Netnography - A very near but yet so far tool for researchers

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ABSTRACT: Research is a constant and continuous activity. Researchers are coming out with innovative and interesting ways to add to the existing body of knowledge.One such contribution in the field of Qualitative Research is the emergence of Netnography as a method. Netnography is a technique that is a conducted in the online communities to get an insight of the rich data that is available on the web. This data is available through social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Blogs, online communities. This paper is intended to clarify the misconceptions of Netnography as an approach to research. The article also aims to highlight the acceptance of Netnography as a very useful technique by many authors across different streams.
KEYWORDS : Netnography, Social Media, Qualitative research

I.   INTRODUCTION

Although Netnography has been seen as a tool that is largely accepted as a method for qualitative research, it is not completely used and understood completely by the researchers. The basic necessity for the success of this effective technique, Netnography is that it involves planned footprints that provides firmness which can not only be adapted but also blended with various other research methods. But, the success of this qualitative methodology completely trusts and builds on the need for the presence of individuals and their personal connections in the virtual world.

Intent of this paper

The paper aims to look at the fact that some studies that claim to have been carried out with the application of Netnography technique has not made use of the essence of netnography either in capturing the data or processing the same. Moreover, unflappable and disinterested ways to netnography is not successful in getting the correct kind of attention that it is supposed to get. The acceptance and success of Netnography as a tool will happen only when the researchers are more committed by immersing themselves completely and contributing in effective and problem solving online social anecdote.

This article presents as to how incorrect adoption of theterm Netnographyis constructing negative perception that is creeping up as a hindrance for the growth of itself. To showcase the reconfiguration Netnography, the viable predilection for "Observational" and "non participatory" netnographies and solicit opportunities to make use of problem solving also known as effective netnographies to leverage the uses of online communities as well as "Social media platforms."

The Qualitative Research Methodologies that are suitable for the online habitat are referred to as "situated in an extensive methodological background of virtual ethnography that consists of several access for administrating ethnographic studies pertaining to the virtual forums and communities. (Wiles, Bengry-Howell, Crow &Nind, 2013). Tunc, alp and Le (2014) defined cogent and favourablemethodological words like "Virtual ethnography" (Hine, 2000) later the same was paraphrased as "Ethnography for the Internet" in 2015. "Cyber ethnography" (Ward, 1999). "Connective Ethnography" (Dirksen, Huizing&Smit 2010) and "netnography" (Kozinets ,1998,2002,2010, 2015) beside further descriptive, united terms like "Computer assisted webnography" (Horster&Gottschalk, 2012) and "netnographic grounded theory" (Healy &McDonagh, 2013).

It is also seen that some researchers are of the opinion that online ethnography, cyber-ethnography, virtual ethnography and netnography as synonymous terms (Grincheva, 2014), while others disputed for exquisite contrast and advocated the use of one more term "investigative research on the Internet (IRI)" with the intension of conducting a qualitative research technique they treated analogous but not similar to netnography (Lugosi, Janta& Watson, 2012).

Perplexity with respect to this jargon has cropped up as the methodology and scope beset are wide-ranging. It is seen in the work of Barna (2011) that a variety of techniques like "discourse analysis, offline interviews, participant observation in not only offline but also virtual places and online textual analysis". This is

used to evaluate the connection in both online and off-line settings but by keeping in good balance between both the contexts.

Netnography is being made use of in various capacities these days but dates back to 1995. It was first recognized by (Loanzon, Provenzola, Sirriwannangkul& AI Mallak 2013), Kozinets (2010). It also further stated that when a researcher studies any online community, a "pure" netnography takes place there and it does not call for a research that is to be carries out offline. Kozinets shared in one of his recent works that a study that involves netnography goes through a "significant" amount of collection of data and it "originates" and illustrates with the help of data collected and shared willingly on the internet. (Kozinets 2015).

An explicit set of analytical ways of research is offered by Netnography that is germane across a wide spread of online environment, at the same time it distinctly differentiates between participant observation and non participant observation. (Kozinets 1998,2002,2010,2015). This proves that online ethnography cannot be used interchangeably with the term Netnography. In a latest analysis of netnography, Kozinets (2015) declared that is was inaccurate to herd netnography in a direction of "unengaged content analysis" by suggesting a contemporary definition : a "more human-centered, participative, personally, socially and emotionally engaged vector: (p.96).

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The appearance of Netnography was witnessed in 1990s in the United States of America. This was a time when internet was still in the text based inception stage. Some online communities did exist but they were predominantly closed groups and more importantly social media was never an integral part of lives at that point in time.

The fan culture study of Kozinets(1998,2002) showcased to the magnitude to which fan cultures took to online platforms for the exchange of ideas. This gave the way for discussions about the inadequacy of clear-cut methods of research for dealing with enormous amount of online data that is developed along with the ethical perspectives combined with researching the online platforms. Kozinets (2002) suggested netnography as "a new qualitative research technique which adapts ethnographic research methodologies to the investigation of cultures and communities emerging through electronic networks."

Netnography content notably addressed the numerous developments through blogs, tweets, videocasting, podcasting, social networking and environments that are virtual. He further explains that the approach in Netnographyvaries with many other forms of ethnography with respect to orderly, step by step access to addressing the principled, procedural and scientific aspects explicit to research that is online. (Kozinets 2010)

Netnography as a method has disseminated from thearea of management and business studies as well as consumer qualitative research to alternative sectors and has seen the approval in other segments like charities and professional sectors worldwide (Wiles et al, 2013). English is not the only language in which Netnograpy is carried out. There are other languages like Finnish (Kurikko&Tuominen, 2012), Hungarian (Lugosi et al,2010), Itatian (Di Guardo&Castorotta 2013; Mortara 2013); Polish (Janta, Ladkin, Brown & Lugosi, 2011; Janta, Lugosi, Brown &Ladkin, 2012), Spanish (Mateos& Durand, 2012) and Chinese (Wu & Pearce, 2014) that have adopted Netnography as a method for the research.

In a detailed review carried out by Bengry-Howell, Wiles, Nind and Crow (2011) many articles referring to Kozinets and Netnographycan be seen which are connected to management and business studies. The approach of Netnography as a method for research has been seen in the field of education (Janata, Lugosi &Brown, 2014; Kulavuz – Onal&Va`squez, 2013), digital journalism (Aitamurto, 2013) Geography (Grabher&Ibert, 2014), Health (Bratucu, Radu&Purcarea, 2014; Murdy& Strong, 2013), Knowledge Management (Chua & Banerjee, 2013), Sport (Gilchrist & Ravenscroft, 2011; Mkono&Markwell, 2014). These publications show that Netnography as an approach to research certainly has an expansive reach in a lot of countries, languages and areas.

A detailed literature review carried out in management and business studies by Bengry-Howell,Wiles, Nind and Crow (2011) has brought to light many journal articles that have given reference to either Kozinets or Netnography. The other areas that are exposed to Netnographic research in the recent times are education (Janta, Lugosi & Brown, 2014; Kulavuz-Onal&Va'squez, 2013), digital journalism (Aitamurto,2013), geography (Grabher&Ibert, 2014) health (Bratucu, Radu&Purcarea, 2014 ; Mudry& Strong, 2013), knowledge management (Chua & Banerjee, 2013), sport (Gilchrist & Ravenscroft, 2011) and tourism (Janta, Brown, Lugosi &Ladkin, 2011; Mkono&Markwell, 2014). This proves the fact that Netnography as a research methodology is being accepted across the world in many countries, areas and languages.

III. METHODOLOGY OF NETNOGRAPHY

The major advantage of netnography as suggested by Kozinets (2002) was the fact that its nature was unobtrusive. In the research work by Pollok et al. (2014), there were comments about the methodology of

netnography as "non influencing monitoring of the communication and interaction of the members of the community to gather information that are aiming to gain practical implications into the usage behavior". The method of observational netnography precisely paradoxes many conventional qualitative research methods made use to know the behavior like focus groups, ethnographies and personal interviews. Its very easy,rapid and cost-effective technique. (De Valck et al.,2009).

Gupta (2009), when studying the social responses to unfriendly events, appreciated netnography as a method for data collection where quantitative survey research could hardly reach. It was even found that the research findings were more trustworthy because of the usage of netnography method to gather data. The other advantages like anonymity, cocreation, rich communication, emergent data are all the added advantages of the netnography method.

Netnography is a very well suited method for dealing with sensitive and personal issues because there is no face to face communication and social media spaces allow for interaction without any inhibitions. Kozinets(2015) depicts netnography as consisting of a "voyeuristic quality" as it can be made use of to study stigmatic phenomena, conversations which might not have happened if were to be face to face interaction.

Cherif and Miled (2013) state that organizations now have moved their attention from conventional marketing logic of usage of the product to "participative model"; this is based on the synergy between customers and brands. The authors have even explained how "client experience" has added up to the creation of value. Hence, companies are making efforts to create and maintain online platforms and social media pages which encourages the brands and customers to create value together.Cherif and Miled (2013)stated, representatives of the online communities made use of social media platforms to post / share gloomy messages while discussing about dissatisfaction with the performance of the brand, disparaging organizations for erroneous advertisements.Hence, the need for understanding for the companies that co-creation is very essential and most required to "balance consumers' power and counter power and to initiate a co-power approach"(Cherif&Miled, 2013).

Netnography has been helpful to market researchers in terms of identifying members of the platform who are "lead users" when compared to "representative customers" (Pollock; Luttgens&Piller, 2014). The capacity to determine different kinds of members further equips the researcher to get rich data on market trends when the community members are allowed to express both views of satisfaction as well as dissatisfaction related to a product or service. (Loanzon et al, 2013). It is also found out that netnography is also used to identify contemporary concepts for profit settings, recognition of lead users and underlying needs to extend ongoing support along with extending support to members on real prudent budgets.(Antikainen&Vaataja, 2010)

IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Netnography as a research method is positioned in such a manner that its market orientation is seen in various fields ranging from digital humanities artists, sociologists, cultural anthropologists, practioners of marketing as well as consumer research(Kozinets,2018). It is observed that the knowledge we accumulate with the help of machines and technology, however big amount of data it may involve, is being exposed to surveillance by public extensively. We are at that point of life where unimaginable storage capacity of data can be seen along with magical wizards that equips a researcher to search for information above anyone's imagination. This is an era of smartphones that everyone uses it right from being an alarm to taking part in a discussion of their interest on a virtual platform. We even observe the fact that social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and Big Data processors like Alpha, Meltwater and Crimson Hexagon are encouraging and creating platforms for people to carry out research by complete monitoring of social control (Kozinets, 2018). This situation is very challenging for the researchers and netnographersare very swiftly adapting to the dynamic conditions. The responsibilities are huge on the shoulders of netnographersas they have to gauge, balance and clout the approaches of netnography. They must be able to carryout an investigative journey by keeping the windows open to the world that is continuously evolving and revolutionizing social lives on a day to day ground.

Future of Netnography

The emphasison Netnographicstudy on a society that is technically mediated will expect us to challenge and extend the boundaries of our research. The areas of study as well as the tools that is being used are changing expeditiously and this highlights the importance for researchers to embrace the technique of Netnography for quicker, better and meaningful research. Hence, the need to collude for research with big multinationalsand their subsidiaries are required at the present day. It is also needed to crowdsource, in the problem solving time the approaches of netnographic studies globally which will aim closely in measuring the macro behavior of the individuals on the virtual social platforms.

V. CONCLUSION

Netnography is a technique that is readily adaptable and has a specific range of approaches that are analytical in nature. These are relevant to the online platforms that encourage the involvement of people which can be found in a single online community or many online communities. Text, videos, pictures, audio clips can be used along with interactions of the members off-line also. Keeping this in mind, attempts have to be made to assist the online cocreation not only by developing but also by creating new opportunities for researchers and netnographers. Cocreation has to take place simultaneously between participant observation and non participant observation. Thus, netnography can contribute to legitimate lives, situations and causes. Netnography is "the key element is not to forget the participative, reflective, interactive and active part of our research when using the communicative functions of social media and the internet.(Kozinets, 2015)

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