
NETNOGRAPHY

Robert Kozinets knows his stuff: over the past 25 years, he has almost single-handedly established netnography as a methodological framework for qualitative Internet research. This third edition of his essential guide to netnographic research practices provides a very welcome update to the framework, taking in even more of the complex and ever-changing landscape of current social media platforms and their uses, and offering a wealth of ideas for working with qualitative social media data. Whether they're already calling themselves netnographers or have yet to discover the field, this book will inspire and enable many more researchers to investigate social media practices from a qualitative perspective.

Axel Bruns, Professor in the Digital Media Research Centre, Queensland University of Technology

If anyone had any doubt that this is the golden age for research, Rob Kozinets has made the case and provided the field guide that shows why this is so. *Netnography* is a fun locution for a big set of ideas about how to exploit new research methods to explore the biggest social, political and economic issues of our time.

Lee Rainie, Director of Internet and Technology Research, Pew Research Center

Netnography is a must-read for anyone engaged in or contemplating qualitative research on social media. Online behavior is at once a psychological, social, and technological phenomena, and qualitative approaches require both rigor and context, which Robert V. Kozinets offers in abundance. Both history and methodology are meticulously detailed in what ought to be a guidebook for social media researchers.

Howard Rheingold



3E

Robert V Kozinets

NETNOGRAPHY

The Essential Guide
to Qualitative Social
Media Research



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At SAGE we take sustainability seriously. Most of our products are printed in the UK using responsibly sourced papers and boards. When we print overseas we ensure sustainable papers are used as measured by the PREPS grading system. We undertake an annual audit to monitor our sustainability.

This book is dedicated to my parents, Mickey and Anne, who lovingly cared for me, encouraging and supporting me in all my interests and peculiarities – even if they didn't always quite understand what I was doing.

Also, to Sidney Levy. You are missed and never forgotten.

And to Mila Steele. This book would not have taken shape without your ambitious vision.

One of the radical spirits in current thought has
defined the task of this somber age as learning anew
to be human.

George Steiner

When you are philosophizing, you have to descend
into primeval chaos and feel at home there.

Ludwig Wittgenstein

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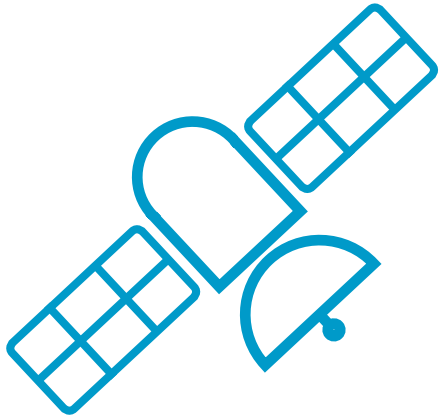
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INTRODUCING: NETNOGRAPHY, QUALITATIVE SOCIAL MEDIA RESEARCH METHODS, AND THIS BOOK

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

This chapter will be full of introductions: an introduction to social media, netnography, qualitative social media research, and this book. Over five billion people around the world use different types of social media, and this new edition of the book responds to the need for updated and improved ways to investigate and understand those uses. The chapter's opening section will broadly explore some of the contours of social media today, looking at global usage patterns, exploring the most popular types of social media platforms, and encouraging some personal reflection on your own use. The next section of the chapter will introduce netnography, defining it as a form of cultural research that uses a set of specific qualitative practices to investigate social media. Netnography is affiliated with and distinct from other forms of digital anthropology and media anthropology. Like other forms of anthropology, it uses techniques that value immersion in a culture. However, these terms are redefined in particular ways in netnography. Netnography is different from other methods because it uses specific techniques and a pragmatic approach to investigate online traces. The chapter's final section will introduce the contents of the book, demonstrating how the approach has been updated for a rapidly evolving world of social media. The five main sections of the book are devoted to methodology and history, empirical initiation, data collection, data analysis and interpretation, and communicating netnographic research.



‘We will become the Network Nation, exchanging vast amounts of both information and social-emotional communications with colleagues, friends, and “strangers” who share similar interests, who are spread out all over the nation. Ultimately, as communication satellites and international packet switched networks reach out to other cities and villages around the world, these social networks facilitated by computer-mediated communications will become international; we will become a “global village” whose boundaries are demarcated only by the political decisions of those governments that choose not to become part of an international computer network. An individual will, literally, be able to work, shop, or be educated by or with persons anywhere in the nation or in the world.’

(Starr Roxanne Hiltz and Murray Turoff (1978) *The Network Nation: Human Communication via Computer*, p. xxv)



SOCIAL MEDIA RESEARCH

Exploring the Universe of Social Media

Take out your phone. Turn on your tablet. Boot up your laptop. Sit down at the desk-top. Lo and behold: the wonders of social media. Flipping through a Twitter feed, checking Facebook updates. A Snapchat beep. A WhatsApp message. All of it – news to read, sports, research material, interconnected, a movie trailer, friends and family, a fitness influencer, merging and built into seductive electronic toys.

This is social media. This is a world within a world deeply affecting the world. Fast, current, zooming by, expanding, connecting everything to everything.

Redefining Social Media

Accurate and succinct definitions of social media are surprisingly hard to find. In a useful exception, Ulrike Gretzel (2017b: 1) defines and then explains social media as:

Web-based communication platforms or applications that take advantage of Web 2.0 technologies, which make it possible for users without technical expertise to easily produce and publish content on the Internet. Social media encompass a variety of different types, such as social networks, review sites, instant messaging applications, and video and photo sharing sites.

For our purposes, we can define social media as applications, websites, and other online technologies that enable their users to engage in a variety of different content creation, circulation, annotation, and association activities. Netnography is a way to study social media that maintains the complexities of its experiential and cultural qualities.

From Virtual Communities to Instagram Nano-influencers

When I started writing about virtual communities, Internet studies was still a relatively small field. No one would hear about social media for another fifteen years. Blogs were at least seven years away from wide recognition and the beginning of their growth. When the first edition of *Netnography* was published in 2010, social media was still a bit of a novelty. In 2009, when I wrote the first chapter of the first edition of the book, there were about 150 million active users on Facebook, and around a million Twitter users.

Just nine years later, social media have become a major part of the fabric of contemporary human society. About 5 billion people, roughly two-thirds of the world's population, are connected through their mobile phones, and about 4 billion of them use these devices to connect to broadband. Ninety-five percent of Americans own a

cell phone, with 77 percent of them smartphones. All of these connections potentially link people to one another through a variety of social media sites and other interaction platforms, as well as to the affordances of apps and the agency of algorithms. From its humble beginnings in work machine networks, today's social media is an unprecedented, global, amplified, electrifying technocapitalist experience.

Social media today thus comprise a complex social system that reflects and reveals human society and is also, itself, a unique social phenomenon. *Netnography* is designed to help you make sense of that system and the way people interact with and within it.

Netnography and Social Media's Evolution

Social media has evolved dramatically over the past decade, emerging as a commonplace, influential, and yet still deeply misunderstood phenomenon. *Netnography: The Essential Guide to Qualitative Social Media Research* responds to the need for a more expansive, inclusive, applied, and up-to-date way to understand social media. The book continues to evolve the two prior volumes and extends them into a new, internally structured system for mixed qualitative methods inquiries using social media data. The emphasis in netnography today is on a qualitative research approach to social media data, rather than on ethnography, anthropology, marketing research, or any one field or methodological approach.

This volume is a near total reboot. It refocuses netnography on social media's vital, and ever-challenging new realities. It offers researchers a detailed and specific approach to conducting qualitative research using social media as the basis of its datasets. Netnography encompasses interviews, data scraping, archival work, online observation, and active engagement with new forms of data collection, visualization, thematic analysis, and field-level rhetorical representation. This edition intensifies the focus on technique but maintains a strong grounding in social scientific theory that seeks, more than ever, to bridge fields such as communication, computer science, cultural studies, anthropology, and psychology. This chapter provides three types of general overview. To begin with, it examines the current terrain of social media. It then introduces and overviews netnography. And finally, it outlines the contents of this book.

Do We Really Need Another Name for Online Ethnography?

Netnography? Do we really need a new name for ethnography, even if it is done online?

Coining a new name for something that already has a perfectly good word to represent it is needless complexification. Unfortunately, we see a lot of this needless complexification in the worlds of business and academia, where audiences reward

superficial innovation by scholars or consultants but often do not have the patience or ability to judge its validity in relation to historical precedent.

As you will see in the historical overview contained in Chapter 2, when I first coined the term in 1995, the act of doing social media research of any kind was still emergent, sketchy, and mostly unnamed (and, generally speaking, just not done at all). It was clear to me that the procedures that worked well in the physical terrain of qualitative research, such as asking for consent, did not translate to the online environment. So, encouraged by the feedback of my peers, I began developing netnography as a new discipline that adapted ethnographic and qualitative research methods to the novel and still emerging contingencies of social media environments. Since that time, however, the term ‘online ethnography’ has come to be accepted as denoting the general category of applying ethnographic research concepts and procedures to online environments such as social media.

As well, a range of different researchers working in different fields have coined a host of new terms for online ethnographic work. These new terms include ‘cyber-ethnography’ (Ward, 1999), ‘virtual ethnography’ (Hine, 2000), ‘network ethnography’ (Howard, 2002), ‘webnography’ (Puri, 2007), and ‘digital ethnography’ (Murthy, 2008), as well as a long list of ancillary techniques developed in marketing research agencies such as ‘mobile ethnography’ and ‘show & tell ethnography’. So the question then becomes whether these names actually mean something above and beyond the mere idea of online ethnography. Do terms such as these tell us anything beyond the mere fact that an ostensibly ‘ethnographic’ type of research can be performed using networked computing devices? Otherwise, this is mere mindless neologizing – renaming for naming’s sake, rather than designating in order to add specific meaning and value to the state of our knowledge.

If we are giving a new name to a particular way of doing something, like ethnography, then that new name should signify the approach is significantly different from other ways of doing that same thing. Thus the name netnography – a portmanteau combining network, Internet, and ethnography – has always stood for a cultural focus on understanding the data derived from social media data, characteristics that the approach shares with all other types of online ethnography. However, it differs from other types of online ethnography in its praxis, the specific way that the idea of online ethnographic work is put into practice at the level of action, or boots on the ground.

Netnography 3e is a Recipe Book for Qualitative Social Media Research

Christine Hine, whose term ‘virtual ethnography’ is still widely used, has written that ‘ethnography is strengthened by the lack of recipes for doing it’ (Hine, 2000: 13). Netnography differs from virtual ethnography and from most approaches to ethnography in its fundamental disagreement with Hine’s statement. When I tried to learn

ethnography from within a business field, I found the lack of clear direction for doing it frustrating and disheartening. Why couldn't ethnographers just state what they were doing, and perhaps offer some options to guide me in the different choices I needed to make?, I wondered. I appreciate the flexibility of the ethnographic method that Hine is celebrating. But that high regard for flexibility assumes a type of hands-on mentorship and a basic level of knowledge and ability that is not always the case. I believe it also relates to a more general type of mystification in qualitative research, particularly regarding interpretation, that is both unnecessary and counter-productive.

Pedagogically dismissive attitudes, which seemingly glorify obfuscation, have led to major misunderstandings of ethnography such as Lubet's (2018) critique of ethnography as a form of inaccurate reporting. Lack of a clear guiding recipe to follow may have also led researchers to play fast and loose with research ethics – for example in the inhumane treatment of Brazilian Yanomami populations by ethnographers (Tierney, 2001), or with ethnographers' complicity in a range of colonialist, misogynist, and exploitative ventures (Bosk and De Vries, 2004).

This edition of *Netnography* embraces the provision of clear direction. It provides its readers with a number of basic recipes for getting social media research done. At this point in its development, after over two decades of adjustment, elaboration, and refinement, three editions of this book, and hundreds if not thousands of peer-reviewed articles, research projects, and dissertations based on its principles, netnography is a detailed, sophisticated, and differentiated set of techniques. Clear recipes, names, flowcharts, and directions give this edition of *Netnography* an unprecedented depth. They give you, the netnographer, clearly elaborated choices. By providing adequate and in-depth explanation of the methodological reasoning behind the guidance, there is no loss in flexibility. In fact, you can think of the many exercises in this book as fulfilling the same task as recipes. As you learn to become a better chef, you become freed to experiment with adapting and creating your own recipes. But first, you must be given the recipe for the soufflé!

Netnography as an Organized Set of Research Tools

Netnography today is not merely another name for online ethnography, but a set of general instructions relating to *a specific way to conduct qualitative social media research using a combination of 25 different research practices grouped into three distinct categories of data collection, data analysis, and data interpretation 'movements'*. There is an immense amount of detail and flexibility in the way that netnographic researchers can apply, adapt, and combine the data collection operations of *investigation (simplification, search, scouting, selecting, and saving)*, *interaction (interview, involvement, innovation, and informed consent)*, *immersion (reconnoitering, recording, researching, and reflecting)*, and *the data integration methods of analysis (collating, coding, combining, counting, and charting) and interpretation (theming, talenting, totalizing, translation, turtling, and troublemaking)*.

Netnography provides new terminology for a new field that needs additional systematizing, and still will. Many of these ideas, if not most of them, came from my examination of published research by authors such as you. These authors have been changing and altering the early practices of netnography to help them better fit to the contingencies of particular field sites, topics, and academic fields of knowledge. They also have changed and systematized some of the ways to communicate to readers and fellow academics about them.

Netnography has become a syncretic amalgam of research practices and viewpoints from computer science, cultural studies, media anthropology, education, nursing, and my own native fields of marketing and consumer culture research. For example, as you will learn in this book, there is a particular netnographic praxis for collecting investigative data that specifies simplifying, searching, scouting, selection, and saving operations that is entirely unique to netnography and not found in this form in any other account of online ethnography. Similarly, netnographic practices espouse and describe a particular variant of ethnographic participant observation called ‘engaged data operations’. They commit to a cultural understanding of social media through an integration of data analysis and hermeneutic interpretation operations. They detail the use of an immersion journal. In terms of ethics, netnography provides a simple, flowchart-based approach to help you navigate the complexities of the research ethics of these methods and ensure compliance with the most rigorous current standards of research ethics practice. From those guidelines, it is able to offer detailed, up-to-date, and appropriate data collection and presentation procedures to accommodate the latest research ethics requirements such as the European Union’s GDPR regulations.

These procedures and practices offer the online social scientist a new conceptual terminology alongside these fully adapted research practices. These terms, principles, and operations, and many others you will learn in this book, are what the netnography name signifies.

Netnography = your choice from among 25 explained, illustrated with exercises, research practices or recipes performed with various types of social media data, incorporating up-to-date research ethics standards, and dedicated to helping you produce reflectively curated and insightfully communicated work about social media itself and its cultural inclusions, reflections, and effects.

If you decide to call your work an online ethnography, it will be unclear exactly what principles and procedures you followed. You will be cooking data without a recipe, producing a dish without a name. The onus would then be on you to explain and justify what you have done, because online ethnography is a generic category, like calling your soup ‘soup’. The same is true for the many under-specified, dated, one-hit wonder versions of online ethnography like cyber-ethnography and webnography. The point of this book is not to critique other forms of online ethnography, which might all prove useful to certain researchers in particular contexts for specific

goals. It is to ensure that the name ‘netnography’ stands for something specific, relevant, actionable, and useful. When you call your work a netnography, and you cite this book and other contributions to the now-considerable netnographic methodological canon in the social sciences in reference to your research stance and research practices, you are indicating that you more or less followed the procedural roadmap laid out in this book. Name the procedures and your fellow researchers will easily know which recipes you followed. Calling your work a netnography does not just mean that netnography as a technique has become a rigorous, legitimate, detailed, contemporary, and ethical technique. It means that *your* netnography is rigorous, detailed, current, and ethical.

More About Social Media

What we know about social media has changed radically since the first edition of this book was written. Not only are social media platforms gaining mass memberships worldwide, but some large sites are dominant, and particular sites dominate in particular regions or countries. Facebook currently has about 2.2 billion monthly active users, Instagram 800 million, Twitter 330 million, and Reddit 250 million. Among the Chinese social media sites, WeChat has about a billion monthly active users and Sina Weibo 376 million. In Russian online social media, VKontakte has about 480 million accounts and Odnoklassniki 200 million registered users. These are the mass audience social media sites, and they contain significant proportions of the population in their countries or regions. Seventy three percent of the American population say that they use YouTube, and 68% say that they use Facebook (Smith and Anderson, 2018). They are also using social media frequently. Seventy-four percent of Facebook users say they visit the site daily, and 51% say they visit it several times a day. Similarly, 63% of Snapchat users and 60% of Instagram users say they visit the platform daily.

The use of some social media sites is more stratified, and sometimes specialized, than in the past. For example, more than twice as many American women use Pinterest compared to men (41% versus 16%). Among young people aged 18–24, 78% use Snapchat (Smith and Anderson, 2018), versus only 7% among those aged 50 and over. And LinkedIn, which is a network for professionals, is somewhat unsurprisingly over five times more popular with high-income college graduates than those with a high school diploma or less (50% versus 9%). The median American social media user uses three social media platforms, and many Americans use several, with young adults showing the greatest variety of use. In fact, people are so immersed in social media that an American group has declared a ‘National Day of Unplugging’, held on March 9–10, to encourage people to disconnect from their devices and provide a 24-hour respite period.

Table 1.1 Global social media statistics, 2018

World Region	Population (2017 Est.)	Population % of the world	Internet Users 30 June 2017	Penetration Rate (%Pop)	Growth 2000– 2017	Internet Users %
Africa	1,246,504,865	16.6 %	388,376,491	31.2 %	8,503.1%	10.0 %
Asia	4,148,177,672	55.2 %	1,938,075,631	46.7 %	1,595.5%	49.7 %
Europe	822,710,362	10.9 %	659,634,487	80.2 %	527.6%	17.0 %
Latin America/Carribbean	647,604,645	8.6 %	404,269,163	62.4 %	2,137.4%	10.4 %
Middle East	250,327,574	3.3 %	146,972,123	58.7 %	4,374.3%	3.8 %
North America	363,224,006	4.8 %	320,059,368	88.1 %	196.1%	8.2 %
Oceania/Australia	40,479,846	0.5 %	28,180,356	69.6 %	269.8%	0.7 %
WORLD TOTAL	7,519,028,970	100.0 %	3,885,567,619	51.7 %	976.4%	100.0 %

Source: www.internetworldstats.com. Copyright © 2017, Miniwatts Marketing Group. All rights reserved worldwide.

THINKING ABOUT YOUR OWN SOCIAL MEDIA USE

1.1

Where is your mobile phone right now? Is it next to you? Take a look at your phone (or the bookmarks on your browser).

- What social media sites are there?
- Do you use any of the sites mentioned in the opening to this subsection of this chapter?
- Which ones?
- How often do you visit these sites? Do you visit them more than once a day? How many do you visit more than ten times a day?

If you aren't aware of your own social media use, why don't you try using a tracker to help you understand how many visits and how much time you are spending on social media. Here are some popular current social media usage trackers you can consider:

- Social Fever
- SPACE – Break phone addiction
- AppDetox – App Blocker for Digital Detox
- OFFTIME – Distraction Free
- MyAddictometer – Mobile addiction tracker
- Quality Time
- Moment – Screen Time Tracker
- Forest – Stay Focused



Table 1.2 Percentage of U.S. adults who use each social media platform

	Facebook	Instagram	Pinterest	LinkedIn	Twitter
Total	68%	28%	26%	25%	21%
<u>Men</u>	67%	23%	15%	28%	21%
<u>Women</u>	69%	32%	38%	23%	21%
<u>Ages 18–29</u>	88%	59%	36%	34%	36%
<u>30–49</u>	79%	31%	32%	31%	22%
<u>50–64</u>	61%	13%	24%	21%	18%
<u>65+</u>	36%	5%	9%	11%	6%

Note: Race/ethnicity breaks not shown due to sample size.

Source: Survey conducted March 7–April 4, 2016. Pew Research Center, 2017.

Table 1.3 Among the users of each social media site, the percentage who use that site with the following frequencies

Platform	Less often	Weekly	Daily
Facebook	7%	15%	76%
Instagram	22%	26%	51%
Twitter	33%	24%	42%
Pinterest	43%	31%	25%
LinkedIn	51%	31%	18%

Note: Numbers may not add to 100 due to rounding.

Source: Survey conducted March 7–April 4, 2016. Pew Research Center, 2017.

Social Media Studies

An SMS is a message. Social media studies, abbreviated as SMS, is an arm of media studies that investigates and develops theory about the online messages that people leave for and send each other. It is a communications subfield, but intersects with Internet research and many other social sciences. Netnography is a tool for social media studies: studies specifically built to understand this global, grassroots, corporate collective communication phenomenon. One that is redistributing power based on new mediagenic metrics.

I hesitate to call social media globally ubiquitous, however. We must recognize that 2.5 billion citizens of the world currently live their lives without an Internet or mobile phone connection. These people, who constitute a full third of the world's population, may have either no access, or only sporadic access to the vast networked infrastructure of information and communication that the other 5 billion have at their fingertips. But for most of the world today, social media is a natural part of their everyday experience. Social media inform them, entertain them, annoy and delight them alongside, as much as, and often more than, any other form of communication and information.

In 1978, when Starr Roxanne Hiltz and Murray Turoff, a husband and wife research team of Rutgers University professors, published their classic book, *The Network Nation*, they predicted many elements of the social media dominated society we currently live in. Along with other early information technology prognosticators like Alvin Toffler, Hiltz and Turoff predicted an interconnected world where home computers would be as commonplace as telephones, and where the barriers of time and space that once limited our access to other people would shrink to near zero.

To their immense credit, they were extrapolating from a very small base. As they note, 'the first computerized conferencing system was created in 1970' and, at the time of the book's writing, its uses were limited to 'tens of organizations and a few thousand people' (Hiltz and Turoff, 1978: xxv). And yet despite these samples being

small and early, they clearly resembled us in many ways. Recreational uses, for play and gaming, were huge then, as they are now. The psychological and sociological impacts on social and family life were there. So were the Internet's destruction of the press and its impact upon television viewership. As well as the way these new technologies would alter concentrations of wealth and power, making software, hardware, and online retailing entrepreneurs the richest Americans in the world.

Hiltz and Turoff also foresaw the abuse of surveillance power. They thought these technologies would 'allow for the invasion of privacy in rather unique ways' (p. xxvi). However, extrapolating from their time, they clearly underestimated the vast impact of large corporations and their increasing power, and the related rise of a neoliberal mantra of a free, open, and deregulated online environment. Their pragmatic focus on shopping, learning, and working were also typical of the early Internet researchers, but made it difficult for them to perceive the social and recreational uses that have driven social media development over the last two decades, resulting in much of its ecosystem-like complexity.

But there was one thing that Hiltz and Turoff gave voice to with great precision, and that was their prediction that the networked world of the future would 'dramatically alter the nature of social science research concerned with the study of human systems and human communication processes' (p. xxvi). Indeed, it has done so, and those dramatically transformed social science research practices are the focus of this entire book. As this chapter now proceeds to introduce and describe netnography, we will begin to take a much closer look at how our contemporary networked world of networked communications transforms sociality and the way we approach our understanding of it.

WHAT IS NETNOGRAPHY?

DEFINING NETNOGRAPHY YOUR OWN WAY

1.2

Before we turn to the next section of this chapter, which defines netnography and explains why it is different from other ethnographic methods, you may want to have a look at Figure 1.1. This word cloud was constructed in 2018 from the then-current netnography entry in Wikipedia (we will be learning more about using word clouds as an analytic technique in a later chapter).

Exercise: Look at this netnography word cloud from Wikipedia. From your examination of it, what would you guess is the current definition of netnography? What would you suppose are the main differences of netnography's approach? When you have given those two questions some thought, move on to the next section.

(Continued)

operations, or procedures are things that we can also call research practices. Research practices are tied into positions, which are ways that people make sense of their own actions and behavioral options, and research positions tie practices to disciplinary structures and social positions.

Netnography has always been the ethnography of online network actors and interactions. But now it is becoming much more: a set of sub-routines, suggested, inflected, and then reflected back through multiple literature bases as a type of crowdsourced scientific method, legitimate, established in multiple fields, yet still growing.

As a type of ethnography, netnography is tied into the current qualitative research practices and positions of anthropology and sociology. It has always been a shifting assemblage of existing legitimate and novel research practices and principles. Netnography was invariably a metamorph, adapting to and being adapted by its computer and data science surroundings, a shifting yet specific set of related data collection, analysis, ethical and representational research procedures.

Like ethnography, netnography subscribes to the methodological connections and principles that animate how its practices relate to:

- views of the world (or ontologies),
- how to study and understand that world (epistemologies), and
- priorities for studying what is important within it (or axiologies).

Also in common with ethnography, the positions and practices of netnography are fundamentally:

- focused on human experience and cultural understanding,
- grounded in deep appreciations of the context of people's everyday life,
- bound to explore social systems of shared meaning, and
- informed by a sense of self-awareness of the researcher and/or of cultural participants.

WIKIPEDIA ON NETNOGRAPHY

Exercise: Go to Wikipedia. Search for the entry on netnography. Examine the definition of netnography there. Do you agree with it? What would you change about it, if anything? If you feel strongly, go ahead and make the change you wish to see in the world (of Wikipedia)!

1.3

Differentiating Netnography

However, despite sharing similar foundations and perspectives, the differences of netnographic practice from other types of research are well worth noting from the outset. Doing so will help prevent confusion. We can start this disambiguation by explaining the relation of netnography to *online traces*. When people post images, video, or text online, or when they comment, share, or do anything else that is accessible online to anonymous or networked others, what they leave behind are *online traces*. Online traces can be textual, graphic, photographic, audiovisual, musical, commercially sponsored, genuinely grassroots, political, fannish, and many other things. Today, these online traces are plentiful, variegated, complex, and widespread. They are also a free form of public social information from which we all draw benefit. One of those benefits is the ability to research them. For over twenty years, collecting and interpreting these traces has formed the core of a netnographic investigation. And from the beginning of netnography, traditional ethnography has had little to say about online traces, what they are, what they mean to social scientific research, how to search for them, how to collect them, what ethical responsibilities accompany their use, the ways that they interact with research searches and search engines, how to analyze them, how to describe them in publications, and so on.

Netnography is centered on the study of online traces. Some netnographies exclusively collect and analyze online traces. Others extend beyond online traces to other forms of data collection and creation. However, the focus on online traces which, when collected, become online data, is a key distinguishing element of netnography. Netnographies start either with social media sites, or with particular topics that are subsequently explored through social media. After collecting, reflecting, and interacting with online traces, netnographers will often, but certainly not always, extend these online explorations with other forms of data collection. This extended data collection can include in-person interviewing, personal observation, online interviewing, mobile interviewing, and mobile recording.

Netnography fits into the general category of digital anthropology, defined as the cultural study of human relations with and through digital technology. So, for example, inspired by Boellstorff's (2008) ethnography of *Second Life*, Gehl (2016) conducted a digital ethnography situated entirely on the Dark Web Social Network, a social networking site which is accessible to web browsers equipped with a special privacy-ensuring router. However, not all digital ethnography, online ethnography, or digital anthropology is netnography. A digital ethnographer might, for example, study how mobile phone use affects behavior around the family dinner table, or the experiences of Indian immigrants working for technology companies, without ever looking at or considering online messaging and content. These two examples would not be netnographies because all netnographies involve collecting, participating, and interpreting online traces.

There is, of course, considerable variance even in what anthropologists mean when they talk about digital ethnography or digital anthropology. Pink et al. (2015) argue

that digital ethnography does not necessarily have to engage with digital technology in its method or its research focus. In fact, Pink et al. (2015) valorize a non-digital data focus as one of the key principles of their variety of digital ethnography: it examines digital life from a purely human angle. Frömmling et al. (2017: 13) sidestep the issue of whether digital ethnography needs to embrace digital data and techniques by focusing their view of the future of ethnography on ‘digital environments’ which is the term they use for the ‘mutual permeation of the virtual with the physical world’ in sites such as Minecraft or Second Life (immersive virtual worlds), expansive digital social environments like Facebook or Instagram, smartphones, tablets and wearable technologies, and blogs, forums, e-commerce sites, and virtual communities.

Pink (2017: 9–10) views digital anthropology and digital ethnography as fields that are currently ‘flourishing’ and creating ‘a new generation of anthropologists’. She writes that the current time is an intellectual moment wherein anthropologists ‘are beginning to make sense of the digital elements of the environment’. Further, she finds ‘that digital technologies and media bring with them a body of theoretical, methodological and practical implications. Many of the themes and issues they raise are in fact already part of the subdisciplines of visual and media anthropology.’ Although I agree that some areas of anthropology are struggling productively with the changes wrought by digital technologies and media, these areas still unfortunately represent relatively small islands of activity within the greater field. In this book, I draw not only on anthropology and its subfields, but also on a range of other disciplinary fields, such as computer science, communication, cultural and media studies, and many more, in order to develop netnography as an expansive set of qualitative social media research practices that center on the collection and understanding of online traces.

Specificity, Dynamism, and Pragmatism

The second difference between netnography and ethnography is one of specificity. Data collection, analysis, ethics, and representational practices are dramatically altered in netnography because collecting and using online traces are different from the types of data collected and used by traditional ethnographers. As a result, the rules of engagement for someone conducting a netnography turn out to be very different from the ones used by physically embedded, face-to-face ethnographers. This difference between physical and online traces, interactions, algorithms, and socialities is a key element requiring the specific adaptation of netnographic practices and positions from those of the more general fields of ethnographic and digital ethnographic inquiry.

Traditional ethnographic techniques and understandings can of course be applied to new developments, but without specificity in relating the procedures used, the results can be unstructured and willy-nilly. This was the state of the art when I was conducting my dissertation in 1995. People were using online data from bulletin boards, but there were no explicit guidelines about what to do, how to do it, and why to do it. I hungered for an instruction set, a body of knowledge to help me in this new

domain, and one to which I could contribute as the method grew and changed. I developed netnography so that I could answer those questions about what type of research procedures to follow in social media. Other scholars found those answers and procedures useful, adopted them, and added to them. In this way, we all built netnography.

Research methods are made of practices pursued with scientific intent. Every recognized, legitimate particular form of research has clear affiliations, roots, and sets of practices. If we do not know the affiliations, roots, and sets of practices that govern a significantly different research approach such as netnography, then we leave it up to individual authors to create their own particular procedures every time they use it. We depend upon individual authors to claim (or have claimed for them) a uniqueness to their findings that may make it difficult to generalize. Uniform adherence to a standard set of practices simplifies communications, or at least helps to aggregate common knowledge so that the wheel of method turns smoothly even as it is – inevitably – being reinvented.

Netnographic techniques require frequent updating because they are both specific and located in dynamic social and technological contexts. New technological developments bring new social science research approaches to the fore, such as using mobile phones and their cameras for interviews or in-the-moment explorations of daily life. Evolution of the social media space means that sites become larger, more complex, more global, and more various. Because its procedures deliberately embrace adaptation and flux, netnography eagerly incorporates these new developments into its research repertoires in order to help triangulate and contextualize online traces. Public postings offer the potential for the participant ethnographer to become a public research figure, a type of public intellectual, online activist, or action researcher. Netnographic research practices follow the rules of online and internet research ethics, which are in a state of near-constant change. And the many visual, mobile, multiple, and storytelling representational options for netnographies require development separately from those of the more familiar modalities of ethnographic research. This edition of *Netnography* includes a range of novel culturally- and technologically-based techniques to help you gather, create, co-create, and analyze online traces.

The third and perhaps most important differentiator is netnography's pragmatic approach. Netnography's focus and forte has always been to present researchers with a nuts-and-bolts, workbench-level approach to cultural social media research. We can also call it a recipe. This pragmatic level is layered onto the richly abstract theoretical bases of traditional ethnographers and the many innovations of contemporary digital ethnographers across multiple disciplines and institutions. This includes those many researchers doing fascinating work while employed in a myriad of business and industry applications, such as marketing research and consumer insight inquiry. Although we will likely never see their work published, I have had very regular contact with them, and they have greatly influenced the practical development of netnography.

The goal of this book is to offer a rich background for researchers from a variety of fields, enabling them to understand the bases of netnography in the study of the cultural contexts and contents of a plethora of online communicative acts and interactions. As well, netnography is focused on providing a clear set of how-to oriented instructions for academic, industry, and other researchers. These guidelines for the practice of netnography are there to help all researchers begin actually discovering, collecting, deciphering, and developing answers and theory from online traces using a range of comprehensible techniques.

SUMMARIZING NETNOGRAPHY

1.4

Netnography is a specific type of qualitative social media research. It adapts the methods of ethnography and other qualitative research practices to the cultural experiences that encompass and are reflected within the traces, networks, and systems of social media. Netnography differs from the more general field of digital inquiry by its emphasis on online traces, interactions, and socialities. It is different from other forms of online

or digital ethnography because it specifies particular procedural guidelines. Finally, netnography is a pragmatic, how-to, work-bench-level approach to studying social media using a cultural lens.



THE RELATION OF NETNOGRAPHY TO OTHER ACADEMIC FIELDS

Applications and publications that use netnography are burgeoning across fields as diverse as Information and Library Science, Computer Science, Psychology, Media Studies, Travel, Hospitality, and Tourism Studies, Sexuality and Gender, Nursing, Drug Policy Research, Game Studies, Education, Media Anthropology, Geography, and Sociology. In the field of Accounting, for example, Guo (2018) studied an online forum set up by a professional accounting group to explore how people develop the professional identity of being an accountant, and how that related to participants' professional insecurities. D'Ambra and colleagues (2017) used netnography to understand how the use of e-books changed readers' experience of reading. They identified a *New York Times* article about the topic, and another in the publication *Scientific American*. They then downloaded and analyzed the comments left on these articles on the publications' websites. Palo and Manderstedt (2017) used a diverse range of data, including Instagram posts, Twitter messages, reviews, blog posts, podcasts, and YouTube movies, to understand how textual features are understood

by engaged child readers. In the field of food sociology, Cronin and colleagues (2014) used netnography to examine discussions of over-consumption of food and alcohol, and then illustrate and develop a theory of their ‘carnavalesque’ qualities. Contributing to the language studies field, Sultana, Dovchin, and Pennycock (2014) used a netnography of Facebook groups to study the use of the ‘linguistic, social and cultural practices’ of young Bangladeshi and Mongolian adults. In economic geography, Grabher and Ibert (2014) used their netnographic study of online hybrid professional-hobbyist communities to conclude that the physical ‘distance’ in these communities should not be considered a deficiency, but rather an asset that helped them to collaboratively learn in ways different from face-to-face learning.

There are many other examples. In the field of Library and Information Studies, for example, Moreillon (2015) used netnography to study how school librarians use Twitter and hashtags as a cultural tool and affinity space to gain and build a sense of professional identity, as well as to promote professional development in a grassroots, social media-created community of practice. Roland et al. (2017) used social network analysis along with netnography to identify and study another kind of Twitter hashtag-based online community of practice, this one dealing with health care. They found that these communities exhibited new characteristics such as social control, common purpose, flat hierarchy, and network-based achievement along with some of the traditional markers of such collectives. Exploring online sites with netnography has also helped us understand how online communications are used to share knowledge about dangerous practices and drugs. In one such study, McVeigh et al. (2016: 1) explored the ‘plethora of communal folk pharmacological advice and recommendations for DNP manufacture and use, together with associated harms and outcomes’. DNP is a cellular metabolic poison that causes thermogenesis and results in fat burning and weight loss. Their study provided a rich and grounded examination of the knowledge, attitudes, and motivations of DNP users, and also illustrated the important role that public online sites play in their information sharing. Their study concluded by calling for more study of, and engagement with, these online groups, and the use of this understanding to formulate appropriate and effective policy responses. These examples from the fields of Computer Science, Child Education, Food Sociology, Accounting, Language Studies, Economic Geography, Library and Information Science, Health Communication, and Drug Policy Research are just a small sampling of the hundreds of netnographies that have been conducted and published within numerous academic fields and subfields, as well as in the Marketing Research, Advertising, Public Relations, and Tourism and Travel academic fields and industries.

The reason for its success across academic fields is probably because netnography is a coherent method that has proven very useful for revealing communities of practice, interactional styles, group exchanges, alterations in communication and information systems, learning in the wild, online norms, digital practices, discursive styles, innovative forms of collaboration and organization, and manifestations of creativity. This book captures the waves of exciting new social media research appearing across

almost every social science academic field since the publication of the first edition of *Netnography*. Every month that goes by, more and more examples of the diverse forms and fields of netnography are taking hold, and overview articles are beginning to appear with increasingly useful and systematic discussion of researchers' varied methodological and operational choices (Bartl et al., 2016; Costello et al., 2016; Heinonen and Medberg, 2018; Tavakoli and Wijesinghe, 2019; Whalen, 2018; Wu and Pearce, 2014).

INVESTIGATING DIGITAL ANTHROPOLOGY

1.5

The lines between different forms of social science investigation are in flux and they are often unclear. As an exercise, investigate the current meaning and boundaries of the field of 'digital anthropology'. What do you think this term means? Does it include netnography? How is it related to netnography?



To finish this initial investigation of digital anthropology, use an online resource to look up a few digital anthropology articles in peer-reviewed journals. Have a quick read through these articles to understand where the current research interests lie in this important and growing field.

Digital Anthropology and Netnography

It would not be an exaggeration to say that anthropologists have greeted the rise of digital culture with skepticism. In the early 2000s, when the Internet's rise was well under way, a survey of the top 50 anthropology departments in the United States found that almost 30% of anthropologists explicitly rejected the idea that online anthropology could be an important research area (Forte, 2002). Although netnography is definitely a form of digital anthropology, it has always been a hybrid creation of many academic fields. For its formulation, I was indebted to early digital anthropologists such as Arturo Escobar (1994) and his early and controversial advocacy of 'anthropologies of cyberculture'. Although it emerged out of my work in the field of consumer culture research, netnography was originally developed based on scholarship I had seen in cultural studies by scholars such as Henry Jenkins (1995) and Nancy Baym (1995). In fact, it was adapted for my own project of bringing cultural studies into the mainstream of consumer research using a brand studies-related lens to investigate media fan communities.

Netnography draws on the work of many communication and information studies scholars, such as Sherry Turkle (1995), Joseph Walther (1992), Ronald Rice (1984), Margaret McLaughlin (1995), Annette Markham (1998) and Stephen Jones (1995).

I also drew on the work of psychologists like Sara Kiesler and her colleagues (Kiesler et al., 1984) and computer science-based human-computer interface scholars like Brenda Laurel and Joy Mountford (1990). I am indebted to the scholars who work in these fields, and am glad that netnography is a creation whose DNA traces to such exciting fields of scholarly inquiry. I hope that future scholars studying and using netnography will build on this common basis in multiple fields to extend, expand, and integrate not only the approach but also the combined impact of these academic domains.

As the social media field sites in which netnography is situated have grown and spread, the approach's focus has become broader and has touched upon diverse areas of inquiry. In anthropology, for instance, there is a growing corpus of 'ethnographic approaches to digital media' scholarship that Coleman (2010) divides into broad and overlapping categories of 'cultural politics', 'vernacular culture', and 'prosaics'. These studies cover a wide swath of contemporary human engagement with technology.

All netnographies are, by virtue of their engagement with social media, a form of digital anthropology. And although some digital anthropology is recognizably netnographic, such as Daniels' (2009) study of racism online, much of it expands the scope of investigation to consider human experiences with technology as broadly as possible, such as with the ethnographies of software developers and hackers. Another important and closely related field that broadens netnography's focus is media anthropology.

Media Anthropology and Netnography

Media anthropology (also called 'the anthropology of media') is an 'ethnographically informed, historically grounded, and context-sensitive analysis of the ways in which people use and make sense of media technologies' (Askew, 2002: 3). It also explores 'the dynamics of all these social processes of media consumption, production, [and] circulation' (Ginsburg et al., 2003: 23). It would be hard to deny that an understanding of social media communication should form a part of more general ethnographic look at how people use and make sense of media technologies, and thus that netnography should play a key role in media anthropology investigations.

Every day, people are intimately involved not only in the social processes of media consumption, but also in its production and circulation. Ordinary citizens become elevated, some rapidly gain celebrity status. The dynamics of media's social processes have dramatically shifted, and continue to alter. For example, consider the netnography of the relation between hijab-wearing, fashion, and social media identity construction by Kavakci and Kraeplin (2017). This article showed how the broad links between morality, religion, economy, and technology are exhibited through celebrity and in both the global attention economy and the Islamic culture industry. These interdependencies become visible through the investigation of social media identity. Kavakci and Kraeplin's (2017) study concludes that 'the identities of their hijabi women's social media personalities are heavily influenced by Western secular

norms and their motivations may often be market-driven, even when bound closely with the mediated Islamic cultural and religious imagery and semiotics' (p. 865). The resulting identity of a stylishly attired but modestly covered Muslim woman is known as a 'hijabista' – a hijab-wearing fashionista.

It is worth noting that, from its inception, netnography was influenced by and used for fan studies in the Cultural Studies vein – an arm of Media Studies and Media Anthropology. The market-based enthusiasm of fan studies, with its passionate connection to its topics, was already a part of online ethnographic work. As we will see in Chapter 2, the Age of Virtual Community in social media studies contained several important studies of the online message board and the conversational groupings that were gathering around general and specific media properties such as soap operas (Baym, 1993), *The X-Files* (Clerc and Lavery, 1996) or *Twin Peaks* (Jenkins, 1995). These early fan studies (and, arguably, 'fannish' studies, such as Howard Rheingold's and Annette Markham's) were marked by a close personal, intellectual, and emotional engagement with the online phenomena they investigated, as well as in the novel processes of investigation itself. Netnography shared and still shares this fan-oriented and fan group-derived emphasis on media, community, and passionate engagement.

OUTLINE OF THIS BOOK

This book is arranged as a series of logical steps that lead you from a conceptual and historically-grounded understanding of netnography, online ethnography, qualitative social media research, and theories about online social interaction to the initiation, development, data collection, analysis, interpretation, and communication of your own netnography project. As part of the book's hands-on approach, you will learn about each step in netnography. You will put this new approach and its specific procedures to use. You will practice these new procedures in a series of practical exercises, including working with a downloadable dataset in spreadsheet format.

You will also create your own research project. You will learn how to prepare data, how to search for relevant traces, how to collect these traces, and how to organize your data, as well as different methods for analyzing and interpreting it, and integrating those analyses and interpretations. As you do so, you will be confronted with realistic methodological and contextual choices. For instance, you will need to consider how to deal with data protection regulations, or how to theorize the complex, changing, and corporate/surveillance capitalist control structure of much of contemporary social media. You will also, as a final step, consider how to communicate the output of your research. The particular manner in which you will move through this learning process is detailed in the remainder of this chapter. The pace at which you do it is under your control (or, if you are using this book for a course, completely out of your hands).

Methodological and Historical Introduction: Chapters 1 to 4

Netnography's initial chapter offers three introductions: an introduction to the field of social media, an introduction to the method of netnography, and an introduction to this book. It provides a clear definition of social media, and then proceeds to define netnography in a similarly transparent fashion. It positions netnography in relation to similar types of research, such as digital anthropology and online ethnography. This first chapter should clear up a lot of questions that people have about netnography and how it relates to other ethnographic forms of online research. Netnography is a specific type of qualitative social media research method that differs from the more general field of ethnographic and digital ethnographic inquiry by its emphasis on online traces, interactions, and socialities. It differs from other forms of qualitative social media research because of its particular procedural guidelines. Finally, this chapter explains how netnography is a pragmatic, how-to, workbench-level approach to studying social media using a cultural lens.

Chapters 2 and 3 will provide a historical basis for understanding social media both as a concept and an institution, and ethnographic social media research as a distinct and interdisciplinary field of inquiry with a history stretching back several decades. In these chapters, the history of social media will be divided into three temporal periods: the Age of Electronic Communications (late 1960s to early 1990s), the Age of Virtual Community (early 1990s to early 2000s), and the Age of Social Media (early 2000s to date). Chapter 2 examines the first two ages. The first age began with the Arpanet and the early years of (mostly corporate) networked communications. For the public around the globe, the Age of Electronic Communication was built on the back of private American online services such as CompuServe and GEnie, and successful public experiments with online services in Europe such as Minitel in France. On the research side, Usenet and the Bulletin Board System proved amenable to an ethnographic approach, and research intensified and developed through the 1990s as the Age of Virtual Community advanced. The second age saw a flowering of experimentation and developments, as corporate, journalistic, and academic communications all emphasized this new form of 'community'. During the second age, a developing field of ethnographies of online environments explored and wrote about life online as an evolving cultural context.

Chapter 3 will demonstrate how the Age of Social Media advanced through three overlapping waves. First, dynamic webpages were forms of social media that were more individual-centered and audience-driven. Then, social networking sites mainstreamed the online interactional format and commercialized online social experience. Finally, visual platforms offered more vivid and creative impressions of contact. Throughout the historical overview, we will observe how the sociotechnical infrastructures of different platforms alter the experience of sociality by offering new

social affordances. With an overview of important sites in China (WeChat and QQ), and Russia (VKontakte), we will learn about some of the global developments in social media. We will also discover the netnographic research conducted using sites of social media such as Twitter, Friendster, Reddit, LinkedIn, Facebook, Flickr, YouTube, Instagram, and Snapchat. Numerous netnographies have already shown how social media offer alternate news channels to the public, are used in life transitions, play a role in processes of credibility and trust formation, become involved in various forms of resistance and activism, and how they are creating new ecosystems of online entrepreneurs and influence networks.

Chapter 4 will delve into a theoretical overview of online sociality. The chapter will investigate utopian and dystopian views of social media and technology by interrogating the ideological and empirical bases of claims of community and also by examining the structure-agency effects of social media technologies on human sociality. On one side is a consocial perspective that leads us to see social media less as a solid institutional arrangement and more as a momentary construction that enables the possibilities provided by individual life projects and trajectories. On the other side are theories positing considerably more determinist effects. The chapter will further examine social media's structure-agency dimension by deploying four distinct but overlapping theoretical lenses: technogenesis, affordance theory, intersectionality, and networked individualism. The chapter's concluding section will consider the central role that marketing, finance, and media industrialization in general play in social media. These capitalist forces have led to a variety of production processes dedicated to monetizing the communitarian dimensions of social life online, with important attendant effects upon both society and our researching of it.

Empirical Initiation: Chapters 5 and 6

Chapter 5 marks the official beginning of the 'how-to' portion of the book. The chapter's methodological overview will present the four elements that distinguish netnography from every other research method. The chapter also offers a broad view of the four general categories of research operations. Then, the chapter explains the six steps of netnography: initiation, investigation, immersion, interaction, integration, and incarnation. Next, the chapter offers some advice and ideas regarding the conduct of netnography in research teams. Much netnography is conducted by groups of researchers, rather than individuals working alone.

With this overview in place, Chapter 5 moves into a discussion and exercise-driven exploration of the first stage of the netnographic research process, initiation. The initiation stage focuses the netnographic project on a particular research question. Chapter 5 will teach you about the two major parts of a research question, and will also unpack the two key initiators of netnographic research questions. Through a series of exercises, you will learn how to develop your own effective netnographic

research questions. The chapter examines a number of research questions that have been used in prior netnographic research, analyzing their components and direction in order to provide you with clear guidelines and a strong foundation upon which to base your own netnographic project. Throughout the remainder of this book, you will build on the research questions that you initiate in this chapter.

However, before your netnography project begins in earnest, you should be aware of the ethical procedures that must guide your work. This is the function of Chapter 6. In this chapter, you will learn the fundamental principles behind research ethics, and in particular how netnography follows standards that are adapted to the current contexts that govern ethnographic and online research. The chapter will tell you the percentage of recent online ethnographies published that failed to include any mention at all of ethical guidelines or standards. Applying the two main moral philosophy stances – deontological and consequentialist – to the task of qualitative social media research is the next step in the chapter, which will proceed to identify and quantify a ‘consent gap’ representing the percentage of the public that has clearly stated their preference for their social media data not to be used in any research investigation. Furthermore, the chapter will explain how ethical practices can be tainted by taking prior detrimental advice. The core of the chapter is an integrated flowchart to ensure that data collection and presentation procedures are research ethics compliant. The flowchart presented in Figure 6.3 is a central tool to help you through the remainder of the book, because data ethics are involved across all of the active operations of data collection, analysis, and communication.

Data Collection Operations: Chapters 7 to 10

Chapter 7 will explore the methodology and implications of netnographic data collection in general, with a specific focus on investigative operations and sampling issues. The chapter will begin by explaining what the terms ‘data’ and ‘data collection’ mean in the context of practicing netnography. It will then explore the implications of observer choice on the creation of data from social media traces, interactions, interviews, and researcher experiences. Investigative, interactive, and immersive data collection operations will be introduced and overviewed. The three operations can be used together, in combination, or separately in qualitative social media research. Which operation(s) to use must be determined in deference to the research question and other elements of the research context. The next subsection of the chapter will explore ethics in investigative data operations, including the right to use public versus private sites and data in research, and the need for and forms of researcher disclosure. There will be important practical concerns discussed about how to deal with data in which message posters are anonymous or pseudonymous. The final subsection will foreshadow the way in which the procedures of the next three chapters will build on the base of methodology developed in this chapter.

The focus on data collection continues in Chapter 8 with a full description and development of investigative operations. In netnography, investigation is an unobtrusive process focusing on the selection and collection of social media data. Building upon Chapter 7's reorientation of the notion of data, this chapter will outline netnography's specific investigative practices. There are five of these: simplifying, searching, scouting, selecting, and saving. Simplifying translates the research questions and focus into a consistent set of search terms or keywords. Searching involves the entry of keywords, search terms, hashtags, trends, and their variations into search functions and engines. Scouting operations provide the initial filter to narrow down the choice set from which you will select your data sites. Selection practices apply specific relevant criteria in order to decide which data sites to choose for your dataset. Selection also involves data ethics concerns such as sensitive topics, vulnerable populations, and weighing benefits against risks. Saving operations include capture, cut and paste, and scraping from any manner of devices, including mobile phones. Saving is also implicated in ethical procedures of data security. This chapter will describe, illustrate, and provide numerous examples to help you learn about these five practices that, together, constitute the process of investigative data collection operations in netnography.

Chapter 9 will focus on interactive data collection operations. Interactive data is co-produced and elicited, rather than simply observed and recorded. Before detailing the elements of interactive data collection, the chapter will consider the nature of online engagement as the appropriate frame for netnography, replacing the more perplexing former term drawn from traditional ethnography, 'participation'. The chapter will then present procedural operations under the general categories of interviews, involvements, innovations, and informed consent. The appropriate way to conduct interviews will be covered, focusing especially on online interviews. After that, the chapter will discuss, describe, and provide examples of involvements, or naturalistic immersive interactions. Then, under the general name of innovative research approaches to interaction, the chapter will discuss the use of research webpages, digital diaries, and mobile ethnography. The chapter's final section will provide the reader with a more exhaustive treatment of informed consent procedures in netnography, including a sample form that can be adapted to your own research project.

Finally, Chapter 10 is dedicated to exploring the nature and practice of immersive data operations in netnography. It will open with a critical inquiry into the ethnographic notion of field and field site. This critique will reveal that the concept of a field site is so destabilized by the nature of netnography as to be inaccurate. Instead of field sites, netnographers have data sites. Instead of fieldnotes, netnographers keep immersion journals. The chapter will then specify and explain the four core immersive operations in netnography: reconnoitering, recording, researching, and reflecting. Reconnoitering is a type of orienting towards data sites, guided by the metaphor of the researcher's focus alternately employing a telescope and microscope. In reconnoitering operations, researchers seek deep data that is resonant, reveals lead users, provides exceptions to

the rule, or reveals the macro inherent in the micro. Recording is the detailed, specific chronicling of the netnographer doing the research. Researching requires researchers to deliberately reveal, systematize, and evaluate the theoretical viewpoints they consciously and unconsciously impress upon the data during its inscription and analysis. Reflecting operations encourages researchers to develop self-awareness, emotionality, and empathy, completing the set of ethnographic immersion operations. The final subsection of Chapter 10 will provide an overview of the research ethics implications of immersive data operations in netnography before proceeding to the next chapter, which will describe netnography's integration movement.

Data Analysis and Interpretation Operations: Chapters 11 to 13

Integration is a combination of analytic and interpretive data operations in a pragmatic quest to answer research questions in netnography. Chapter 11 opens with a short science fiction story that analogizes a key problem regarding how social scientific analysis obscures contextual understanding. After the metaphorical story, the chapter will define and explain integration, analysis, and interpretation. Integration, analysis, and interpretation will connect to netnographic research, research questions, deductive, inductive, and abductive approaches to research. Those connections will subsequently be explored and discussed. An adaptation of Benjamin's immanent criticism method will be developed and its application explained. The analysis and interpretation exercises of upcoming chapters will be foreshadowed. There are several data-processing tools available to netnographers, including printed hardcopies, word processors, spreadsheets, and qualitative data analysis software. These options will be compared and discussed to close the chapter and prepare the reader for the next two chapters, in which data analysis and interpretation explanations and exercises will be provided.

Data analysis is a research process in which a particular phenomenon is broken down into component parts in order to study and understand it. The various subsections of Chapter 12 break down analysis into five component operations. First, the decisions involved in analysis will be discussed. Levels of analysis will be related to researchers' decisions about what is to be treated as a whole or a part. Analysis and its outcomes will also be related to sociologies of knowledge in which extant theoretical frames are adopted or new ones are made. The basic principles of qualitative data analysis will be overviewed. Following that, this book's more specific focus on data analysis operations for netnography will be introduced, detailed, and illustrated using examples and practice exercises. First, collating operations will be discussed as the preparation of data for coding. Second, coding operations, which lie at the heart of data analysis, are detailed as initiations into the processes of abstraction and reflection that lead to theory development. Third, combining operations unite conceptually-related codes to form new, higher-order elements called pattern codes – and thus

reveal more abstract structures and patterns. Fourth, counting operations are a quantifying procedure that allows researchers to more precisely compare various elements in qualitative data. Fifth and finally, charting operations create and use visualizations, maps, graphs, tables, and other displays of data. Researchers today have many tools for grasping a holistic sense of the data, as well as a sense of its component parts and how they fit together. This subsection will consider maps, network graphs, and word clouds. Together, collating, coding, combining, counting, and charting form the constituent elements of the analytic process advanced in this chapter.

Chapter 13's emphasis on interpretation rounds out this section on data integration, analysis, and interpretation. Interpretation is the process of making sense of, and discovering meaning in, collected and analyzed data. In this chapter, the use of hermeneutic interpretation in netnography will be introduced and clarified. Then, the application of assemblage theory to netnographic data interpretation will be introduced and developed. Thereafter, the six interpretive practices will be introduced, developed, and explained with examples and exercises. Theming is the operation that reassembles the component pieces of an abstractly analyzed phenomenon, creating a new conceptual whole from these parts. Talenting is a way to produce theming interpretations using artistic expression. Totalizing operations explore the reassembled conceptual whole and its meaning. Translating operations transport the researcher as they move back and forth between worlds of data and theory. Turtling operations are based on a famous metaphor of turtles standing on each other's backs and refer to the operation that will (re)connect data as well as the holistic phenomenon itself to the context(s) from which it was taken. Finally, troublemaking operations critique underlying and taken-for-granted notions in the service of developing a more robust and ethical interpretation. Throughout the chapter, numerous explanations and exercises will be provided to practically guide the reader through the process of data interpretation in netnography.

The Future Communication of Netnographic Research: Chapters 14 and 15

The book's penultimate chapter, Chapter 14, will forecast the future by reading the communication of netnographic research in the past, as it has occurred through particular research outlets. After presenting general guidelines for writing research, the chapter will present a new concept: the method-embedded research communication triangle, which will identify four key research elements to communicate: (1) the method of netnography, (2) the netnographic data operations, (3) the netnographic dataset, and (4) the data. Chapter 14 describes each of the four elements in turn, providing examples and exercises, and illustrating certain important concepts, such as legitimation from institutional theory and rhetorical writing in the sciences.

The communication of method is a rhetorical act. Strategies may differ and depend upon the various characteristics of an audience. Netnography currently has

25 different research operations (26 if you include research question-asking conceptions as operations). These 25 (or 26) operations are grouped into three distinct categories of data collection and two categories of data integration operations (i.e., analysis and interpretation). You must describe, explain, and justify the particular procedures employed in your research project. Datasets and data also need to be presented in the communication of your netnography. Chapter 14 will provide numerous examples of different types of netnographic method and procedural descriptions, datasets, and data drawn from a variety of published netnographies. The final section of this chapter will discuss some of the hallmarks of excellence in published netnographic research. Following this, the final chapter offers a vision of The Future of Netnography. Don't peek: save this chapter for last.

With this introduction to the book now complete, we will turn in the next chapter to a new examination of the history of social media.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

The book's opening chapter was a series of introductions. First, we were introduced to netnography by way of its relation to social media – the applications, websites, and other online technologies that enable users to engage in a variety of content creation, circulation, annotation, and association activities. Over five billion people around the world have access to different types of social media, and this edition of the book responds to the need for updated and improved ways to investigate and understand how they use them. The chapter's opening section broadly explored some of the contours of social media today, looking at global usage patterns, exploring the most popular types of social media platforms, and encouraging some personal reflection on your own use. The next section of the chapter introduced netnography, defining it as a form of cultural research that uses a set of specific practices to investigate social media. Netnography is affiliated with other forms of digital anthropology and media anthropology through its focus on cultural understanding. Netnography is different from other approaches because it uses specific techniques and a pragmatic, step-by-step approach to investigate online traces. The chapter's final section introduced the contents of the book, demonstrating how the approach has been updated for a rapidly evolving world of social media. The five main sections of the book are devoted to methodology and history, empirical initiation, data collection and creation, analysis and interpretation, and communicating impactful research customized to any academic field.

KEY READINGS

Frömming, Urte Undine, Steffen Köhn, Samantha Fox, and Mike Terry (2017) *Digital Environments: Ethnographic Perspectives Across Global Online and Offline Spaces*. Bielefeld, Germany: Transcript Verlag.

Gretzel, Ulrike (2017) 'Social media activism in tourism', *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism*, 15(2): 1–14.

Pink, Sarah (2017) 'Foreword', in Urte Undine Frömming, Steffen Köhn, Samantha Fox, and Mike Terry (eds), *Digital Environments: Ethnographic Perspectives Across Global Online and Offline Spaces* (pp. 9–11). Bielefeld, Germany: Transcript Verlag.

Pink, Sarah, Heather Horst, John Postill, Larissa Hjorth, Tania Lewis, and Jo Tacchi, Jo (eds) (2015) *Digital Ethnography: Principles and Practice*. London: Sage.