

Netnography Research in Leisure, Tourism, and Hospitality: Lessons from Research and Education

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Abstract : The internet is affecting the way the industry operates and communicates. It is also becoming a customary means for leisure, tourism, and hospitality consumers to seek and exchange information and views on hotels, destinations events and attractions, or to develop social ties with other users. On the one hand, the internet is a rich field to conduct leisure, tourism, and hospitality research; on the other hand, however, there are few researchers formally embracing online methods of research, such as netnography. Within social sciences, netnography falls under the interpretative/ethnographic research methods umbrella. It is an adaptation of anthropological techniques such as participant and non-participant observation, used to study online interactions happening on social media platforms, such as Facebook. It is, therefore, a research method applied to the study of online communities, being the term itself a contraction of the words network (as on internet), and ethnography. It was developed in the context of marketing research in the nineties, and in the last twenty years, it has spread to other contexts such as education, psychology, or urban studies. Since netnography is not universally known, it may discourage researchers and educators from using it. This work offers guidelines for researchers wanting to apply this method in the field of leisure, tourism, and hospitality or for educators wanting to teach about it. This is done by means of a double approach: a content analysis of the literature side-by-side with educational data, on the use of netnography. The content analysis is of the incidental research using netnography in leisure, tourism, and hospitality in the last twenty years. The educational data is the author and her colleagues' experience in coaching students throughout the process of writing a paper using primary netnographic data - from identifying the phenomenon to be studied, selecting an online community, collecting and analyzing data to writing their findings. In the end, this work puts forward, on the one hand, a research agenda, and on the other hand, an educational roadmap for those wanting to apply netnography in the field or the classroom. The educator's roadmap will summarise what can be expected from mini-netnographies conducted by students and how to set it up. The research agenda will highlight for which issues and research questions the method is most suitable; what are the most common bottlenecks and drawbacks of the method and of its application, but also where most knowledge opportunities lay.

Keywords : netnography, online research, research agenda, educator's roadmap

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