

**SOME THOUGHTS ON THE PROS AND CONS OF
CYBERETHNOLOGICAL RESEARCH.**

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***Abstract.** Cyberethnological research is the study of online communities and cultures using ethnographic methods. It has some advantages and disadvantages compared to traditional ethnography. Some of the pros are: it allows researchers to access diverse and global populations, it reduces the costs and risks of fieldwork, it enables the collection of rich and naturalistic data, and it facilitates the analysis of digital traces and interactions. Some of the cons are: it raises ethical and legal issues regarding consent, privacy, and data protection, it poses challenges for establishing rapport and trust with participants, it requires technical skills and tools to manage and analyze large and complex data sets, and it may overlook the offline contexts and influences of online phenomena.*

***Keywords:** phenomena, cyberspace, online research, cyberreligion, cyberactivism, cybercrime, cyberbullying, cyberart, cyberethnological researches, virtual communities.*

Introduction:

Cyberethnology is a branch of ethnography that studies online communities and cultures using various methods and perspectives. Cyberethnology aims to understand how people interact, communicate, create, and share meanings in cyberspace, as well as how these online practices are influenced by and affect offline contexts. Cyberethnology can be seen as a response to the challenges and opportunities posed by the emergence of cybertechnology, which is defined as "computer technology, especially that which involves the Internet or cyberspace" .

Research methods

Some of the main methods of cyberethnology include participant observation,

online interviews, surveys, content analysis, discourse analysis, and netnography. These methods allow cyberethnologists to collect and analyze data from various sources, such as websites, blogs, social media platforms, forums, chat rooms, online games, and virtual worlds. Cyberethnologists also need to consider ethical issues such as informed consent, privacy, anonymity, confidentiality, and data security when conducting online research .

Some of the main ideas and concepts of cyberethnology include identity, community, culture, subculture, power, resistance, globalization, localization, hybridization, and digital literacy. These ideas and concepts help cyberethnologists to explore and explain the diversity and complexity of online phenomena, such as online social movements, fandoms, cyberactivism, cybercrime, cyberbullying, , cyberreligion, and cyberart . Cyberethnology also contributes to the development of theoretical frameworks and paradigms that can account for the specificities and dynamics of cyberspace, such as cyberspace as a social space , cyberspace as a cultural space , cyberspace as a liminal space , and cyberspace as a networked space .Some of the challenges and opportunities of cyberethnological research in social media include:

- The ethical implications of conducting research in public or semi-public domains, where the boundaries between private and public are blurred or contested.
- The methodological issues of collecting, analyzing, and presenting data that are often multimodal, dynamic, and ephemeral.
- The theoretical frameworks and concepts that can adequately capture the complexity and diversity of online cultures and communities.
- The practical applications and implications of cyberethnological findings for various stakeholders, such as educators, policymakers, activists, and designers.

Cyberethnological research is a relatively new method of data collection that involves applying the techniques of classic anthropology and ethnography to the online world. It has developed over the last ten or so years since the Internet has become such a widely used tool of social research, both as a means of gathering data and as an object of study in its own right. Cyberethnologists conduct largely

qualitative studies of online communities and of the kind of interaction that goes on in cyberspace. This might involve participant observation in chat rooms, multi-user domains, email distribution lists, forums, and bulletin boards, as well as techniques of online interviewing, conferencing and other types of computer-mediated communication .

Cyberethnological research has several advantages over traditional research methods in studying social phenomena or issues. First, it allows researchers to access a diverse and global population of participants who may otherwise be hard to reach or unwilling to participate in offline settings . Second, it enables researchers to observe and analyze naturalistic and authentic data that reflects how people communicate, interact, and construct their identities online . Third, it offers researchers the opportunity to explore emerging and dynamic aspects of online culture that may not be captured by other methods or sources .However, cyberethnological research also poses some challenges and limitations that need to be addressed. For example, researchers need to be aware of the ethical implications of their presence and role in online communities, such as informed consent, privacy, anonymity, confidentiality, and potential harm . Moreover, researchers need to be careful about the validity and reliability of their data and interpretations, such as sampling bias, identity deception, data quality, contextual cues, and cultural differences . Furthermore, researchers need to be reflexive about their own positionality and assumptions in relation to their participants and the online environment, such as power relations, rapport building, trust issues, and researcher bias .Cyberethnological research is a promising and innovative research approach for 21st century research investigation. It has the potential to provide rich and insightful data on various aspects of online culture and society. However, it also requires careful consideration of the methodological and ethical issues involved in conducting research in cyberspace. Therefore, cyberethnologists need to be flexible, creative, and critical in their research design and practice.

Differences between cyberethnology and traditional ethnographic research include:

Cyberethnological research and traditional ethnography are both methods of data collection that involve studying human cultures and societies. However, they differ in several ways. First, cyberethnological research focuses on the online world, while traditional ethnography focuses on the offline world. This means that cyberethnologists study online communities and interactions, while traditional ethnographers study physical locations and face-to-face interactions . Second, cyberethnological research uses the Internet as a tool of data collection, while traditional ethnography uses direct observation and interviews as the main tools of data collection. This means that cyberethnologists rely on computer-mediated communication, such as chat rooms, forums, and email, while traditional ethnographers rely on personal contact, such as fieldwork, participant observation, and oral history . Third, cyberethnological research deals with dynamic and emergent aspects of online culture, while traditional ethnography deals with stable and established aspects of offline culture. This means that cyberethnologists explore new and changing phenomena, such as online identities, subcultures, and social movements, while traditional ethnographers explore existing and enduring phenomena, such as rituals, norms, and values .

It is natural that cyberethnological research has its downsides. First of all, we should pay attention to these factors:

— The lack of contextual and nonverbal cues, which may affect the interpretation and validity of data. For example, online communication may not convey the tone, emotion, or intention of the speakers, leading to misunderstandings or misrepresentations. Online interactions may also be influenced by factors such as time zones, cultural norms, or technical glitches, which may not be apparent to the researchers or the participants.

—The difficulty of establishing rapport and trust with online participants, especially in sensitive or controversial topics. For example, online participants may be reluctant to share personal or private information, or they may lie or exaggerate their responses, due to concerns about their identity or reputation. Online participants may also be more prone to drop out or disengage from the research, due

to boredom, distraction, or lack of commitment.

—The ethical dilemmas of informed consent, privacy, anonymity, and confidentiality in online settings. For example, online participants may not be fully aware of the purpose, scope, or implications of the research, or they may not be able to withdraw their consent or data at any time. Online participants may also be vulnerable to breaches of privacy or confidentiality, due to hacking, leaking, or misuse of their data by third parties. Online researchers may also face ethical challenges in deciding how to protect the rights and interests of their participants, while respecting the authenticity and integrity of their data.

—The potential risks of online harassment, trolling, hacking, and cybercrime for both researchers and participants. For example, online participants may be exposed to abusive or hateful messages, threats, or attacks from other online users, which may cause them emotional or psychological harm. Online researchers may also be targeted by malicious actors who may try to sabotage their research, steal their data, or compromise their accounts or devices.

— The technical issues of data collection, storage, analysis, and presentation in digital formats. For example, online data may be difficult to collect, due to the large volume, variety, and velocity of online information. Online data may also be difficult to store, due to the limited space, security, or accessibility of online platforms or devices. Online data may also be difficult to analyze, due to the complexity, ambiguity, or diversity of online content. Online data may also be difficult to present, due to the lack of standardization, quality control, or verification of online sources.

We will also provide some suggestions and best practices for cyberethnologists to overcome these challenges and conduct rigorous and ethical online research.

Ethnography is a research method that involves studying a specific cultural group or phenomenon in its natural setting, using various techniques such as participant observation, interviews, surveys, and document analysis. Ethnography aims to describe and interpret the meanings, beliefs, practices, and values of the people under study, as well as the historical, social, and environmental contexts that shape their lives. Ethnography is often associated with anthropology, but it can also

be used by other disciplines such as sociology, education, media studies, and health sciences. Cyberethnology is a type of ethnography that adapts ethnographic methods to the study of online communities and cultures that are created through computer-mediated social interaction. Cyberethnology recognizes that cyberspace is not just a tool or a medium, but also a social space that can generate its own forms of identity, community, culture, subculture, power, resistance, and creativity. Cyberethnology also acknowledges that online practices are influenced by and affect offline contexts, and that there is a complex interplay between the virtual and the real.

Cyberethnology is therefore not just a variation of ethnography, but also a distinct form of online research that requires its own adaptations and innovations.

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