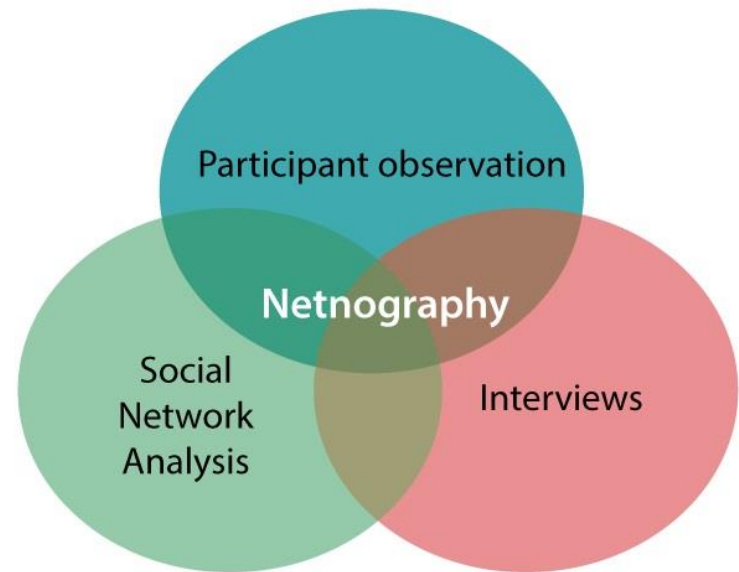# Netnography

– a basic guide for Management Projects, Masters Theses and Elective Credits

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Fenton & Procter (2019, n.p.)

The background to this overview of 'netnography'

- Written in April 2020, during the middle of the 'lockdown' of The Netherlands as a result of the Covid19 virus, this presentation is an overview **sketch** of the background, meaning and elements of 'netnography'. Its main audience is lecturing staff but students may also find this a useful starting point.

- It has tried to summarise the existing knowledge on the method and provides additional readings for those interested in using it for Management Projects, Masters Theses and Elective Credit options at StendenHMS

- Once things are 'back to normal' this information would be much better shared in classrooms with groupwork discussions and examples from lecturers, allowing questions to be asked and answered and guidelines to be captured in handbooks and Q&A sessions

- We welcome all feedback and suggestions for improving this presentation and see it as a first step, not the final word!

Netnography: What it is

- ## A way to study consumers

"Marketing researchers use a variety of methods to study consumers. Qualitative methods are particularly useful for revealing the rich symbolic world that underlies needs, desires, meanings and choice" (Kozinets, 2002, p. 62)

- ## An unobtrusive way to study communities

""Netnography," or ethnography on the Internet, is a new qualitative research methodology that adapts ethnographic research techniques to the study of cultures and communities emerging through computer-mediated communications. As a marketing research technique, "netnography" uses the information publicly available in online forums to identify and understand the needs and decision influences of relevant online consumer groups." (Kozinets, 2002, p. 62)

Morais et al. (2020, p. 441) note "The netnographic method is distinguished by its axiological orientation residing in recognition of online social experiences. The main method for data collection adopted by the netnographer is participant observation."

- ## A way to study 'naturally occurring behaviour'

""Netnography" provides marketing researchers with a window into naturally occurring behaviors, such as searches for information by, and communal word-of-mouth discussions between, consumers." (Kozinets, 2002, p. 62)

- ## Quick access to valuable data

"Data can be generated very expeditiously by searching for relevant text through search engines such as Google and Yahoo. Netnography also provides researchers with access to groups of people who may otherwise be difficult to reach. Further, the pseudonymous/ anonymous nature of most online interactions can potentially generate more candid accounts compared to those created through the probing of a researcher." (Mkono, 2012, p. 554)

"Netnography has advantages in terms of quantity and availability of data when compared to other traditional research methods, however, it presents challenges and problems that the researcher needs to know, especially conducting ethical research." (Morais et al., 2020, p. 442)

Where it fits in to qualitative research methods…

- Existing qualitative research methods include ethnography, focus groups, personal interviews, participant observation.

- Netnography comes out of ethnography, the study of particular social groups and their habits, processes and behaviours. Researchers would observe and usually participate in cultural experiences and then try to understand them through reflecting on their notes and observations.

- Kozinets (2002) recommends five clear stages or steps: entrée, gathering / analysing data, ensuring trustworthy interpretation, conducting ethical research; providing opportunity for feedback

What it is, what it uses and what academics say about it…

- Over 5 billion people use social media (apps, websites and online technology), and netnography allows people to better understand these people through "techniques that value immersion in a culture" (Kozinets, 2020, n.p.)

- Facebook has 2.2 billion monthly active users, 74% facebook users say they use it daily, 51% several times a day. Instagram has 800m and Twitter 330m monthly active users. WeChat has one billion and Weibo 376m (Kozinets, 2020)

- "Netnography is a way to study social media that maintains the complexities of its experiential and cultural qualities… and makes sense of that system and the way people interact with and within it" (Kozinets, 2020, n.p.)

- It can involve interviews, data mining, web crawler software, thematic analysis

- "All netnographies involve collecting, participating and interpreting online traces" (Kozinets, 2020, n.p.)

- Topics selected for netnographic research should meet 6 criteria including to be relevant to the research question, be active with recent and frequent contributions, be interactive, involve substantial numbers of different contributors and provide rich data (Janta et al., 2014).

- Wu and Pearce (2014, p. 464) describe "practical steps to employ the method – entree, data collection, data analysis, data interpretation and member checks".

The steps in using netnography (Wu & Pearce, 2014)

Kozinets (2002) describes the process of using netnography as a process made up of 4 steps. Wu and Pearce (2014) describe these in a really clear and simple way:

- Entreé: criteria for selecting the most informative online community (focused group; many postings; longer/richer postings; 'between member' interactions

- Data collection: Sites have lurkers, miglers, devotees and insiders. The last two will provide the best data for netnographic research and are most likely to post text and images allowing rich data analysis.

- Data analysis: manual coding is possible for reasonable datasets. Easier if the researcher is familiar with the subject/context.

  Quotes ⟶ Codes ⟶ Themes

- Research ethics and member checking: disclose your researcher role if you are actively participating. If not, use 'do no harm' principle. Member checking not always possible but desirable

Netnography, samples and saturation

- Populations, sampling and measures of saturation are very important for research to be trustworthy.

- Netnography shoud be careful not to be caught up in biased views which are not representative or tell the full story.

- While netnography is normally a qualitative measure, researchers may wish to keep a record of number of postings read, used or rejected and the reasons for doing that.

- 'Saturation' occurs when no new information is gained from reading further postings, and no new insights are gained by the researcher.

The 'father of netnography' Robert Kozinets said the following:

"As with grounded theory, data collection should continue as long as new insights on important topical areas are still being generated. For purposes of precision, some "netnographers" may wish to keep close count of the exact number of messages and web-pages read (in practice, an extremely difficult measurement), as well as how many distinct participants were involved. The strength of "netnography" is its particularistic ties to specific online consumer groups and the revelatory depth of their online communications. Hence, interesting and useful conclusions might be drawn from a relatively small number of messages, if these messages contain sufficient descriptive richness and are interpreted with considerable analytic depth and insight." (Kozinets, 2002, p. 64)

Quality criteria for the netnographic researcher

- Trustworthiness. The parallel concept to 'validity' in qualitative research. The identities of contributors is often unknown and their 'persona' may be "carefully cultivated and controlled" (Kozinets, 2002, p. 64). Triangulation with other forms of data collection may be helpful.

- Representativeness. "Utilizing carefully-chosen message threads in 'netnography' is akin to 'purposive sampling'… because findings are to be interpreted in terms of a particular sample it is not necessary that the sample be representative of other populations" (Kozinets, 2002, p. 67). The aim is to understand, not claim generalizability.

- Member checking. "To ensure a 'trustworthy' interpretation, member checks with nine informants were conducted. Member check informants said they were 'impressed' by the 'netnography', thought it was 'perceptive' and even 'fantastic' (Kozinets, 2002, p. 67).

A word of warning about netnographic research…

"The immediacy and accessibility of data afforded by netnography requires researchers to question the currency of content and its accelerated perishability. Data that might be trending today within forums as highly influential may stimulate very limited interaction tomorrow and may be ignored next week. The challenge lies in how to accommodate and account for these dynamics and complexity in netnographic research." (Lugosi & Quinton, 2018, p. 289)

Who is using netnography?

- Janta, Lugosi and Brown (2014) use netnography to investigate PhD (international) student loneliness and social isolation and how their fellow students supported them online with suggestions

- Wu and Pearce (2014) analyse the blogs of Chinese tourists who used recreational vehicles (campervans) when visiting Australia. They point out that travel blogging has been a part of the internet since the early days and therefore netnography is very appropriate, and that it can be a time-saving and cost effective way of gathering data (but that the analysis is VERY time-consuming!). They provide an excellent overview of the steps involved in netnography (see earlier slide)

- Rageh, Melewar and Woodside (2013) study the concept of the customer experience in tourism. They argue (p. 130) that "the merit of the netnography research method is the fact that it excels at telling the story, understanding complex social phenomena and assists the researcher in developing themes from the respondents' point of view".

- Thanh and Kirova (2018) investigated the wine tourism experience of visitors to the Cognac region, France. Their study supported the '4E' model and highlighted the importance of 'education' and 'entertainment'.

Netnography and research ethics

- 'Do no harm' principle versus 'informed consent' principle

"Netnographers are professional "lurkers": the uniquely unobtrusive nature of the method is the source of much of its attractiveness and its contentiousness" (Kozinets, 2002, p. 65)

- Public versus private forums – is informed consent implicit in public forums?

- Posting in forums – yes or no? 'Lurk' anonymously but post publicly seems to be the guideline

- Acknowledging Research Ethics challenges

"The consumers who originally created the data do not necessarily intend or welcome its use in research representations" (Kozinets, 2002, p. 65)

What might a netnography MP, MT or EC look like? – an example of the discussion chapter from a recent Masters thesis from another university!

1. **A positive stay experience**

Almost all of the guests described their luxury hotel stay experiences to be positive. In addition, the over-all hotel attributes evoked positive emotions in relation to luxury hotel stay experiences of the guests. Table 18 summarises the emotions expressed.

It has been highlighted throughout this chapter how the different hotel attributes worked together and made the luxury hotel guests feel positive. As illustrated by one guest in an online review:

"…felt like home – but way more luxurious!… had a hard time leaving it... room was beyond comfortable and I really enjoyed using the spa facilities... The hotel staff… genuinely caring for my well-being and enjoyment… never felt lonely the entire time I was there…" (Review 191)

As guests enumerated their important attributes, they also identified their stay experience as favourable. As stated by one guest in an online review:

"Excellent!... very friendly and professional staff, great room, very clean, perfect location... We had very pleasant experience!" (Review 418)

Feeling good emotions and distinguishing their stay experience positively, most guests recommended their luxury hotels on the online reviews. They also declared their intentions to stay again, and some guests even congratulated the luxury hotels for their great work. As stated by one guest in an online review:

"… Kudos to one of the best hotel experiences we have experienced! Way to go Hotel XXX…" (Review 146)

Appreciative	Delighted	Impressed	Pampered	Well-rested
Did not want to leave	Enjoyed	In awe	Relaxed	Wish to stay longer
	Home away from home	Love	Satisfied	

Table 18: Emotions associated with the over-all hotel experience

Online resources through the NHLStenden library

The Kozinets book "Netnography" from Sage publishers is available free during April through 'vitalsource'. Students can 'borrow' a maximum of 6 books this way but it will allow them to continue their studies during the lockdown. Students need to set up an account first, after which they will be able to select their 6 titles (until 1 May). The link to the page is: https://www.studystore.nl/c/gratis-toegang-ebooks-tot-1-mei

Ebsco Ebooks also has the following title which has a chapter (Chapter 23) by Kozinets on Netnography in The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Business and Management Research Methods:

http://search-1ebscohost-1com-1zu0iwqsc0071.access.nhlstenden.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=1679432&site=ehost-live&scope=site&authtype=ip,shib&custid=s1242078

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Thank you for your time and attention

In this ppt presentation we have tried to give you a flavour of a research method you may not have come across before.

1. *We hope it has been helpful and informative*

2. *Feel free to contact us if you would like to use this method in your research – we are not experts but we should be able to help you along the way*

3. *Do please look for, download and read the references on the previous slide – they will be a valuable help to you on your research journey*

4. *Reading how others have used netnography is a great way to learn how to do it for yourself. There is no magic formula (as is the case with much qualitative research), but seeing how others have done it should give an intelligent person plenty of clues and ideas*

5. *Why not look for our other resources on ethnography, focus groups, personal interviews and participant observation – there are MANY ways to do research!*