Useful softwares for the ethnography of online practices

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Addons, 'third-party' softwares, plugins...
[many different terms, depending of the plateform]

It is very likely that you can (and sometimes must) install that kind of softwares that are created to modify (usually to improve :) your use of a particular plateform or game.

In a game like *World of Warcraft* some addons are 'must have's' for almost every player : no one could/would play without running them. And so they will usually be 'must have's' for researchers doing participant observation.
Some addons are particularly useful for social sciences researchers, for example addons that make it possible (or more easy) to select text in chat and then copy/paste it in a .doc-like file.
The addon **Prat** – for example – makes it possible to do that and also adds some informations in chat (timestamps, additional infos on players who post in chats, etc.). Those addons can thus be very useful to creat/gather rich data and then to use them (analysis, quotes).

Simple screenshots

A simple screenshot is a still image : a copy of whatever is displayed on your screen (either the complete screen, or only a part of it). It's like a photography : no sound, no movement is recorded. And no 'hyperlink-paths'.

Depending what you are observing, simple screenshots can be enough. Don't forget you can take series of screenshots to somehow capture 'movements' and/or evolving situations.

You probably don't need to install any software to make simple screenshots, since every computer should have a 'printscreen' function. But some softwares can make it easier to precisely define what you capture and then to manage the screenshots created.

Example : **Screenpresso**. But they are a lot of other softwares doing similar things and you'll find them easily on the web. The are usually free (or – at least – the free-versions are enough to help you in your research).

Recordings

If you want to record sequences of play or sequences of you (or other people) 'surfing the web' and using *Wikipedia*, *Facebook* and other plateforms/softwares, here are two softwares that you may want to use.

OBS (Open Broadcaster Software) : *OBS* is totally free to use and allow you to capture all that 'happens' on your screen while also recording the sounds : sounds of 'what happens on your screen' (the sound of a youtube's video for example) but also sound of what you say in a microphone and what others tell you if you are using a software like *Skype*.
You will normally have to change the original settings of the software before you can use it, but there are many tutorials on the web so don't be 'scared' by that : maybe you'll take one hour to figure out but then it can make your research much easier !

Fraps is (was ?) 'the' recording software widely used among gamers to record their gaming sessions. And so it is (was ?) very useful for social scientists as well.
Why 'was' ? Because the free version used to be enough for much users, but now you really have to buy *Fraps* (~25 €) to be able to use it (the free version doesn't record more than 30-seconds sequences, for example ...which is very short :). But I mention it can appear as more user-friendly than *OBS*.

There are obviously other similar softwares you can find and try !

It is also very important that you begin by checking on your computer if you <u>already</u> have a recording software, because **some graphic cards now 'come with' a recording software**. This is normally the case with 'gaming-oriented' graphic card. Those softwares are usually very good, user-friendly... and you don't have to buy them (well... you paid for the graphic card) nor to install them.

Analysis

ATLAS.ti, **MAXQDA** ...among other !
Those two softwares are not free, but I'm pretty sure one of them (or both) can be installed for free as students of your University. Maybe you can contact the 'informatic support-team' of your institution to get informations.

Those softwares are widely used to help coding and analyzing 'traditional' data (observations' notes, interviews' transcriptions), but they can also be useful to 'deal with' materials like screenshots, at least *ATLAS.ti* (and maybe *MAXQDA* but I didn't tried it).