A Netnographic Sensibility: Developing the netnographic/social listening boundaries

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Abstract

Netnography is constantly evolving as technologies and access to online data develops. Our paper outlines how large datasets of social media can be analysed through bridging the divide between the small, rich and contextually nuanced data that is the hallmark of netnography and the scope and scale of data made possible through social media listening conventions. We define this approach as a netnographic sensibility and with the use of a short case, discuss the process through which social media data could be gathered, triangulated and analysed. We orientate the paper around two interrelated questions, in investigating how netnographic insights be extended using social media monitoring (SMM) tools, and asking how this can be used to add richness and depth to understandings of mass consumer realities. Our contribution complements the widely established methodological approach of netnography as we argue that netnography has the capacity and capability to embrace technological advances within the domain of social listening to add value for academic researchers.

Keywords: Netnographic Sensibility, Social listening, Netnography, Methodology, Social Media Monitoring

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Introduction

This paper explores how netnographic researchers can better use social listening techniques and commercial social media monitoring tools (hereafter SMM tools), in what we refer to as a 'netnographic sensibility,' to add depth and richness to the data gathered. We define a netnographic sensibility as an approach that marries the nuanced, rich understanding of consumers garnered through netnography (Kozinets 2015), with the scale and depth facilitated through social listening practices. We advocate that a netnographic sensibility can add richness and depth to mass consumer realities by bridging the established tradition of netnography with the depth and scale of social media monitoring. We show that adopting a netnographic sensibility in collaboration with SMM tools, offers a considered way for academic researchers to approach large data sets of social media data using qualitative research techniques, to understand the behaviours of the community being observed with a renewed focus on context. We have already started to see this methodological conversation unfold from a digital methods perspective (see Arvidsson and Caliandro, 2016; Caliandro 2017) but we suggest that there is a need for further focus on the opportunities of a netnographic sensibility within consumer research. This paper explores guidelines that could be used within academic practice to provide a more holistic understanding of context and community, whilst harnessing the power of social media data for netnographic insight. As such, we question the theoretical, methodological and practical opportunities for the development of a netnographic sensibility and probe the emerging boundaries for qualitative researchers in adapting netnographic principles with the advancing opportunities of social listening, defined as the "process of monitoring digital conversations to understand what customers are saying about a brand and industry online" (Trackmaven, 2018). We ask, how can netnographic theory be informed by social media listening practices, to explore the integration of methods to contribute holistic insight for academic research. Our discussion unfolds against two key questions: Firstly, how can netnographic insights be extended using social media monitoring (SMM) tools? Secondly, how could the combination of netnographic insights and SMM tools add richness and depth to understandings of mass consumer realities? The central issue presented here is the value in the overlap of techniques of the

industry-led social media monitoring tools (and the practice of using them through social listening) and the founding theoretical practices of netnography (Kozinets, 2015), in search of a richer picture of sociality. By extending advances of netnography, our contribution complements the widely established methodological approach of netnography and aims to evolve the methodology through the integration of SMM tools and social listening techniques. As such we explore how to triangulate a methodology that encompasses these key concerns and integrates netnographic best practice.

The perspective forwarded is informed by the first authors' experience in a three-year industry digital role specialising in the analysis of social media conversations, mainly emerging from Twitter, and utilising a range of social listening tools. This experience illuminated first hand one of the fundamental challenges and potential opportunities faced within marketing (by both academic and practitioner) as how to approach, analyse and advance the vast array of data available (including images, video, text, audio and the integration) available via social media platforms (Baron et al. 2016). From an applied perspective, companies are increasingly turning to such platforms to outline individual consumers, yet the means of profiling remains at the aggregate level. From a theoretical standpoint, there is a need to consider alternative methods to understand the relevance and value of social media data for academic researchers (Kozinets and Arnould, 2017). Building on the premise that theory and practice inform one another, we turn to industry to open a dialogue into the practical problems for researchers in the wake of digital technological innovations.

The paper is structured as follows. We begin with a short overview of digital research methodologies more widely to orientate our positioning of netnography, we then introduce netnography and applications in different disciplines. This is followed by an introduction to SMM tools and social listening as a concept. We then move to the main contribution to the paper, where we begin to draw connections between netnography and social listening tools, exploring the possibility of what we develop as a netnographic sensibility. We then offer a case to demonstrate how the netnographic researcher can approach data collection using social listening tools. We suggest guidelines for the conduct of netnography to systematically incorporate SMM tools and social listening techniques. Finally, we argue that netnography has the capacity and capability to embrace technological advances within the domain of social listening to add value for academic researchers.

Exploring Digital Research Methodologies

In orientating our understanding of the opportunities to evolve netnography, we firstly turn our attention to the myriad of other approaches to digital research. Digital ethnographic research has emanated around two prominent trajectories: immersive research of online communities and socialities (Kozinets, 2010; Markham 1998, 2016; Hine 2000, 2005) and the practices of everyday digital life (Horst and Miller, 2006; Slater and Miller, 2000; boyd, 2014), we have also seen a recent focus on the 'networked public' of the social (Bruns and Burgess, 2012; Arvidsson and Caliandro, 2016; Caliandro, 2014, 2017). Alongside these advances of digital research, social researchers have adjusted their epistemological and methodological stances for undertaking social research in this digital era. Across the social sciences, theory and practice has developed to incorporate conceptual, axiological and methodological considerations for digital social research, which highlights the immediacy of experience and a developing understanding of sociality. With social data, researchers continually analytically demarcate between 'the social' and 'data' (Hand, 2014), data can be seen as emergent and dynamic rather than being static and bounded. Kozinets (2015) suggests that within this much-changed social media landscape, netnography takes on a more activist role, as the concept of a field site becomes de-centred.

Research practices have developed to approach this altered digital landscape which include approaching the challenges of working with large digital data sets, finding field sites and topics of interest, navigating online ethics and public aspects of netnographic participation and exploration. Hardey (2014: 118) identifies a crux in broaching these boundaries, 'the temptation is to believe that consumer data simply extends the scope of research productivity and therefore, the researcher's competence.' Building on this importance of the human element which is central to a netnographic approach, with the researcher(s) as the research instrument, Weijo et al. (2014) propose that greater researcher reflexivity regarding how we theorize and produce knowledge is needed, alongside a consideration of the subjectivity of the research encounter and in the craft of research writing. In approaching our proposed netnographic sensibility, this highlights that we must stress that as a reflexive practice, researchers need to take account of ethical practice and the changes at the level of epistemology. Therefore, considering the role of researchers, we must ensure that netnographers fully understand both the limitations and unique benefits of social media data and their active role.

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Netnographic understanding

Netnography aligns itself closely with the idea of researching the human experience, whereby social reality is viewed as a constantly shifting iterative process. Following in Kozinets' (2015) established tradition, netnography is a qualitative research approach belonging to the ethnographic branch, which uses naturalistic analysis techniques (that are immersive and not intrusive) allowing the researcher to empathetically enter the (consumers') online conversations. The approach consists of an adaptation of traditional research strategies developed offline (such as face-to-face interviews) to the online environment. Netnography is not limited to or by online data, and can be combined with other forms of ethnographic research including depth interviews and observations. Data may be longitudinal or across a short period of time. Kozinets (2015) has spoken of the continued development of netnography regarding it as a 'promiscuous and hybrid method'; promiscuous in so far as it relies on a wide range of virtual techniques (virtual survey, chat interviews, email interviews, etc.) and hybrid, in that it combines virtual techniques with traditional ones (online and offline participatory observation).

The tradition of ethnography is distinctive to the conceptualisation of netnography, in that it enables researchers to observe and gain an understanding of the voices of individuals and collective interactions online; ascertaining specialised and localised nuances, and discerning culture in a visceral and kinaesthetic way (Kozinets 2015; Markham, 2016). Just as attention to human detail distinguished ethnographies, Kozinets (2015) writes of the humanism, attention to the details and contexts of human stories and human understandings of people using technologies, is the hallmark of genuine netnography. Kozinets' (2015: 8) highlights 'netnography is a specific kind of online ethnography, it requires participation through researcher engagement and conversation' (which often should be in person), whereby the focus on the human story and the interaction, in which cultural insights emanate from an understanding of cultural elements as they unfold. The netnographer is tasked with listening, comparing and understanding stories of how narratives are constructed and shared (Kozinets, 2013). Belk and Kozinets (2016:272) highlight the ethnographic orientation, 'is about participant observation, no more and no less,' therefore removing the participative role of ethnographer from netnography, also removes the opportunity to experience embedded cultural understanding. Without this profound knowledge and experience of the cultural context, the interpretation is impaired (Kozinets, 2010: 75).

Referring to common ethnographic procedures, Kozinets (2015) recommends the following methodological stages and procedures for netnographic studies: entrée: in which

there is a formulation of research questions and identification of appropriate online community for a study. Data collection and observations of the community and its members, interactions and meanings. Analysis and interpretation in which classification, coding analysis and contextualization of practices takes place. Overall, the researcher needs to understand the differences of the online social environment, to appropriately and consistently guide the adaptation of ethnographic techniques. When considering a technique for cultural analysis of social media data and rigorous research applied through netnography, the literature generally suggests that we, as researchers, are immersed in the context, act as participants (active and passive), listen to what people tell us and record observations in fieldnotes and researcher immersion in our journals.

Therefore netnography has provided researchers with an accepted approach to understanding the worlds of digital consumption and the complexity of consumer cultures (Kozinets, 2013). However, as Belk and Kozinets (2016: 272) caution 'as the internet changes, as people's use of it changes, as its use of people changes, the method must adapt to these contingencies.' We see that these definitional understandings and the application of netnography as both a research approach and established method are continually evolving as technology, data and skillsets adapt and develop. This understanding of a netnographic approach highlights the centrality of both the role of the netnographic researcher and what constitutes netnographic data, and as such these are key components of our following discussions.

Reviewing netnography as a methodological approach

In our brief review of the practices of netnography above we have shown that netnography is established within consumer research and has a foundational basis in the tradition of ethnography. We have also reflected on netnography as a dynamic research approach. We now overview the breadth of utilization of netnography within academic research. As such our aim is not to provide a systematic review, but rather to highlight studies that show the development and application of netnography across different disciplines including nursing, health and tourism as well as the marketing discipline. In marketing and consumer research studies, its discipline of origin, netnography has been employed to understand collective online behaviours, conversations, languages, meaning making and symbolic repertoires of different consumer groups. Table 1 highlights some of the varying studies, taking our focus to the discipline, the netnographic data being examined and the mode of data collection, with consideration given to the role of the researcher (as a hallmark

of netnography). The studies were chosen for inclusion to highlight the breadth of disciplines adopting a netnographic approach.

Authors	Subject of study and industry/discipline	Source of data (e.g. Facebook, forums)	Tools used/volume of data	Role of researcher(s) in process (level of participation)
Weijo, Hietanen and Mattila (2014)	Marketing – CB- Online consumption communities	Online community	Immersed in forums	Two researchers in team followers and partakers in community plus interviews
deValck, Bruggen and Wierenga (2009)	Marketing – CB – virtual communities	Online survey from community	1007 usable results from 30000 members	Netnographic observations over 3 years including interviews
Logan (2015)	Marketing – CB – celebrity studies	Online fan community	831 Facebook posts and 431 tweets and included both pictorial and textual data	One researcher taking part in a 9 month netnography – including observation, interaction and active engagement as participant observer.
Hartmann (2016)	Marketing – CB - consumptive and productive practice moments – gardening and guitar playing	Online communities of interest in both phenomena	observations from public conversations, forum entries, discussions, questions and answers.	Thirteen month non-participative netnography to orientate and contextualise understandings in both phenomena of interest.
Seregina and Weijo (2017)	Marketing – CB - cosplayers' communal engagements	Biggest online community in area of study. Use of blogs, Facebook profiles and relevant niche media.	145 discussion threads, 4,278 double-spaced pages 12 blogs, 9 profiles (16 double- spaced pages of notes)	Two researchers - netnography was both active in online community and contextualisation within wider field of interest. Central to refining and finalizing research themes.
Arvidsson and Caliandro (2016)	Marketing – brand community	Data gathered using crawlers that interrogate the Search Application Programming	Main data set - 2848 tweets with the key identified hashtag	Two researchers – non-participatory data collection. Qualitative analysis of a large data set – brings together netnographic understanding of webs of significance and digital methods tradition - automatic analyses that use software with a

		Interface (API) of Twitter.		traditional human interpretative approach.
Kozinets, Patterson and Ashman (2016)	Marketing CB – networks of desire - food porn	Netnographic participation - active newsgroup posting, production of a food blog, use of a Facebook group dedicated to the topic. Followed topics and consumers rather than bounded sites.	Blogs, forums, Twitter, Facebook, Reddit, Instagram, YouTube, Pinterest, Vine, and Platter (an online food-oriented social network	Preparatory field immersion in the phenomena, over 16 years – including observational and lurking practices. Three year focused netnography and part of wider ethnography.
Parmentier and Fischer (2015)	Marketing – CB – audience dissipation	Netnographic participant observation – use of publicly available user-generated content (e.g., posts on discussion boards, social networking sites and blogs, videos, memes, and fan art), interview transcripts, e-mails and private messages, field notes	Over two years - social networking data tweets, news feeds, discussion boards, official accounts on Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube.	Online and offline interviews and observation over two years, discourse analysis, netnographic participation in relevant discussion boards and sites. Participants recruited from a mix of online forums and snowballing.
Kulavuz-Onal and Vasquez (2013)	Education – online English language teachers	Online community	12 months' fieldwork online	Online participant observation – main events, emails combined

		of practice (multi-sited)		with interviews with moderators, and fieldnotes (active participation)
Eriksson and Salzmann-Erikson (2016)	Nursing – nursing care robots	Social media	Pulsar (social listening tool) - keyword searches (3621 posts)	Manual viewing of images, netnographers wrote up fieldnotes to understand context, analysis involved combination of fieldnotes, discussions and raw social media data, creating thematic analysis
Costello, Witney, Green and Bradshaw (2012)	Online health communities	Chat room, discussion threads, messaging and interactive tools	Live chats (copied and pasted)	Researcher worked with participants to contribute to data Combined with interviews, focus groups and survey data
Healy and McDonagh (2013)	Consumer culture – football fans	Online football forums	QSR Nvivo (2000 pages of forums)	Netnography and grounded theory – fans gave informed consent
Langer and Beckman (2005)	Research – 'sensitive topics'	Danish cosmetic surgery online message board	Copied from online community and observations (894 messages)	Argues for covert research and netnography, data analysed using content analysis
Berdychevsky and Nimrod (2015)	Health/leisure – online senior communities	Online communities aimed at senior groups	Different online forums (study used existing dataset of 686283 messages resulting in 2534 relevant posts)	Netnography and grounded theory to develop coding
Mkono (2011)	Tourism	Review of restaurants in South Africa	Analysis of online tourism reviews (41 in total)	Author confirmed non-participation and commented on loss of context and thematic analysis
Witney, Hendricks and Cope (2016)	Nursing research	Forums supporting women with breast cancer	Online surveys, data from offline and focus groups	Introduces ethnonethnography – combining data from online community, collecting online data then collecting offline data and synthesis – thematic analysis
Toledano (2017)	Public Relations – social network analysis	Netnographic data from online discussions on designated forum - analysed the content	Quantitative data from online questionnaire; qualitative data from ethnographic observations, netnographic observations from online forum; email	Online questionnaires, ethnographic observations and netnographic observations of forums

		thematically.	and skype interviews.	
Wu and Pearce (2014)	Tourism	Chinese recreational vehicle tourists	Travel blogs (107 in total – 37 chosen)	Use of keyword searches of blogs – thematic analysis (non-participant observation by researchers)

Table 1. – Netnographic studies across disciplines

In exploring the above sample of work and the respective contributions to the practices of netnography, we note that only one study above uses a commercial SMM tool (Eriksson and Salzmann-Erikson, 2016). Generally, researchers were more likely to use smaller volumes of data that could be gathered and analysed using manual techniques (while observing that Berdychevsky and Nimrod, 2015, used an existing data set). For example, Healy and McDonagh's (2013) study on football fan behaviour, used QSR Nvivo as a tool for analysis but this involved the need for thematic coding from the researchers. Costello, McDermott and Wallace (2017:1) highlight that netnography's effectiveness, as a qualitative methodology is contingent on the need for human participation and connection, whilst advocating that a check for participant observation could be "the blood, sweat and tears" invested or "the netnographic slog."   Notably, Arvidsson and Caliandro (2016:732) bring together netnographic principles to focus on webs of significance with a digital methods perspective (Rogers, 2009, 2013), as such they start to address how large data sets can be explored using Twitter API's (application programming interfaces) with qualitative analysis. The netnographic principles that inform the study are augmented, as rather than following debates and interactive exchanges, Arvidsson and Caliandro (2016) analyse hashtags and other mediation devices. In exploring how netnography has further advanced, we see Kozinets, Patterson and Ashman (2016: 8) as a significant addition, the researchers follow topics and consumers through postings in both open and private groups. We see this development of infiltrating the 'private' as key as researchers navigate the opportunities of messaging apps (such as Whats App, WeChat, Facebook messenger). This raises opportunities and challenges for researchers in the evolution of methods and associated practices.

As Table 1 illustrates, there is no one-way to conduct a netnographic approach and we see both the method and units of analysis develop, as the technological possibilities advance and unfold. Researchers are led by the data available to them to address their research questions, along with their ability to collect and immerse themselves in the data (in either an overt or

covert fashion) and the ability to analyse this data. In considering technological advances and the opportunities available to academic researchers to evolve their data collection approaches within this digital landscape, we now explore the value of social listening tools and associated practices.

Social media monitoring tools and social listening practices

When it comes to organisational research methods, the marketing industry generally uses a variety of traditional and non-traditional research methods as a way of understanding customers, for example focus groups, surveys, observations and depth interviews. From a research perspective, social media platforms (e.g. Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat) offer access to user generated content (UGC) allowing organisations to conduct 'social listening' – a means by which practitioners gather social media data online by 'listening' to conversations (Schweidel and Moe, 2014; Hofacker, Malthouse and Sultan, 2016; Killian and McManus, 2015). There are many methods through which organisations, brands and individuals can track what is being said about them online, from setting up Google alerts, to searching Twitter feeds and using Twitter analytics to track conversation. However, while carrying this out manually is possible with small volumes of data, the large volumes of UGC data created about large organisations and brands across different platforms makes it almost impossible to be gathered and analysed manually. Using a commercial SMM tool, social media data is gathered by mining for set keywords and phrases, using web crawlers and APIs. Gathering data in this way offers organisations the opportunity to move from an unstructured or curated timeline of social media content, to sets of structured data, ripe for analysis and interpretation.

The social media monitoring market (defined by the Financial Times as 'the active monitoring of social media channels for information about a company or organisation' is industry-led and commercially focused, based around how organisations use social media data to understand customers and the wider market. As identified by the UK Institute for Practitioners in Advertising (IPA), SMM tools are designed to be primarily used for marketing communications rather than to assist in market research. SMM tools can assist in identifying new trends, and make organisations aware of crisis as they happen (by tracking conversations and data) allowing them to make real-time interventions in a prompt and data-supported manner. Industry leaders are also beginning to see the benefits of making use of

relevant social media data to respond to various managerial needs. Certainly, this is one area where industry is driving the behaviours of social analysis rather than emerging from traditional research techniques or academic theory (ESOMAR, 2017; IPA Social Works, 2016).

Within the social media monitoring market there are many tools available, including Brandwatch, Crimson Hexagon, Pulsar, Netbase and Nuvi amongst others – with each offering a slightly different set of functions for marketers and organisations to help to automate their social media monitoring and listening activity. Other features of SMM tools may include: workflow management, topic or thematic analysis, customisable dashboards, analysis of trends, competitors and industry, and creation of word clouds. These tools can be used as a means of gathering customer's conversations with, and about a topic, brand, product or news story. This allows organisations to identify trending topics, potential crisis, positive and negative sentiments towards the brand, in real-time (or using historical data) in a way that is relatively low-cost, agile and scalable (Stavrakantonakis et al., 2012).

The Institute of Practitioners of Advertising UK (IPA) has begun to address some of the challenges and opportunities raised by businesses using social media data. Research conducted in 2016 (in partnership with cross-industry partners the Marketing Society and the Market Research Society) aimed to develop and establish best practice in social media insight across the industry. The purpose of this research included a desire to link social media effectiveness with ROI and a robust, rigorous approach to measurement, specifically allowing brands and organisations to take advantage of both the scale of data provided by social media, and the real-time element provided. The main purpose of this, described by the IPA 'the secret to using social' is to ensure that the data generated by social media is not looked at in isolation; rather it is integrated with other sources and qualitative data analysis skills to derive meaning and insight from data. The IPA has identified that it is not enough for brands to use social media data alone (Ewing et al., 2016). Whilst the automation of the data through SMM tools is one way of categorising and classifying data, there remains a need for human insight to understand the nuances behind behaviours. Furthermore, what is becoming more prevalent in industry is the triangulation of social media data with other data sources (for example accounts, company reports, news releases, industry reports and other sources of rich data) to present a rounded, detailed perspective

In turning to academic work addressing the practices and use of SMM tools, Fensel, Leiter and Stavrakantonakis (2012) define social media monitoring tools (SMM) as "the continuous systematic observation and analysis of social media networks and social communities". Whilst Bekkers et al. (2013: 335) define the main areas of SMM to be 'strategic control and responsiveness,' Killan and McManus (2015) discuss benefits for brand managers in conducting social listening to understand (and respond to) consumer needs and demands across different industries. From a methodological perspective, we note that Malthouse and Sultan (2016), while not discussing SMM tools directly, discuss the benefits of gathering big data (which they extend to include social media data) to understand consumer behaviour. They highlight the challenges of big data as data occurring in the past, recording only what has happened without context or explanation, the challenges around the quality of the data collected and how representative the data is of the community studied, the accuracy and the motivations behind the creation of the data. Schweidel and Moe (2014) in their study on social media sentiment, highlight the importance of 'where' researchers listen when monitoring social media conversations. Branthwaite and Patterson (2011) discuss the links between SMM and qualitative research, identifying that while social media data offers some similarities to qualitative research, in terms of the ability to discuss in depth detail from consumers in an authentic environment. However, the large sample size and distance from the research participants and make this type of data more like quantitative research. The authors also argue that the textual analysis software is not sophisticated enough to provide accurate analysis. Our positioning of this paper argues that the developments in technology and understanding of how people use social media has developed substantially. While social listening and SMM tools are discussed within the academic literature, there is an opportunity to bring together the scale and depth of data that can be gathered using SMM tools and the rich understanding of consumer behaviour that is revealed through the methodological approach of netnography to gain a deeper understanding of online communities and behaviours. We now move on to discuss social media data and the role of SMM tools to provide a setting for how this approach can be adapted to explore more indepth analysis using netnographic techniques.

Social media data

Within SMM conventions, consumers using social media can provide brands and organisations with an 'authentic customer voice' in a way that is cost effective compared to other traditional market research techniques such as focus groups, observations, depth

interviews and surveys. In considering social media data as the unit of analysis in social listening, particularly data created and shared around the same hashtag, users may use the hashtag and in addition, converse directly with other users. Alternatively, they may use their post as a stand-alone post and chose not to interact with others. Social media posts may have a range of different layers (Khan, 2015) including textual posts such as Tweets, actions such as likes or shares, participation within social media networks and sharing of hyperlinks and images which are all visible to the user and community. Further layers of the data, including the use of mobile apps, search engines and location settings are less visible to users but can be used as a means of segmenting and categorising social media posts ready for analysis.

When considering the premise of analysing online conversations, traditionally analytics takes a 'data-centric' view (Gandomi and Haider, 2015) whereby social media posts and content are codified by quantification, in simple terms counting the number of followers, likes and other engagements people had with social media platforms. While this information is of interest in understanding the scale and volume of posts and interactions (allowing to make assumptions around the popularity of a brand or product on social media), it became apparent that these numerical analytics told very little about who the audience were, what their behaviours, influences, interests, and why they behaved in such a way online. Social media data is full of rich detail and language, which could be explored in depth using qualitative analysis techniques (Braithwaite and Patterson, 2011). This in turn presents an opportunity of enhancing the methodological approach of netnography for both analysts and importantly academic practice.

Many companies are turning to customer research that is powered by big data and analytics to gain social insight – a deeper understanding around why people behave the way that they do online, which can inform organisational strategic developments. In moving from data to insight, social insights put this into the context of our interpersonal relationships, communities and society, to provide a powerful hidden, unexpected or unspoken interpersonal truth that can cause people to see the brand, product or category differently (Marketing Week, 2017). Although this approach can provide astonishingly detailed pictures of some aspects of their markets, the pictures are far from complete and are often misleading. It may be possible

to predict a customer's next mouse click or purchase, and address the 'how' question about to consumer behaviour, but the 'why' question remains more abstract. Without that holistic insight, companies cannot close the complexity gap (Madsbjerg and Rasmussen, 2014). This is where we would advocate for the use of a netnographic sensibility.

Approaching a netnographic sensibility

We see an opportunity for academic researchers to make use of social media monitoring tools in their netnographic research practices. Our approach marries the nuanced, rich understanding of consumers garnered through netnography (Kozinets 2015), with the scale and depth facilitated through social listening practices. We propose that extending netnographic practices to listen, absorb and then interpret the discussions taking place on social media platforms, would aid researchers in understanding the consumer voice with a view to joining/becoming part of the conversations in an immersive and naturalistic way and overall add value to understanding more about the behaviours of the studied communities. We see that this bridging adds top level understanding of scale and scope through social media monitoring, as it allows the researcher to start to familiarise themselves with the language, codes and spaces relevant to the phenomena of interest, these can then be approached at a more local level in the netnographic understanding, allowing the researcher to come from a more informed perspective. Specifically, we suggest an approach that firstly advocates for netnographic immersion in context (guided by theoretical inquiry) that is used to identify sites of interest for the phenomena – key actors and building participant relationships if relevant which aids the identification of language/phrases/practices. Secondly, based on this initial netnographic immersion, allows for keyword selection, combined with social media listening to provide the scale of insight, married with the granularity of netnographic insight. Thirdly, the social listening data is triangulated to contextualise, against and with and is iteratively analysed in conjunction with the netnographic insights – to provide a holistic understanding that contributes depth, richness and breadth of understanding into the phenomena. By approaching a netnographic sensibility based on these premises it ensures that data is not isolated from context. It also prizes participant observation in the immersion stages to identify key aspects of the behaviours under investigation.

By approaching a sensibility, we argue for the rich insights that underpin the netnographic tradition, with the availability and advancement of social listening. The methodological possibilities of this sensibility, necessitates a renewed focus on our role in our

research practice. Kozinets (2015) writes of the humanism, attention to the details and contexts of human stories and human understandings of people using technologies, is the hallmark of genuine netnography. Within the netnographic tradition, the researcher acts as decoder, listening and understanding distinct cultural elements, such as webs of meaning, new languages flourishing, patterns of behaviours emerging, shared narratives and value systems enacted (Kozinets, 2015; Logan 2015; Kozinets, Patterson and Ashman 2016). We suggest that the role of the researcher within the netnographic sensibility as of active story interpreter. Taking our inspiration from Kozinets' (2013), netnography preserves and analyses contexts, identities and meanings, but it could also seek out and work in conjunction with the multi-layered stories and narratives of social media gathered using SMM tools. Overall the netnographic sensibility proposes a culturally grounded approach of netnography combined with social media listening and monitoring tools to approach, absorb and contextualise the vast array of consumer data available. Building on the cultural insights that netnography provides, (Kozinets, 2013; 2015), we see that in further triangulating data, the observable and naturalistic of a netnographic approach with potential big data sets, researchers can go beyond the dash board of the SMM tool. Only through this triangulation, sense-making and contextualisation, can the depth of data provided by social media tools be made useful to the qualitative researcher in search of holistic understanding of a phenomenon.

For netnographers, the use of SMM tools to gather and organise social media data to understand more about communities and cultures may result in a timesaving method of gathering data and ensuring a high volume of relevant data, that can auto-segmented by demographics, volume, influencers, top topics, which may provide a useful and innovative way of data collection. Considering the social listening approach allows researchers to categorise data by attitudes, segmentation and other areas of interest, but we argue that this should be a starting point for researchers. We fully appreciate that researchers could gather UGC from social media in several different ways without using SMM tools. One example would be using the search function on social media platforms to gather all the UGC created using specific hashtags. Another would be to copy and paste all tweets (or links to tweets) from a user's timeline. However, this would be dependent upon the volumes of data being produced and is more ad hoc in nature. It would also be time-consuming and difficult to analyse the data systematically by analysing a stream of Twitter or Instagram posts. Using a SMM tool allows researchers to gather all the relevant data in one place ready for segmentation and analysis.

The outlined approach offers a sensitive response to the constantly evolving ways in which data produced by users on social media can be gathered and analysed through the careful adaptation of netnographic practice. While social media data can refer to tweets, photos, snaps, Instagram posts, comments, likes, shares, and other forms of user generated content, we also consider the data produced by the netnographic researcher. Fieldnotes as data, allow the researcher to form their initial thoughts and plans around the findings, allowing for the reflectiveness of the participant observer. The researcher should take fieldnotes throughout each stage of the research and use this to provide context and meaning behind the conversations gathered from social media. From an academic perspective, being able to capture and use this holistic data has huge potential in understanding consumer behaviours and trends. Belk and Kozinets (2016) raise the issue of the challenges of coding and analysing a large dataset using netnographic practices, "This is the netnographic edge, in which the 'researcher-as-instrument' demonstrates what a trained anthropologist can do that a sophisticated data-mining program cannot" (Kozinets et al., 2014: 273). Taking a netnographic approach allows for greater researcher immersion into the context around the data, rather than taking 'the dashboards and pith helmets' (Kozinets, 2013:98) at face value. Our perspective makes use of the agility of SMM tools whilst starting to address the emergent methodological gap and critical questions in advancing netnography, as well as how to harness the power of SMM tools and their capabilities balanced against the rigour and established tradition of netnography.

We now illustrate the approach in practice, blending together netnographic techniques and SMM tool functions. While we do not advocate using SMM tools alone as a netnographic research tool, having access to, and an understanding the value of SMM tools, offers new possibilities for qualitative researchers to apply their honed research skills to large data-sets.

Extending netnographic practices with SMM tools

We present an example to assist in illustrating our netnographic sensibility approach, highlighting the benefit in the overlap and the holistic consumer insights garnered. We follow the stages in the SMM process as defined by social media tool comparison site G2Crowd (2017). We then suggest ways in which established netnographic practices can be added to

the automated processes carried out by the tools, to hone the rich insights that can be garnered from analysing social media conversations with a netnographic sensibility.

Nike #AirMaxDay

The brand Nike holds an annual event to celebrate the launch anniversary of its flagship 'AirMax' Sneaker brand (Nike, 2018). This event takes place on March 26th and spans both digital and physical spaces. The event is promoted online but also generates high levels of conversation from consumers about their desired purchases, display of owned products and conversations about brand expectations and experiences. Consumers of the brand can use the #AirMaxDay hashtag to create UGC and join in conversations and demarcate their consumption choices. In 2017, the hashtag was 41,000 times by 26,000 unique users (a 64% increase from 2016's figures). Within this dataset 12,213 posts were generated on the Instagram photo-sharing platform (Reid and Duffy, 2017). In approaching this example from a commercial SMM perspective, following the social listening process discussed by G2 Crowd, commercial SMM tools can be used to 'listen' to mentions (for example by setting the tool to gather data for the #AirMaxDay hashtag only). The tool then gathers and organises the data in ways chosen by the user, for example allowing the data to be segmented by geography, gender, sentiment of conversation, image/text conversations and topics discussed. This would allow the user to understand more about the main conversations taking place, and allow for quantitative display of the findings. Influencers can be identified by using the tool to find the users who made the highest number of posts or had the highest number of followers, likes and so on.

This is all of interest to the brand, who may use these vast volumes of data to understand more about the popularity of the brand. And with 41,000 pieces of content generated it was certainly a popular topic of discussion. However, the tool cannot provide rich insight about those who post on the sites, their motivations, the behaviours of the community and groups of interests and the outliers. For a researcher, whilst the volume of this data may be intriguing, the content lacks contextualisation and subsequent meaning. This is where a netnographic sensibility approach becomes appropriate. Being able to immerse yourself within the community allows the netnographic researcher to understand different aspects of the conversations and behaviours online, which can in turn help the researcher to understand more about the community, the value regimes at work, the issues of contention and the emergent consumer practices. As discussed above, our approach involves netnographic

immersion in context, followed by the keyword selection allowing to understand the scale of the insight. The researcher can use the social media monitoring tool to gather, cleanse (delete irrelevant content) and segment the data ensures that the data is accurate and complete (not accidentally deleted or lost within fieldnotes but stored within a server). Which in turn can save the researcher time and provides them with a cleansed, accurate data set ready for immersion. The social media data is then triangulated alongside netnographic insights to provide rich, deep insights.

A netnographic approach should focus on the humanistic side of the data and holistically approaching those human stories unfolding online. In adopting a netnographic sensibility to explore the #AirMaxDay example, the approach could depict more about the online community of sneakerhead fanatics and associated consumers, who discuss the sneakers, the deadstock, their hauls, specific colorways and who identify themselves as being fans of the product range, than about the Nike brand itself. The specific analysis and rich insights that would be gained for a study like this are outwith the scope of this paper. However, we demonstrate the process through which a netnographic sensibility can allow for this type of indepth analysis to take place.

Building on the central tenets of Kozinets' (2015) approach, we outline the benefits of a netnographic sensibility in complement to the seven principles of netnography. Firstly in **introspection** and in understanding the role of the researcher, we see that the Nike study puts the netnographic researcher in the role of a passive observer rather than a participant observer, listening to the conversations taking place. The researcher should have some prior knowledge of the AirMax brand, the community and the nature of conversations taking place online. We then consider the nature of **investigation** – ensuring that the keywords chosen, data sites and platforms chosen and dates are appropriate for this study. For the #AirMaxDay case background research is required to ensure understanding of where the conversations are taking place, when and by whom. This helps the researcher to understand what the research question should be and the purpose of the research being undertaken. Within the nature of **informational** – with regards to ethical concerns – this should be raised by the researcher who should ensure that they have the most up to date understanding of the privacy settings of each platform. For academic researchers, this will possibly require pre-approval from University Ethics Committees. Moving onto an **initial interview** stage – the nature of this form of data collection does not involve direct contact with participants, rather the researcher

remains at an observer level, listening to conversations taking place in a covert role. Participants are therefore unaware that their conversations are being gathered by social media tools and analysed by researchers which does raise ethical concerns (we will return to this in the discussion section of this paper). At the **inspection** stage, the decision has been made to follow the conversations taking place on social media platforms where the #AirMaxDay hashtag is being used, and this is validated and triangulated through background secondary research to ensure that there will be a large and relevant dataset. The **interaction entrée** and the extent of the researcher's participant will not change in this context. It is unlikely that the researcher in a project like this will enter or join the conversation. However, this may change if or when the research project develops or if the researcher wishes to study individuals in more depth or requires more information. The stage of **immersion in the data and the interpretation** is the first time the researcher will actively become involved in the conversations taking place, however the data is most likely to be examined as complete dataset rather than 'live' participation with the research subjects. This is the opportunity for the netnographic researcher to immerse themselves within the community and context of the conversations. Utilising other methodological analysis techniques such as thematic analysis, content analysis, linguistic analysis (Humphreys and Wang, 2017) is just a few of the techniques that could be used by researchers to analyse the data gathered. The **data collection (indexing)** stage discussed by Kozinets (2015) is already underway, assisted by the SMM tool. The role of the researcher here will involve regularly reviewing the data being collected to ensure that it remains relevant and appropriate for the subject being studied. The next stage, that of discussion **iterations and phases**, involves the decision around how often to visit the research site, and for how long. The SMM tool will be set to look continuously for keywords, hashtags and comments as requested by the user. The dates should be appropriate for the project at hand. For example, for #AirMaxDay, while the event takes place annually at the end of March, the whole month is used to build anticipation and to run smaller feed-in events and promotions. It is therefore appropriate to gather conversation over the month to learn more about the community and culture (and subcultures) around this event. A point of interest to note here is that many SMM tools allow you to 'backdate' data, allowing users to gather data months after the event, or to add data to an existing search (for example if a new hashtag was found to be used instead of the 'official' hashtag created by the brand). The authors propose a potential means of segmenting data for analysis. One common use of these tools is to auto-categorise data by topic or theme, using proprietary algorithms created by the tool manufacturers. This then presents the user with auto-categorised data presented in

dashboards that can be manipulated by the users. Furthermore, analytics platforms such as Brandwatch allow users to automatically triage specific conversations or insights directly to decision-makers, ensuring that important insights are delivered quickly. Kozinets et al. (2012) suggest a word cloud as one means of analysing the data. SMM tools automatically generate a topic cloud based on the top topics (by volume of posts) discussed on the dataset. The larger the word or phrase, the higher the number of mentions generated. Clicking on each of these topics takes the user to the original mentions, listed in a table format, and allows the user to click on each individual mention to understand more about the author. The resulting themes and topics can then be qualitatively analysed to orientate the researcher and explore in more depth.

As with some of the netnographic approaches discussed in the literature review, we suggest thematic or content analysis as one way of categorising data with a netnographic sensibility. Coding may be both inductive and deductive as researchers take a variety of approaches to analyse the data. Researchers may have existing research questions to answer, or wish to analyse data that contains a specific word or phrase. Categorising data by direct mentions and re-tweets may also help in understanding behaviours. Another method may be to search for specific keywords, phrases, or other points of interest. Having an overview of the data (from the dashboards, topic clouds, top subjects discussed) combined with an understanding of the field and the population being studied will help researchers to begin to navigate the dataset confidently. The researcher may take an interpretivist role, immersing themselves into the data and understanding the context around conversations and information about the individual users, this is where we see a clear role for netnographic understanding. At the stage of identifying topics and themes, the researcher can apply netnographic practices to facilitate the use of established qualitative analysis techniques such as content or thematic analysis. This gives users one approach of making sense of the data gathered using social listening techniques and though SMM tools. Considering the potential benefits of gathering and analysing the rich conversations taking place on social media platforms for academic research. This requires structured guidance on how to approach these (potentially massive) datasets and to understand how to codify these large datasets and conversations, often taking place across multiple social media sites and digital platforms.

We then move on to **instantiated representation**, which is one of the main challenges when collecting data using SMM tools. Dependent upon the settings and data availability, it is

possible that the SMM tool will gather the entire dataset, with every single conversation taking place that includes the chosen hashtag. Due to data volume restrictions, the user may choose to select a sample of data rather than the full dataset. Furthermore, this dataset only represents the users who chose to participate in conversations during this time period and may exclude those with private accounts, deleted content or who had used incorrect hashtag (or no hashtag at all) when posting about Nike #AirMax Day. The role of the researcher at this point is to triangulate the social media data with other background data, fieldnotes and any other research of interest to provide detailed social insight about the community and culture in question. The researcher must carefully examine the data to identify any outliers (those unexpected rich findings that help to understand more about the community and culture). Researchers should also examine the data to identify new influencers and influential behaviours. For the #AirMaxDay community, this could involve identifying language nuances unique to this community, unexpected purchasing behaviours and a greater understanding of the blending of online/offline behaviours. The role of the netnographic researcher should involve the reading, comparison and understanding of the data to form narratives which discuss the community, culture and context of the conversations. Returning to Kozinets' (2013) the researcher takes their understanding of the culture embedded in the communities, allowing the researcher to form cultural insights about this highly involved brand community.

We conclude with **integration**, what the outcome of the research will be. The SMM tool can assist in illustrating some of the more quantitative findings using dashboards and charts, while the rich qualitative data analysis can be used to provide a more detailed insight of the context, culture and community being discussed within the conversations online. For example, the social and cultural insights formed through this data collection can allow the researcher to create short narratives or vignettes which can detail the behavours that customers/consumers undertake and plot the customer journey by examining the data collected across the #AirMaxDay month. For this dataset, there is of course value to the brand in having a far deeper and richer understanding of how the community behaves, in their own words and in an authentic manner. For the netnographic researcher, gathering this type of data will contribute to a theoretical understanding of digital consumer behaviours.

Our case illustrates that by using SMM tool as a way of gathering, cleansing and organising the data into more manageable segments or slices of data, allows a more indepth examination

of the dataset. For the researcher, time is saved, there is a greater breadth and scale of data that what is possible the traditionally small volumes of data collected by netnographic researchers. As Table 1 illustrated, academic research in netnography tends to focus on smaller samples than what is made possible using SMM tools. So how does this benefit the researcher? Having a larger scale data set allows researchers to understand more about and identify emerging trends, patterns and outliers (unexpected findings) emerging from the data, and can use the data alongside triangulation of other data sources. This type of analysis is also possible through other qualitative analysis software such as NVivo. However, SMM tools allow researchers to refer to the original source of the social media post which can provide far more rich information about the individual subjects who have created the content. This leads to us to our second point, in adding richness and depth to analysis. The conversations taking place online are in real-time and in the authentic customer voice. Through this textual analysis, and through understanding the types of posts shared, how often the user posts and how other consumers/fans respond to these posts gives a far clearer picture of the behaviours within the community and the cultures and exchanges taking place online. This type of information could be gathered using Twitter searches and analysed by hand by a netnographic researchers. However, using the SMM tool as a medium provides a more complete picture of audience behaviours through outlining the scale and breadth of the posts. Our approach, in marrying the scale of SMM tools with the human skills of a netnographic researcher following Kozinets (2015)'s process of netnographic research, through the immersion with the data and taking a qualitative analysis approach, allows the academic community to understand more about the #AirMaxDay brand community behaviours, wider context, influencers and outliers, and the cultural insights gained through this analysis.

Discussion

As we have shown there are clear benefits for academic researchers to adopt a netnographic sensibility to social media data sets. From a social listening perspective, this gathering of rich insights about users and communities is hugely time-consuming and requires a great deal of skill in understanding consumer behaviours, psychologies, social media behaviours. In putting forth the netnographic sensibility, we highlight the role of participation, and the differences between SMM tools and a netnographic approach, but we also see opportunities in the overlap and value in bridging the two. We argue that the role of the researcher is as an observer and interpreter, or in Kozinets' terms a 'lurker' who spends time familiarising themselves with the data and context, to explore and de-code it in forming

cultural insight (Kozinets, 2013:95). Researchers can examine the opportunity whereby SMM tools and netnography overlap allowing for detailed examination of social media data from multiple perspectives. We suggest that a combination of qualitative insights from netnography and the granularity made possible from small/big social media data gathered by SMM tools, provides holistic cultural insights which in turn allows researchers to understand more about consumer behaviours. However, we are aware that as the digital landscape transforms, with more data, methods, skillsets and changing technologies, necessitates that netnography is constantly evolving as a research approach. In exploring how academic researchers may begin to adapt to a potential netnographic sensibility, we now address a few concerns.

Considering ethics and privacy

The SMM tools we discuss are built for marketing professionals rather than to assist in academic practice, therefore to remain competitive with the SMM marketplace, these tools must be able to utilise cutting edge technologies to create these new practices of social media analysis. The first author notes that how these tools are used, and the market requirements for the tools are often led by industry practice and demand as well as innovative ideas and access to social media data and APIs. With most types of data used for academic or industry led purposes, there are concerns around ethics and privacy guidelines. ESOMAR, a global organisation aiming to 'promote the value of market and opinion research in effective decision making, demands that members should abide by its International Code on Market and Social Research (ESOMAR, 2017). This code of conduct encourages researcher self-regulation, strict adherence to local laws and high standards in ethical and professional research behaviours. IPSOS Mori a UK based research agency published a report on social media research arguing that while social listening and social insight offers excitement about the 'possibilities for a new social researcher methodology,' it raised concerns around associated ethical considerations (Evans et al., 2015). The learnings taken from this research are aimed at industry-led research, specifically towards regulators, social media organisations and researchers. This report makes the valid point that, to its knowledge, no major UK social media analytics platform has agreed to the ethical code suggested by the Market Research Society (MRS), with the point raised that 'research methodology is being led by what is technically possible, not always what is ethically appropriate' (ibid, p.6). It is unlikely that this will change in the near future as the developers of these tools will be more able to

respond in an agile fashion to the ever-changing social media landscape, as compared to academic institutions and the academic community.

These industry-led concerns are perhaps even more challenging for academics wishing to adopt a netnographic sensibility. In promoting this shift in the netnographic vantage point it complicates almost every dimension of our research strategy: how do we approach participant observation and informed consent? How do we ensure that our practice is ethically grounded and context sensitive? How can researchers ensure that participants remain anonymous when presenting research findings? What is the role of the researcher in this instance? If this is not a traditional ethnographic approach where the researcher clearly joins the community and is open with participants, how do we as ethical researchers ensure the anonymity of our research subjects? Admittedly, as researchers we ask more questions than answers in this section as we share concerns around how academics can keep up with the ever-changing privacy settings and online behaviours taking place on social media.

Firstly, we advocate considering the individuals who create the UGC, as we must consider the role of 'informed consent'. As academic researchers, is it enough to accept that if a person signed terms and conditions when opening a social media account, that they are fully aware how their data could be used? Hand (2014: 7) states that 'social media is resolutely non-anonymous' as we should consider that data is produced both intentionally and non-intentionally by users. Similarly, boyd and Crawford (2012:675) question how the research tools we use and participate in, actively shape the world as we employ them. This critical questioning accentuates unpacking this turn in research practice to probe the underlying assumptions, ethics, values and biases within a netnographic sensibility. The availability of research data made possible by social media raises new ethical questions such as what is public and what is private, whereby researchers may hold different views on privacy than those of their potential participants (Markham and Buchanan, 2012). Wu and Pearce (2014) argue that when content is available open access then there is not the requirement to contact the author for permission. It is assumed that if the author(s) put this content online, they have agreed that they have become a member. Of importance is the fact that original authors are not clearly identifiable in the final write-up of the research. Markham and Buchanan (2012) advise balancing the rights of subjects with the social benefits of the research and researchers' rights to conduct research. However, a key concern lies in the terms of service that different platforms may have.

The image of 'perceived privacy' (Bekkers et al., 2013) is relevant when considering netnography, social media analysis and the outlined netnographic sensibility. Researchers must consider whether users perceive their posts to be private or not. There is an assumption that users who post content on social media using hashtags (and without privacy settings on their account), share this content to allow others with similar interests to find and interact with the content. Furthermore, content posted with a recognised hashtag generally suggests that the user wishes to join the conversation, using the hashtag as a recognised sign for being part of the community (such as with #AirMaxDay). Bekkers et al. (2013) discuss the covert nature of monitoring social media platforms, raising concerns around how this impacts on a user's 'perceived privacy'. We advocate remaining sensitive to the established netnographic approach whereby there may be ethical concerns around the approach to data collection, as Kozinets (2014:130) warns 'ethics is a moving target'. Academic researchers must consider the anonymity of participants, and due care should be taken to ensure that any information about participants remains confidential. There are also questions about data ownership and differences across international borders. When considering informed consent, the researcher must consider if there is a probability of harm or damage, to the subjects or even to the researchers own public reputation. What about the age of the participants or their level of vulnerability, even when data is anonymised? We promote that ethics should be absorbed throughout the process. This requires consideration of how we think about research, the constitution of knowledge, processes of research and the nature of our epistemological assumptions.

Conclusion

This paper has outlined an approach whereby netnographic researchers can provide a holistic understanding of consumer behaviour through marrying large data sets curated by SMM tools with netnographic techniques (Kozinets, 2015). As a form of ethnographic research uniquely adapted to the particularities of technologically mediated social interaction in the contemporary world, netnography continues to have distinct advantages, as discussed throughout this paper. Netnography has continued to develop and can be considered the basis for broader studies of online social interaction and experience that assumes a cultural perspective. In understanding that culture is born, shared and revealed (Kozinets, 2013), we suggest that adopting a netnographic sensibility is a way to approach the value of social

listening research to provide holistic consumer understanding. Married between the founding practices of netnography (Kozinets, 2015) and the industry informed practice of social listening, we see this triangulation as providing a richer picture of sociality and culture with the researcher active as story interpreter.

Within the consumer research domain, we see our approach as bridging the divide between the small, rich and contextually nuanced data that is the hallmark of netnography and the scope and scale of data made possible through social media listening conventions. We adhere to cautions that 'context is king' and see a clear value in the contextualisation made possible through approaching a netnographic sensibility. With the recent work in consumer research, we have seen netnographic principles augmented to the phenomena under exploration, as researchers actively follow the digital traces, such Arvidsson and Caliandro (2016)'s analysis of hashtags and other mediation devices, and Kozinets, Patterson and Ashman's (2016) following topics and consumers through postings in both open and private groups. As Kozinets (2014: 104) has argued 'context is everything, soland context is constantly changing' therefore our methodological approach must evolve to contend with this increasingly complex and messy digital landscape.

In illustrating the approach, the #AirmaxDay case and following discussions focused mainly on the analysis of text based social media data. However, trends in social media behaviours include increased image sharing, user generated content, short videos and live broadcasts (e.g. Facebook Live, Pinterest Lens, Snapchat, Instagram Stories, Periscope), communicating using emojis, memes and photographs using filters (including augmented reality lens) and all are becoming the 'new normal' in social media. Whilst some social media monitoring tools are exploring automated image analysis (for example Pulsar) and 'visual listening' (Brandwatch, 2017), there remains a lack of commercial or academic ability to confidently analyse image, video and emoji use with automated tools. The movements towards private messaging (e.g. Whatspp, WeChat and Facebook messenger) may also suggest a change in digital behaviours around sharing content online within a public domain (Kozinets, Patterson and Ashman, 2016). Each of these presents an interesting area for future research and an ongoing challenge to the current methods of analysing social media conversations using automated tools and existing netnographic approaches.

The codification of methodological standards around social media research is challenging, with more questions than answers at this point. This, coupled with the ever-changing nature of social media behaviours, the introduction of new tools and new online

behaviours, adds to our concerns as researchers as to how academics can lead on this netnographic analysis of large scale social media data, adhering to professional and university codes of ethical conduct while learning from industry's applied practical understanding. Therefore, we argue that there is a need to adapt approaches to netnography to blend together the work of big data and automated tools, with the value of human qualitative analysis skills. Within this methodological terrain, we must question researcher agency and the underlying power dimensions in understanding people, contexts and practices. As Hand (2014) forewarns the 'datafication of everyday life' (Hand, 2014), has led to global headlines over controversies of big data and unaware participants, such as with Facebook's now famed 'emotional contagion study' (Kramer et al., 2014). Such studies and the proliferation of tools and software with which metricisation and datafication have been made possible, have shifted the agenda towards a renewed focus on the standards of practice for ethnography and by extension netnography and social listening (Batteau and Morais, 2015). Avoiding digital opportunism, with premises such as 'focus group 2.0' (Rodgers, 2009, 2013), or 'commercial sociology' (van Dijick, 2013) we advocate that the trajectories of netnographic research need to advance whilst balancing the hallmarks of continued best practice. Netnography asks each of us to be aware of what we are assuming, thinking, and doing (Kozinets, 2015). With our outlined netnographic sensibility, we see an opportunity to conduct a microanalysis of textual content on a large scale. Netnography has never been a speedy alternative and in continuing this tradition, a netnographic sensibility should viewed as an approach to gaining understanding into consumer insights, and prized as a dynamic way to gain deep understanding into the rich nuances of consumer practices, cultural contexts and socialities.

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