Report on the outcomes of a Short-Term Scientific Mission[1]

Action number: CA21129

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Details of the STSM

Title: Research Collaboration on Cross-Platform Opinion Mining

Start and end date: 07/09/2025 to 13/09/2025

Description of the work carried out during the STSM

The research visit to VU was undertaken in line with the objectives of WG2, with the primary aim of initiating a methodological study on cross-platform textual and visual methods for identifying opinion diffusion. The visit concentrated on the first major task of the broader project, applying opinion mining methods to multi-platform datasets (Task I), to develop guidelines for future research.

The visit began with a kick-off meeting on September 8, where participants aligned their expectations, and clarified the scope of the research visit. A central take-away of this meeting was the formulation of short-term goals (a research project with corresponding paper publication) and long-term goals (collaboration on an EU grant proposal). We then prepared the cross-platform workshop planned for the next day.

On September 9, a workshop on cross-platform opinion mining (Task I.I) was held at VU. This workshop brought together COST Action members and local researchers to discuss methodological challenges related to extracting platform-specific features and mapping them into shared semantic spaces using recent advances in transformer-based text models and large visual models. Important take-aways of the meeting, which brought together CSS researchers with those interested in qualitative methodology, include a) the relevance of mixed methods approaches and b) the integration of audience perspective in what constitutes latent concepts like "opinions", "information", etc. when working with opinion mining. These exchanges helped refine our initial research questions and provided input on practical considerations for implementing methods across datasets of varying formats and origins.

The following day, September 10, focused on establishing the research infrastructure (Task I.II). We started mapping our existing datasets across 1) platforms (e.g., Telegram, Instagram, TikTok), 2) modalities (e.g., text, images), 3) time (e.g., longitudinal, observation period), and 4) perspectives (e.g., opinionated content; exposure to opinion). We created a shared repository to further assess and combine our data sets for a total of two projects planned as an outcome of the research visit (including both text-

as-data methods and digital trace data). In-person collaboration proved crucial given the sensitive nature of the datasets, enabling efficient coordination of data access protocols and technical workflows.

On September 11 and 12, work shifted to laying out future collaboration strategies, including potential conference submissions (Task I.III) and more long-term grant proposals. In short, we brainstormed on collaboration partners within and outside of the COST network for a future EU project we plan to submit. The visit concluded with a wrap-up meeting to consolidate achievements, identify next steps, and plan the continuation of Task I activities remotely. Overall, the visit successfully launched the methodological study, established a robust research infrastructure, and initiated scholarly outputs that will support the project's long-term objectives.

Description of the STSM main achievements and planned follow-up activities

The research visit to VU (Sept 7–13) successfully advanced the expected short-term and long-term deliverables of the project, thereby directly contributing to the COST Action's objectives in research coordination and capacity building.

In the short term, two central outputs were achieved. First, the workshop on cross-platform opinion mining (Task I.I) was organized at VU on September 9 and we started working on a collaborative project that could be submitted to future conferences, such as the ICA (Task I.III). This event was open to COST Action members and external scholars, enabling broad exchange on methodological challenges and solutions. It provided a platform to discuss cross-platform methods for opinion mining, while also facilitating discussion of practical challenges in handling multimodal and cross-platform datasets.

In the long term, the visit also laid the groundwork for deliverables that go even beyond the ones initially expected. By setting up a data overview (Task I.II), the team started to create the necessary infrastructure to curate and benchmark CSS methods across different datasets. This will enable systematic comparisons of opinion mining methods across textual, visual, and multimodal data, ultimately leading to a validated set of approaches for feature representation and matching. These activities form the basis for a curated methodological framework for WG2 and provide the foundations for a future collaborative journal publication. As an initially unexpected results, we additionally discussed the possibility of a future grant application within the EU Horizon grant scheme together, to some extent, with other COST Action members.

The contributions of the research visit directly align with the Action's broader goals. First, the comparative approach across platforms and data types contributes to a shared methodological research agenda, fulfilling a core research coordination objective. Second, by extending CSS methods from textual to visual and multimodal content, the project fosters methodological integration across linguistic, national, and disciplinary boundaries, strengthening COST's collaborative potential. Third, the benchmarking process initiated during the visit will contribute to the development of gold standards in data handling and validation, supporting both WG2 and WG3 debates. In addition, we contributed to capacity-building implications by initiating a workshop that integrated local researchers with the COST network goals. In doing so, the research visit not only generated immediate outputs but also created durable infrastructure and knowledge pathways that will benefit COST members and stakeholders alike.