The Internet as a Library-Of-People: For a Cyberethnography of Online Groups

Maurizio Teli, Francesco Pisanu, David Hakken

Abstract

The concept “cyberethnography” remains undefined in the social sciences while, at the same time, still overlapping too much with the more well-known concept of “virtual ethnography.” The aim of our paper is to remedy this situation by underlining new directions in the ethnographic study of computer mediated settings. To do so, we define cyberspace as computer-mediated contexts intrinsically related to supposed-to-be “real” places. From this point of view the ethnography of online groups is not just the ethnography of the groups online (or the online ethnography of groups), but it is both the ethnography of online and related off-line situations, the ethnography of humans and non-human actors in these related fields. It is hybrid, like a cyborg. In a word, it is a cyberethnography. In the first part of the paper, we discuss linkages between classical ethnography and its cyber developments. In the second part, we ground epistemologically the argument in favor of a robust social concept of “cyborg” drawing mainly from the fields called Science, Technology and Society (STS), and Organization Studies (OS). In the third part, we focus our argument on web-based group issues, using field data from our own research to define this kind of group and propose a metaphor, “the Internet as a library-of-people.” This metaphor, which is strictly grounded in the cyborg concept, highlights the cyborgic characteristic of society that arises in research practice.

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Keywords

computer mediated communication; cyberspace; virtuality; cyberethnography

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The internet as a library-of-people: For a cyberethnography of online groups. Abstract The concept “cyberethnography” remains undefined in the social sciences while, at the same time, still overlapping too much with the more well-known concept of “virtual ethnography.” The aim of our paper is to remedy this more. Abstract The concept “cyberethnography” remains undefined in the social sciences while, at the same time, still overlapping too much with the more well-known concept of “virtual ethnography.” The aim of our paper is to remedy this situation. Volume 2: Taking Research Online – Internet Survey and Sampling addresses the range of resources, digital archives, and Internet-based data sources that exist. Historically, social researchers have shown a willingness to exploit new technologies to enhance, facilitate, and support their various activities. However, arguably no other technological development has influenced the landscape of social research as rapidly and fundamentally as the Internet. This collection avoids both uncritical embrace and wholesale dismissal by considering some of the key literature in the field of Internet res