Active involvement is required.</p>		<p><u>when</u>: Online 24/7 <u>where</u>: online environment (everywhere)</p> <p>There is no specific role to women and men, no age restrictions. Membership is open, no restriction based on ability or active involvement (silent members also)</p>	
Types of evening gatherings		Types of gatherings	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Young girls - Youngsters 	More spiritual and social role	Online	Tradition role Social role Economic role
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Young women - Old women 	More economic and social role	Offline	Tradition role Social role Economic role
Role of the host		Role of the host	
Woman	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Supervising the behavior of the young -Initiating in songs, games 	Woman (initiator)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Supervising the common direction of the community - Initiating the group in the process of sewing tradition

Man	Storyteller	No man as host	
Role of the women participants		Role of members (women & men)	
Permanent participants	-Working their own products -Sharing knowledge about tradition	Moderators and top fans Active members	- Working their own products - Sharing knowledge about tradition
		Silent members	No information found
Role of the men participants			
Occasional participants	Walking in groups from one gathering to another		
Way of communicating		Way of communicating	
Oral		Written	Pictures, links, texts, videos

Table 4. Comparison between evening gatherings as described in ethnographic studies and online community on Facebook

Following the “living tradition model” (Beckstein, 2017), we can state that there are qualitative equivalences between these two manifestations since tradition is answering to the main purpose of passing down to next generations the knowledge and skills of sewing Romanian Blouse, using the context of internet environment. Also, adding to the old way, SCiA strengthened the community by organizing offline activities, which brought people together and re-enacting the evening gatherings in modern times.

5.2. Comparison between Evening Gatherings and SCiA Online Community in Terms of Roles and Functions

A comparison between offline ancestral gatherings and online community needs to be done, in order to better understand the categories from content analysis and how they are associated. We used the codebook presented in Table 3 to analyse the messages posted in the online community by the initiator of this community, Ioana Corduneanu (administrator of the group) and by its members as well.

5.2.1. The Tradition Category

As in old times, tradition is explained in details, the online users talk about the materials and stages that need to be followed. The social media posts contain a lot of details about the *technique* of cutting and sewing the blouse and the pattern, while this is the declared scope of the Facebook group, to support the correct learning and practicing. There are discussed the *phases* of the process (*washing, cutting, sewing, merging parts*) and different *sewing techniques* (*crosses, tehnica pielea gainii, motiv paharele mireului, cusatura zig-zag, cheite*), words that in later development of the community will become hashtags (#cut). There are very clearly mentioned the *instruments* used (*centimeter, thimble, loom, thread, needle*) and the way how experienced members from the community choose them.

The *characteristics* regarding the process of sewing and the characteristics of the final product refer to its *beauty*: “a proud blouse”⁴ (P1_25 admin); “very beautiful, very loved, ie de pomina” (P1_20 admin); “dreamy” (P3_22 user); “a beauty” (P6_22 user, P5_22 user, P1_23 user); “a wonder” (P1_20 user); “wonderful” (P1_26 admin, P1_25 admin); “beautiful things” (P10_21 user); “two beautiful blouses” (P10_21 user); “the most beautiful” (P6_22 user); “its’s perfect” (P9_21 user).

A blouse manually sewed by the community members is „the ideal blouse” (P1_20 admin), that “catches the eyes and the hands of the one who looks” (P1_24 user), becomes a “beautiful story” (P12_21 user), thus becoming „pieces of art” (P6_21 user).

The pattern in work or the drawing that inspires the future blouse is defined through words implying its *beauty* (“beautiful, discreet and elegant” P1_27 admin; “Superb” P12_27 user, P3_26 admin, P5_22 user, P1_23 user, P6_22 user; “the most spectacular” P1_23 admin; “Fabulous” P10_27 user; “Splendid” P1_23 user; “absolutely special” P1_24 user; “surprising” P3_26 admin), through words highlighting one’s *emotion* (“cheerful” P6_22 admin; “something sober” P6_22 user) or through words emphasizing the difficulty of the sewing (“very hard” P6_22 user)

As in the offline gathering, different *celebrations* are mentioned, mainly the International Day of Romanian Blouse, that was set then for the first time on the 21st of June, and also Easter Holiday. The purpose of the mentioning of celebration was to highlight that they set a context of delaying the sewing of the blouse (P3_26 user, P1_27 user) since it is prohibited to sew during religious celebrations.

In all posts members share their work, their status of the blouse and the final image of the product. There are some people working in secret and sharing only the final product. For example, in one case (P8_27.03.2014) the admin said “she sewed her ia after an old pattern. And she worked secretly. As in the past.” Thus it is acknowledged the old tradition, but it is emphasized a new approach according to the times we are living in: “we want to see pictures, pictures. It is an experience to be shared” (P1_20 admin).

⁴ All the posts were in Romanian and we supplied our translation from each post.

5.2.2. The Authenticity Category

There are mentioned different actors who play an important role in promoting an authentic tradition of sewing the Romanian blouse:

- experts in this field: artisans, different associations, shops (Varvara Buzila - P6_22 admin, Adela Petre from Buzau, human heritage - P9_21 admin, Marius Matei from Timisoara - P5_25 admin, Ioan-Sorin Apan's group from Brasov - P4_20 user)
- museums that are presented either as good examples (Romanian Peasant Museum is one of the places "where you can feel their desire to promote the exhibits" P1_20 user) or as negative examples ("Culture Museum (from Iasi - nOC) is closed for 10 years" P8_26admin) and comparisons are made with big museums of the world ("the ethnographic collection from Metropolitan Museum has those wonderful Romanian costumes" P1_20 user)

Different *places and regions* are mentioned, mostly related to choosing a pattern to sew that has a meaning with the family history ("region where I come from" P4_22 user; "my area" P3_22 user P4_20 user; "pattern specific to my area" P2_22 user; "area where I come from" P6_22 user).

The analysis of the sources of inspiration about the drawings and their authenticity is made in a geographical and historical context, by discussing the Germanic or Slavic influences from different models found on the internet or in product fairs ("flowers are of Slavic influence, from South, it is not a Carpathian influence" P6_22 admin; "the rose on the blouses is, mainly, a clear Slavic influence, especially Bulgarian. As fruits on blouses appear especially at Croatians" P6_22 admin; "the Saxons didn't wear Romanian blouses" P5_25admin; "In Transylvania they did not sew with *altita, incret and rauri*" P5_25user)

The *authentic* past is remembered from personal and family experiences ("our parents had the luck to catch traditions more authentic than we did" P1_20 user). Old interbelic photo albums are considered to be few authentic sources of inspiration ("D. Comsa's album" P5_25 user; „this is how I saw it was made in old albums" P2_22 admin). There is also a kitsch past and present that are mentioned, related to personal experiences ("it's a general chaos" P6_22 admin; „this⁵ doesn't mean authentic and tradition", kitsch P6_22user, "(...) because of the desire to see the streets without those damn occidental cloths that are making women look masculine" P3_26 user)

Many messages focus on defining what is good and what is wrong in the desire to create in this group an authentic continuation of the tradition ("follow the original colours" P6_27 user; "correct altita" P6_22 admin; "I want a Romanian blouse made of my own hands and I promise to make a good research" P3_26 user).

In this respect, the purpose of the Facebook group „Semne Cusute in Actiune", is stated very clearly by the users, namely that of defending the original and authentic

⁵ It refers to a blouse from a shop

tradition: “the efforts⁶ are of encouraging members to sew traditional blouses” P6_22 user; “here we focus on rediscovering and reviving a treasure, parts of history and stories that are not meant to disappear” P2_27 user.

5.2.3. The Community Category

One of the main parts of the analysis focuses on the way in which the virtual community and group identity builds up through posts and comments, and on the way in which the position as an expert that the administrator is taking is helpful or not.

There are many remarks related to the national identity and to the Romanians' view regarding virtues and talents (“You are to be admired. Maybe through this campaign we will learn more than to sew the blouses ourselves, we will learn about history and meaning. Maybe we will learn to respect each other, to love more and to be more united. To remember that we are not a nation of thieves” P3_27 user).

Sewing becomes an attribute of nationality, of the image of being a Romanian woman: “we are proud to be Romanians” P6_25 user; “I believe that every Romanian woman has engraved, in her genetic material, the pattern of a blouse and the way how to sew it” P5_26 user.

The “social cohesion and collective identities” (Hobsbawm apud Wang, 2017, 505) are pointed out here through messages like: “it’s encouraged to save the old patterns for blouses through accurate copying” P5_27 user; “there are SciA people who are fond of traditions, who document themselves about this and want to unveil the values” P1_20 user; in this group there are “the ones with the desire to learn, desire for knowledge” P1_20 user. It is very clearly stated the mission of the group: “the efforts of Semne Cusute and of other people from the group are of encouraging sewing traditional Romanian blouses” P6_22 user.

The spirit of the old evening gathering is emphasized through the theme of the virtual group: “virtual gathering (claca)” P1_20 user; “I understand that here is a sort of ... gathering (claca)” P12_21 user). The group is a place to show the process and the result, but also a place to learn the correct tradition (“this group is meant to eliminate the mistakes. So... no offence!” P5_27 user), to support each other (“you are a great adviser” P3_26 user) and to provide a healthy competition (“I was the first and now I am the last... I hope to come in front next week” P3_26 user)

Offline gestures and behaviours are invoked (“knock!knock! can I come?” P1_20 user; “thank you for accept” P2_20 user) or salutes like being in the same room (“Good night!” P6_21 admin; “My dears, Happy New Year and good to have you here” P3_26 user). They are sharing their work as they are sharing the same space (“please show us” P1_20 admin; “Girls, look what I found today” P5_22 user; “I will show you pictures” P9_21 user)

Learning is an important aspect of the group, therefore it is analyzed under the tradition category, because in this context, learning becomes a social activity of the

⁶ It refers to the efforts of this group.

community: through support and active involvement in the social media the group evolves in understanding different patterns and learning the specific techniques of the tradition.

Here we can observe messages of trust and disbelief in one's own powers that receive supportive and encouraging answers ("I have never cut before" P13_27 user; "I am not good at all" P7_21 user; "I am not productive anymore" P9_27 user; "Never say never" P3_26 user; "I started. Anyway, I won't quit, I will try" P9_21 user; "I hope to succeed" P5_22 user). There are a lot of messages that express personal courage, patience and determination or invitation towards these attitudes ("I made myself courageous" P13_27 user; "Come on to research!" P3_25 user; "you will quickly learn how to handle" P1_24 admin). This online community is also a place for requesting and offering help ("who can help me?" P6_25 user; "Can you give me a hint" P12_21 user; "Girls, I am in trouble" P1_20 user).

A lot of motivation is offered by the initiator, her messages being extremely important in building a space of trust and support ("really it is simple, you will find all you need, the easiest solution, you already showed you can" P1_20 admin). The members' answers are alike: "will, hand, heart and eyes will make any needle to be of gold" P1_20 user; "you get used by practice, let your untrained hands to align with will and love and then they will be the most gifted" P1_20 user, "The hand will start working by itself, while the mind will relax and you will be ZEN" P1_24 admin)

The administrator's knowledge and expertise reveal technical details, but also personal stories and experiences ("my grandmother taught me to sew" P9_27 admin, "after 2 years of daily research and drawing I believe I could make my own pattern, but only for the areas that I studied. I wouldn't go outside those areas" P11_27 admin)

The personal experience is encouraged to be also shared by the members, so that in the end most of them post messages as "I chose", "I believe", "I tried", "I wouldn't recommend it", "personally, I believe".

Analysing the data, the initiator of the group had 30% of the posts and 20% of the comments from the total of corpus, which means that she leaves enough space for other members to express themselves. This would be the definition of a host from the ancestral evening gathering: to teach other persons and leave the guests to talk. With all this encouragement and advice, the community becomes a place where everyone can learn a new way of sewing "explained with meaning and love" (P1_24 admin) in "7 steps" (P1_24 admin) so that to understand that "the blouse is not a sprint, but a sewing marathon" (P1_24 admin).

5.2.4. The Spirituality Category

As a subtheme of authenticity, spirituality is present in messages from the group by invoking the value of their work, the symbolic meaning of each action and the technique used: "(...) each model that is re-born is enriching us spiritually and gives us

hope that we will see other initiatives as well” P4_20 user; “meaning of curling⁷: practical role and symbolic role” P1_24 admin; “blouses were made for entire life and even more.” P13_27user

Beyond the elements of technique, tradition has a story in which the person that sews becomes a character, and everybody starts to say it through what she is and what she does, thus the sewing action becomes a ritual: “each blouse has its story, each area has different elements and colours” P1_23 user; “the cutting was ritualic. Breathe, the next one will be cutting by itself” P6_21 admin; “Indeed it was ritualic...” P21 user; “Silence is golden. Where the blouses stand by themselves, you have to learn to listen to their silence. Light, shadow, volume – cloth architecture. All they can say are some whispers, it’s enough. Silence for the eyes and mind.” P1_26 admin; “What a beauty: to work, admire, love and learn to listen the silence of what you or others worked” P1_26 user; “I wish you to paint beautiful stories on your blouses” P7_27 user; “this tradition is calligraphy on cloth” P1_24 admin.

We also identified superstitions and beliefs related to the process of sewing. For example, a member of the community is telling a superstition that she has in her village, as an answer to different obstacles or when people were not productive: “In my village it was a superstition: girls had to let a lizard to cross their hands and then to say «spotted lizard, teach me how to sew»⁸ in order to gain talent. I did this, as a child. And I sewed, knitted, cutting... Will it be from the lizard or from family heritage? I worked as you do: with kids near me, after they fall asleep... but what a joy I had when I finished a piece. (P5_26 – user)

Beliefs are seldom invoked in the process of sewing (“As Good God wants!” – P3_26 user) or related to the activity on the group (“God bless you for this initiative” P3_26 user) or when portraying the Romanian people (“Romanian are good and honest people, with fear of God” P27 admin).

5.2.5. The Economy Category

One of the main functions of this community is the economic one. This function implies to put at the disposal of its members the information regarding the materials needed for creating a Romanian blouse from scratch. This is how the community starts, when the initiator, Ioana Corduneanu, is sharing a list of materials and suppliers. Later on in the development of the community, an online shop will appear to meet the specific requests regarding the colours and the quality of materials.

Even if we are in an online community, its members still prefer to check and test the material in an offline shop (“I wish to touch the material before buying” P3_26 – user; “you can ask samples to see how you can work on it” P7_27 user; “Oh, oh how I miss home and the magazines full of materials from Cluj” P3_26 – user). The community becomes a barometer for what is expensive or cheap (“a little bit too expensive” P7_21

⁷ Curling is a sewing technique.

⁸ The Romanian for this translation is “sulumendrita pestrita, invata-ma sa cos altita”.

user, “very very expensive” P1_22 user, “cheap” P5_22 user). People are talking about taking care of the materials and making savings, without wasting money (“time saving” P3_26 user, “do not destroy” P4_21 user, “you cannot afford to make a mistake” P1_20 user).

Whether in the past, in the villages women used to come together to save gas while working together, nowadays the saving is transformed in advice on the materials and the budget. The function remains the same, just getting transformed according to modern times.

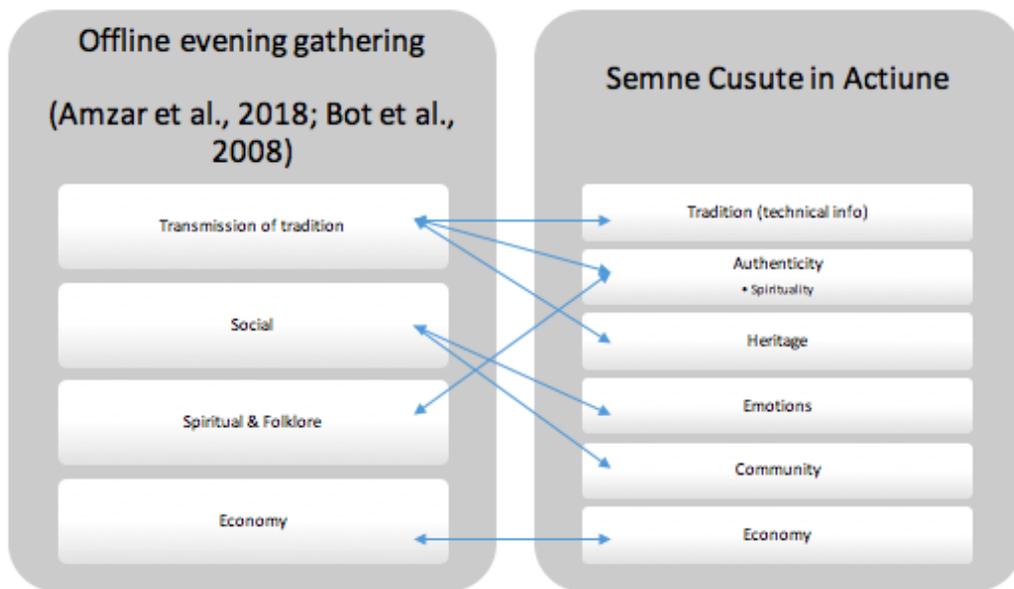


Fig. 1. Roles and functions – offline evening gatherings versus the online community SCiA

As figure 1 shows, there are a lot of similarities between offline evening gatherings and the online community SCiA. Tradition is passed down to the next generation through advice and practice nowadays as in the past, by taking into account the modern ways of communicating and relating. The online messages, pictures and links can be considered equivalent with the advice that was received in the offline ancestral village gatherings, these changes being part of the modern changes that came in people’s life. The social function remained in terms of bringing community together, to be more productive together and to encourage one another. Visiting neighbours, that used to happen in the village, is, somehow, equivalent now with becoming friends on social media and being part of the same group. The economic function for savings is also to be found in present times, messages on how to be wiser and on where to find cheaper

materials being equivalent with putting together the resources from the past.

However, in this study on the online community SCiA it was not found an important part of the social function of the evening gathering, namely the folklore aspect (singing songs, playing, storytelling). This is an aspect to be documented further if the offline meetings organized by the online community are slowly incorporating also this part.

6. Conclusions

This research investigated the social media public discourse of the Facebook group *Semne Cusute in Actiune* in order to identify a potential equivalence with the evening gathering that took place in the Romanian ancestral villages.

Using the model of living tradition as it was defined by Beckstein (2017), we consider that the criteria of equivalence are met, so that the model of passing over the tradition of sewing is also suitable for the online media.

On the one hand, in the context of tradition reinventing, this modern model overpasses some limitations of geographical coverage and time limitations, since the internet space is a space for everyone all over the world. On the other hand, this manifestation has lost the spiritual role of rehearsing and disseminating the stories and songs and dances, due to the need for specialisation of the group in order to maintain a focus. A further study should focus on other social media groups that try to revive this part of the Romanian culture and track any interconnections or collaborations in the offline events that take also place in the online community.

If in the ancestral way the sewing tradition was maintained in the village life through evening gatherings where people used to meet and socialise while working, we can say that now, the Facebook group has this function, as an online evening gathering, that overpasses the spatial and time limits, being open to become a place for remembrance, since the archives can contain the written format better than the oral one has done in the past.

With the enormous work that this community is doing, voluntarily, to recover the authentic roots and patterns, the tradition of sewing can have its own online stage of performance, where people can come and go, but not to be forgotten again. As Amzar et al. (2013) claimed, the evening gathering was a place for sharing knowledge in an informal way, with joy and jokes, people coming by their own will and desire to participate, so that the place became a school of life, where everybody was learning from the others without taking notice. We could just associate Amzar et al.'s perspective with the Facebook group and we would get the same meaning and atmosphere but, this time, created online. Although the online environment of Facebook has its main declared purpose of a social function, we can see that while comparing it with offline gatherings, there are aspects that are lost when it comes to performances, or to the social function related to small communities. This could be a further research related to the activities of

the community in the offline environment and how much the present happenings are similar or equivalent with the ancestral ones. Therefore, an enlargement of the research in other areas of actions of the community would give a broader insight on the modern phenomenon of traditional sewing Romanian blouses.

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