Adapting ethnographic approaches to suit computer-mediated environments: notes from the field.

Neil Hair, Moira Clark,
Cranfield School of Management,
Cranfield University,
Bedford,
MK43 OAL,
United Kingdom

Telephone +44 (0)1234 751122
Fax +44 (0)1234 751806
neilhair@hotmail.com
m.k.clark@cranfield.ac.uk

Abstract

This paper reports on the process of conducting research in virtual communities through the practice of ‘virtual ethnography’ (Hine 2000). Beginning with a review of traditional ethnographic practices and belief ascriptions the authors consider the traditional means by which scholars have claimed ‘criticality’ in their work (Geertz 1995, Hammersley and Atkinson 1995, Mariampolski 1999, Woolcott 1995). This debate is extended to the virtual context and addresses a number of contentious issues that has divided traditionalists and avant-garde ‘netnographers’. Firstly, the ‘virtual context’ is considered as it pertains to ethnographers ontological assumptions. Secondly, how these considerations reflect impediments to, and facilitators of, epistemological choices including participant observation and the ethical considerations involved in these research decisions. Drawing from a review of broad based ‘netethnographic’ approaches (Chisnal 2001, Hine 2000, Kozinets 2002, Mann and Stewart 2000, Mariampolski 1999, Nocera 2002, Paccagnella 1997) the authors set forward a process that advances critical reflection through hermeneutics (Ricoeur 1981). It concludes with the personal experiences of the authors including the effect of the ‘netnography’ on the relationship between researcher, those researched and subsequent knowledge claims.

References


Geertz, C. 1995, After The Fact: Two Countries, Four Decades, on Anthropologist
Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA.

Routledge, London.


