Association for Information Systems
AIS Electronic Library (AISeL)

ACIS 2002 Proceedings

Australasian (ACIS)

December 2002

Online Communities in Saudi Arabia: an ethnographic study

Yeslam Al-Saggaf
Charles Sturt University

Kirsty Williamson
Information and Telecommunications Needs Research (ITNR), Victoria, Australia

John Weckert
Charles Sturt University

Follow this and additional works at: http://aisel.aisnet.org/acis2002

Online Communities in Saudi Arabia: an ethnographic study

Yeslam Al-Saggaf

School of Information Studies
Charles Sturt University
Wagga Wagga, N.S.W., Australia
yalsaggaf@csu.edu.au

Kirsty Williamson

Director, Information and Telecommunications Needs Research (ITNR)
Caulfield East, Victoria, Australia

John Weckert

Centre for Applied Philosophy and Public Ethics
Charles Sturt University
Canberra, ACT, Australia

Abstract

This paper presents part of a research project about online communities in Saudi Arabia. The paper will address one of the research sub-questions, that is: What are the key features of participation in online communities in Saudi Arabia? The results presented in this paper are drawn from one of the techniques of data collection used in this research, that is, silent observation, which was conducted over a one-year period. In addition, the paper will discuss briefly the research design, including the research procedures. In its final section, some of the findings from this part of the project are presented.

Keywords

INTRODUCTION

The Saudi Arabian government introduced the Internet to the public in early 1999. Since that time the number of Internet users in the country has reached one million (AlZaharni, 2002), which is about 5.8 % of total population. According to a recent study, of this one million, 53 % participate in online communities (JeddahNews.net, 2002). The use of online communities, in the country where Islam acts as a major force in determining the norms, traditions and practices of society, is creating new forms of communication across gender lines, interrupting traditional social rituals and giving people new autonomy in how they run their lives. There are many accounts of what is an online community in the literature (see Holmes, 1997; Jones, S. G., 1997; Smith and Kollock, 1999; Wellman and Gulia, 1999; Preece, 2000; Jones and Kucker, 2001), but for the purpose of this paper, online communities are defined as "social aggregations that emerge from the Net when enough people carry on those public discussions long enough, with sufficient human feeling, to form webs of personal relationships in cyberspace" (Rheingold, 2000).

Many researchers have written of the existence of online communities and their unique cultural characteristics but little has been said about their effects on people's lives. Moreover, there is a notable absence of research on online communities that is being done in Arabic and Islamic countries (Ess, 1998). Towards that end, ethnographic research about online communities in Saudi Arabia (part of it presented in this paper) is being conducted, having begun in July 2000.

This paper will discuss briefly the research design for this project, the research setting and the gaining of entry to the setting, along with some of the findings. Also the procedures carried out in collecting data and analysing it will be documented.

OVERVIEW OF THE RESEARCH DESIGN

The central research question is: To what extent, if any, does the participation of individuals in online communities in Saudi Arabia affect their lives? This central research question is broken into the following sub-questions: What are individuals' perceptions about how their participation in online communities affects their lives? And what are the key features of participation in online communities in Saudi Arabia?

The research questions are investigated through a qualitative research design. Qualitative research methods were chosen to answer the research questions for a number of reasons. First, qualitative research methods are appropriate when the interest is in learning, in depth, about individuals' experiences and the meanings these individuals bring to their community (Jones, 1998; Fernback, 1999; Glesne, 1999; Marshall and Rossman, 1999; Denzin and Lincoln, 2000; Janesick, 2000; Saule, 2000; Schwandt, 2000; Williamson, 2000). Second, qualitative research methods are appropriate when the phenomenon is ongoing and at the forefront (Lincoln and Guba, 1985), as is the case with online communities in Saudi Arabia. Third, qualitative research methods are especially appropriate for studies where little empirical research exists (Patton, 1990; Locke *et al.*, 2000).

The qualitative research method employed in this research is ethnography or participant observation as it is often referred to (Bow, 2000). There are four ethnographic techniques used in this research. These are: online semi-structured in-depth interviews; observation of an online community; a participant role in another similar online community; and offline semi-structured in-depth interviews with key informants. Findings obtained through these techniques will be triangulated to assist in establishing validity and reliability (Lincoln and Guba, 1987; Maxwell, 1996; Bow, 2000).

There are many reasons for choosing to be a silent observer in an online community and a participant in another similar online community as two separate techniques to collect data for this research. First, since the researchers' intent was not to disturb the online community or change the natural behaviour of the participants being observed (Angrosino and Mays de Perez, 2000; Locke *et al.*, 2000), silent observation was the most appropriate technique. Second, it is difficult to act as an observer and a participant at the same time. Being an observer and a participant involves two distinct roles, which may not often be accomplished successfully (Lincoln and Guba, 1987; North, 1994; Tedlock, 2000). Third, had the researcher been a participant and an observer in the same online community, he might have been emotionally close to the participants, which may have caused distortion to the research findings (Paccagnella, 1997; Baym, 1998; Glesne, 1999). Fourth, being a silent observer in an online community and a participant in another similar online community means studying two similar sites, which is a practice researchers are often encouraged to adopt (Hine, 1998). Moreover, triangulating data collected through different techniques increases the chances of establishing validity and reliability (Lincoln and Guba, 1987; Maxwell, 1996; Bow, 2000). Finally, had the researcher been an observer and a participant in the same online community, other participants in the community might have been confused about his role (Paccagnella, 1997; Glesne, 1999). There is also a question of whether it is ethical to be an observer and a participant at the same time. (Ethical issues are discussed further below.)

This paper will address only one of the research sub-questions: What are the key features of participation in online communities in Saudi Arabia? The results presented in this paper are drawn from only one of the techniques of data collection used in this research, that is, silent observation, which was conducted over a one-year period.

THE SETTINGS

The forum selected as the research site for conducting silent observation is an asynchronous public discussion web forum, hosted by one of the largest and fastest growing online service providers in Saudi Arabia. (For ethical considerations, the name of the forum under study is omitted as King, 1996 and Eysenbach and Till, 2001 suggest should be the case when carrying out research on Internet communities). The main reason for the selection of this site was the richness of information available, which is a requirement for the choice of a research site (Maxwell, 1996). There are three reasons why this research site was selected over many others. First, the forum that existed on this site was one of the

earliest forums in the country, having started just a few months after the introduction of the Internet to the country. In fact, there were very few forums that existed prior to the time of starting the observation (mid-March 2001). Second, keeping in mind that Saudis make up the target population, it was noted through observation over a few weeks that the vast majority of participants are Saudis. Third, the online service provider, which hosts this forum, has one of the largest numbers of Internet subscribers in the country, which, to some extent implies that the range of participants' characteristics was diverse.

The observed forum has a design similar to that found in most forums in the country. At the time of observation, the main page in the forum contained links to newly posted topics or messages only. Older topics resided in other pages that could be accessed through small links that were found on the main page. In addition to the title of a topic, each page contained information like the nickname of the author of the topic, the date the topic was posted, the number of times the topic was read and the number of replies. Each page on the forum had around twenty topic titles (links). If the number of topics exceeded this number, older topics got scrolled backward to another page in the sequence. When a topic from an older page was being replied to at a later date, the topic would appear on the main (first) page.

To tell which page has a link to a particular topic of interest that was not in the first page was not an easy task. Participants were often forced to view more than one page before they found the topic of their interest. This made archiving very difficult and time consuming.

GAINING ENTRY

The forum selected for observation is a public space where anyone with a computer, Internet connection and a telephone line can participate. Those who intend to post contributions to the forum need to subscribe to it. The subscription is free of charge and involves only the provision of a nickname and a password. To observe the forum silently, also called lurking (Jones, S.G., 1997), the researcher did not need to subscribe to the forum or gain permission from a gatekeeper. Moreover, the researcher neither sought permission to conduct observation from the participants in the observed forum, nor did he seek their permission to use some of what they said in the forum. Should readers inquire about the ethical considerations involved in this activity, they are reminded that conversations in publicly accessible discussion forums are, in fact, public acts deliberately intended for public consumption. Recording, analysing and reporting of such content, where individuals' identities are shielded, is not subject to "Human Subject" constraints (King, 1996; Paccagnella, 1997; Frankel, 1999; Glesne, 1999; Liu, 1999; Eysenbach and Till, 2001). In fact, Associate Professor John Weckert, who is a member of the Ethics Working Group of the Internet Research Organisation that is in the process of developing guidelines for conducting research on the Internet, says that the general consensus about research on the Internet is that it is exempt from "Human Subjects" classification if there is no intervention with the persons doing the activities being observed and the collection of data does not involve these persons' identities (Personal Communication, 10 September 2001).

DOING SILENT OBSERVATION

Silent observation, also called unobtrusive observation (Bow, 2000), was conducted over a period of twelve months from mid-March 2001 to end of March 2002. For the whole of that time, observational field notes were recorded daily in a journal in which date and time were also entered. The process of observation and the recording of field notes took two to three hours daily depending on the volume of new topics in a single day.

The process of observation went in two stages with the first stage being unstructured. In the first stage of observation, the researcher entered the setting with a broad view, which involved looking at events, activities, cultural artefacts and behaviours that were salient. The guide for observations made and recorded, was based on the concepts developed in the available current literature on online communities (see Turkle, 1995; Holmes, 1997; Jones, 1997; Wellman and Gulia, 1999; Smith and Kollock, 1999; Preece, 2000; Rheingold, 2000; Smith *et al.*, 2000; Jones and Kucker, 2001). This stage, which lasted four months (between mid-March 2001 and mid-July 2001), assisted the researcher in becoming familiar with the

online culture of the community, its vocabulary, history, and people. The researcher also during this stage became aware of the nature of the activities, the key features of participation and the general behaviour of the participants of the community. In the field notes, during the first stage, the researcher identified the patterns and the key features of participation and made a checklist of observational categories for use in the second stage. Table 1 sets out these categories.

grouping	meeting offline	information sharing	religion	friendship
history	flaming	complimenting	disclosure	status
trivia	offline culture	humour	obscenity	love
religious influence	shyness	defending	withdrawal	intimacy
respect	intellectual	emotional support	commitments	family atmosphere
reputation	language	misunderstanding	name known	attention

Table 1: Lists observational categories developed in the first stage

In the second stage, field notes focused on these categories were made daily, recording information about the discussion topics, and the messages related to the topics. It was within these topics and the related messages, that the key features of participation were observed and categorised. During this process, the researcher always asked himself: Why was the instance interesting? And: Why was he interested in it? At the time of recording the field notes and, in the same journal, the researcher wrote his own reactions, reflections and interpretations about his observations. (The researcher is aware of issues of subjectivity of a single observer but hopes to compensate by the use of technique triangulation at a later stage of the research.)

Quotes that contained unusual language style, startling statements, or insights into behaviour, or that seemed interesting or important in illuminating the questions of the study, were copied and translated immediately in the same journal. Quotes and their translations were given a different font to distinguish them from other data. Translation has sometimes been a problem. Many of the expressions in Arabic were not accommodated in English. Very often, a friend of the researcher was asked about a word or a phrase. Sometimes an Arabic-English dictionary was consulted for a word or a phrase that is not captured in English.

Analysing the observation documents

The daily observational field notes were recorded in Microsoft Word and saved as a RTF (Rich Text Format) document. A single document covered one week of field notes. Each document was given a label, identifying the name of the week that data were collected and the date. The document passages were also arranged under headings, based on time and date of recording, to form sections, facilitating analysis. At the end of each week, this RTF document was imported into NVIVO for analysis. Thus, the analysis of field notes was performed weekly. This is not to say, however, that the process of analysis was not iterative. That is, observational field notes were re-analysed, as more data were collected.

After editing the documents in the NVIVO editor, they were read more than once so that a feel for the data was gained. Next, within each of the observational documents, keywords were identified after careful studying of each word and each line in the document passages. Themes were then developed based on these keywords. And the NVIVO Coder was used to assign nodes representing those themes.

Once these nodes were assigned, the node browser in NVIVO was invoked to view all segments of text, from all the observation's weekly documents, for the purpose of printing them out. Very importantly, the nodes stored all the data related to a particular theme from all the weekly documents. That is, these nodes became buckets or baskets into which segments of text, from all the weekly documents, related to a particular theme were placed.

The step that came after printing out the segments of text pertaining to a particular node was carefully reading and studying these segments of text off screen to make sure that the themes developed from these passages were appropriate. Two important steps followed the studying of nodes off screen: first, items of data from all observations documents that had

been assigned to a particular node were compared and contrasted to ensure that they were assigned to the appropriate node. Second, all nodes were further structured or organised into groups based on the general concepts of the research they addressed.

Finally, for the purpose of producing a summary of the data, statements that encompassed the developed nodes (themes) were written. These statements were combined to form paragraphs that formulate the results presented below.

Discussion of the key findings

The following key findings represent part of the answer (from the observational field notes only) to the following question: What are the key features of participation in online communities in Saudi Arabia? Other parts of the data will later supplement these findings. The results indicate that for its participants, the online community has been a big event in their lives. It is clear that the observed online community is a real community for many reasons. First, and most importantly because its participants believe that it is so. Markham (1998) and Fernback (1999) support the view that an online community can exist as a real community in the minds of its participants. Second, the observed online community fulfilled the conditions of an online community given by Jones Q. (1997), that is, a variety of communicators, a minimum level of membership, and a virtual common-public place. Third, the participants of the observed online community, in addition to their online interaction that included the forum, e-mail, chat and the MSN Messenger have extended their relationships to the telephone and face-to-face mediums. This extension of relationships indicates that online communities do not necessarily remain just online. This finding is supported by the work of Willson (1997), Horn (1998), Baym (1998), Wellman and Gulia (1999), Rheingold (2000) and Wong (2000). It is important to note that, while male and female participants admitted to having communicated across their gender lines via E-mail, chat and the MSN Messenger, it is not obvious that male and female participants in the observed online community have actually met offline. The fact that male and female participants communicated across their gender lines online is illustrated by the following quote:

> …It is true that I only know you through the forum and [a] few MSN conversations, but God witness you were a sincere brother.

> [A female participant saying goodbye to a male participant, Week 7, 15 May 2001]

Fourth, the sense of commitment and belonging to the community that the participants demonstrated, serves as strong evidence of the importance of their community to them. In fact, the sense of commitment seen in the community challenged the views of Baym (1998): that on-line communities lack commitment. This sense of commitment to the community was captured from many angles, including evidence of people continuing with the community for more than a year non-stop and of participants moving together to a new similar forum. One of the possible explanations for the sense of commitment among the participants is the immeasurable sense of intimacy that participants seem to share, as the following quote indicates:

> Everybody loves her and the heart is suffering for her loss, though we blame her for leaving …surely the good heart can't get too far from those whom it loves sincerely.

> [A female participant comments about another female participant, Week 14, 8 February 2002]

There are many ways participants adopt to indicate the intimacy of their relationships with others. One way is by adapting or playing with nicknames or real names, just as people abbreviate names in their offline culture. Another way is by teasing each other. Teasing, when it comes from an outsider, is considered an insult, but if it comes from a friend it has a positive effect. In addition, the intimacy of the relationships between participants is also indicated by them calling each other by their real names, as pointed out by Mar (2000).

Extension of relationships to offline settings

As mentioned earlier, most participants of the community met offline as well as online, as the following quote indicates:

> *Hey, looks like I won over you hahahahahahah [laughing] I will tell you why when we meet tonight. Ok!*

[A female participant talking to another female participant, Week 5, 29 April 2001]

That participants met offline was not surprising, as most online community researchers have noted this happening with online participants (see Parks and Floyd, 1996; Willson, 1997; Horn, 1998; Baym, 1998; Thomsen and Straubhar, 1998; Wellman and Gulia, 1999; Rheingold, 2000; Wong, 2000). It appears that the extension to offline settings made the relationship between participants deeper and stronger, as the following two quotes indicates:

> *The sensational feeling I got after meeting you is difficult for the human being to describe it or express it, but I always repeat that it is the sense of belonging, yes, the sense of belonging toward a thing is a wonderful feeling and that can give it its due justice.*

[A male participant describing his feelings after his meeting offline with another participant from Jeddah, W11, 12 January 2002]

> *Be certain brother that what is between us exceeded a friendship that is on the forum, but it became a … true friendship and real one, full by the love and the affection. Be certain that we will not allow any person to deform your picture either in front of us or in front of any other creature.*

[A male participant defending another, W19, 10 March 2002]

Negative aspects of participation

However, while the extension of relationships offline made the participants close friends, it also introduced what participants call "grouping", which takes places when a group of participants circle around each other, support only themselves and abandon the rest. The following quote illustrates this:

> *To remain fit and proof yourself you need to join a group like (name omitted)…but the thing is…is not unfair…I mean what is the fault of the new comers who try to join the forum but cant find a place for them?*

[A participant complaining about the issue of grouping, W4, 21 April 2001]

Horn (1998) notes that, over time, when people get to know each other well [in their own community], they start forming groups. Grouping in the observed community should not be surprising, knowing that Arabs are usually identified by their strong attachment to their family or group and their lack of acknowledgment of members from other groups (Gallois and Callan, 1997). Grouping apparently has been a negative aspect of participation, because it has denied participants outside a particular group equal attention.

Meanwhile, grouping is not the only negative aspect of participation in the observed online community. Participants often spend a great deal of time each day posting new messages, readings others' messages and/ or replying to others' messages. To some extent, this made them withdraw from their neighbours, relatives and friends. This kind of behaviour has been noted by many researchers who argue that the time spent on-line can take away time spent on other activities like watching TV, reading or socialising (Jones, S. G., 1997; Baym, 1998; Archee, 2000; Preece, 2000).

Features associated with the online medium

There are many features that are provided by the online medium that made the text-based experience interesting, for example the use of colours, signatures, smiley faces, images, comments and inside jokes are just a few examples among many more. Another important feature is the archiving facility, which maintained the history of the community. The history of the community served many purposes. For example, participants often scrolled back to capture moments in time and remember the good old days in the community. This meant that a history of topics and contributions was extended to a history of the community itself, its participants and their relationships with each other.

Another feature that emerged associated with the online medium is its lack of aural cues, which according to Joinson (1998) and Mar (2000) causes abandonment of social inhibitions. The lack of aural cues and anonymity may have been the cause for some mentions of what would be considered embarrassing to utter in the Islamic culture of Saudi Arabia. Some of these incidents, especially when they involved females, left the participants embarrassed and ashamed. The lack of aural cues and anonymity associated with the online medium, coupled with misunderstanding or misinterpretation over the content of a message, also often resulted in fights and flame wars as the following quote indicates:

> *…Thanx hun for ur reply. I never thought that Saudi guys r THAt sick. I knew they were sick… but I expected less symptoms..!! I'm regretting coming back [from US] more and more every passing second.   It's   becoming unbearable. I'm not coming back to this Forum any more coz I don't feel like being friends with such beings and so, the name does not apply to them and I..U r my friend... and some peeps (people) r really nice, but most r not…This's the last time I read any reply and the last time i get into this Forum…farewell*

[A female participant upset because some participants offended her, W19, 25 March 2002]

Like offline life, online communities are not necessarily conflict free (Horn, 1998; Rheingold, 2000). Conflicts took place most of the time when there was a misunderstanding over, or misinterpretation of, the content of a message. In text-based communities, such as the observed community, there is plenty of room for misunderstanding (Dowling, 1999).

Another feature of participation that can be attributed to the lack of aural cues associated with the medium, is self-disclosure, which was a visible scenario in the observed community as the following quote indicates:

> *Oh God, will you forgive me for the many prayers I wasted on things that are not useful!*

[A male participant confesses publicly that he does not perform the Islamic prayer, which is a grave sin, W19, 25 March 2002]

Horn (1998) and Rheingold (2000) observed that community participants online would reveal a lot about themselves and their personalities. Peerce (2000) also shares this view when she said that the anonymity often encourages people to disclose more about themselves.

Influence of the offline culture

There are many examples that indicate the influence of the offline culture on the individual's participation online. It could be seen in the adherence of participants to the attitudes and behaviours of the culture and religion; in the seeking of permission to converse with a participant on another participant's topic; in the use of excessive flattering and complimenting; and in the absence of debate and disagreement about views. The following quote indicates flattering:

> *To the inspiring figure in the forum (name omitted), to the wonderful writer, to the owner of the most passionate thoughts, to whom the forum cheered by her presence, to my dear sister…*

[A male participant complimenting a female participant, W5, 29 April 2001]

Also associated with the offline culture is the status bestowed upon some participants by other participants. Participants who are normally respected in their society (offline) for age, job or social status reasons, appeared to have a certain status in the observed community too. Moreover, participants who spent time in regular interaction and commitment to the community appeared to have a certain status. The other way that won participants status among others was their use of language as Rheingold (2000) confirms. Participants who came up with accurate, well-worded and intelligent answers won all the attention. In addition, participants who had the ability to write creatively and knowledgeably also gained attention. One of the biggest disadvantages about participants having a higher status or position in the

community over others is that their topics always receive attention while unknown and non-famous participants' topics were neglected.

The revealing of real names among the participants in the observed community occurred frequently and can only be explained by association with the offline culture of participants. Arabs do not like to communicate with others in the abstract. That is why participants often revealed their true genders and true names. Moreover, revealing true names made participants look more real in front of each other (Horn, 1998). One advantage was establishing accountability for actions and making people selective and cautious about what they wrote. Horn (1998), when describing the culture of Echo community, mentioned that knowing the real name of members made them accountable for their actions. All knew many of the real names of male participants in the observed community. In the community, over time, reputations were built, expectations were established, images were formed and identities were constructed. What participants wrote in the community was immediately linked to their reputation, expectations, image, and identity. This may have also been the reason for the presence of such artistic, creative and original topics in the community.

CONCLUSION

Overall, participation in the online community can be seen as very fruitful. It was clear that the participants learned a great deal from their interaction with each other, from the sharing of their offline life experiences and from the sharing of information. In the country where freedom to verbalise one's ideas and views is limited, participants found in the online community a gateway or "an opening" to express their ideas and views, express themselves better and complain about the social problems and the pressures of life that they were facing. Considering the fact that cinemas, theatres and nightclubs are not part of people's lives in Saudi Arabia, it was not surprising that the online community became a form of entertainment, a place for relaxation and a way of enjoyment. It was very obvious with the passage of time that participants felt attached to the online community and became part of it. It became their great escape away from the pressure and stress of daily life activities and routines. It also became a place for unwinding where they were able to meet their friends and peers; people of their choice and not the people whom they were conditioned to meet or be with in their usual daily life. From their online community they derived a sense of belonging. All this made them view the community as their sacred home or sanctuary. One of the most positive aspects of participation in the online community was the channel for communication it gave to women in a society, where women traditionally stay at home to raise the children. In the online community, women for the first time had their opinion heard in public.

REFERENCES

AlZahrani, S. (2002) 45% of the Internet users in Saudi Arabia are women. AlWatan Newspaper First Page Jan 7, 2002.

Angrosino, M. and Mays de Perez, K. (2000) Rethinking Observation: From Method to Context. In: Denzin, N.K. and Lincoln, Y.S., (Eds.) Handbook of Qualitative Research, 2 edn. pp. 673-702. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Archee, R. (2000) Critiquing <the> Internet 2000: Knowledge, Language and freedom. In: Gibbs, D. and Krause, K.-L., (Eds.) Cyberlines: Languages and Cultures of the Internet, pp. 207-222. Australia: James Nicholas Publishers.

Baym, N.K. (1998) The Emergence of On-Line Community. In: Jones, S.G., (Ed.) CyberSociety 2.0: Revisiting Computer-Mediated Communication and Community, pp. 35-68. USA: Sage

Bow, A. (2000) Ethnographic techniques. In: Williamson, K., (Ed.) Research methods for students and professionals: Information management and systems, pp. 247-261. Wagga Wagga: Centre for Information Studies, CSU.

Denzin, N.K. & Lincoln, Y.S. (2000) Introduction: the Discipline and Practice of Qualitative Research. In: Denzin, N.K. and Lincoln, Y.S., (Eds.) Handbook of Qualitative Research, 2 edn. pp. 1-29. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Dowling, Carolyn (1999) Minding Our Manners: Public and Private Discourse Within Electronic Environments. Australian Institute of Computer Ethics Conference, Lilydale.

Ess, C. (1998) First Looks: CATaC'98, in Ess, C. and Sudeweeks, F. Proceedings of CATaC'98. Uni of Sydney, Australia.

Eysenbach, G. and Till, J.E. (2001) Ethical issues in qualitative research on internet communities. British Medical Journal 323, 1103-1105.

Fernback, J. (1999) There Is a Their There: notes Toward a Definition of Cybercommunity. In: Jones, S.G., (Ed.) Doing Internet Research: Critical Issues and Methods for Examining the Net, pp. 203-220. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Frankel, M.S. (1999) Ethical and legal aspects of human subjects research on the Internet. Washington: http://www.aaas.org/spp/dspp/sfrl/projects/intres/report.pdf.

Gallois, C. and Callan, V.J. (1997) Communication and Culture, Chichester, England: John Wiley & Sons.

Glesne, C. (1999) Becoming Qualitative Researcher: An Introduction, 2 edn. New York: Longman.

Hine, Christine (1998) Virtual Ethnography. Proceedings of IRISS '98 Bristol, UK.

Holmes, D. (1997) Glossary. In: Holmes, D., (Ed.) Virtual Politics: Identity and Community in Cyberspace, pp. 229-242. London: Sage.

Horn, S. (1998) Cyberville: clicks, culture, and the creation of an online town, edn. New York: Warner Books.

Janesick, V. (2000) The Choreography of Qualitative Research Design: Minuets, Improvisations, and Crystallisation. In: Denzin, N.K. and Lincoln, Y.S., (Eds.) Handbook of Qualitative Research, 2 edn. pp. 379-399. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

JeddahNews.net. (2001) Where do you spend most of your time over the Internet? JeddahNews.net. Accessed 6 May 2002.

Joinson, A. (1998) Causes and Implications of Disinhibited Behaviour on the Internet. In: Gackenbach, J., Psychology and the Internet, Academic Press.

Jones, Q. (1997) Virtual -Communities, Virtual Settlements & Cyber-Archaeology: A Theoretical Outline. JCMC 3.

Jones, S.G. (1997) The Internet and its Social Landscape. In: Jones, S.G., (Ed.) Virtual Culture: Identity & Communication in Cybersociety, pp. 7-35. London: Sage.

Jones, S.G. (1998) Information, Internet, and Community: Notes Toward an Understanding of Community in the Information Age. In: Jones, S.G., (Ed.) CyberSociety 2.0: Revisiting Computer-Mediated Communication and Community, pp. 1-35. USA: Sage.

Jones, S.G. & Kucker, S. (2001) Computers, the Internet, and Virtual Cultures. In: Lull, J., (Ed.) Culture in the Communication Age, pp. 212-225. London: Routledge.

King, S.A. (1996) Researching Internet Communities: Proposed Ethical Guidelines for the Reporting of Results. The Information Society 12, 119-128.

Lincoln, Y.S. and Guba, E.G. (1987) Effective Evaluation, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Liu, G.Z. (1999) Virtual Community Presence in Internet Relay Chatting. JCMC 5.

Locke, L.F., Spirduso, W.W. & Silverman, S.J. (2000) Proposals That Work, 4 edn. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

Mar, J. (2000) Online on time: The language of Internet Relay Chat. In: Gibbs, D. and Krause, K.-L., (Eds.) Cyberlines: Languages and Cultures of the Internet, pp. 151-174. Australia: James Nicholas Publishers.

Markham, A.N. (1998) Life Online: Researching Real Experience in Virtual Space, Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira.

Marshall, C. and Rossman, G.B. (1999) Designing Qualitative Research, 3 edn. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Maxwell Joseph A. (1996) Qualitative Research Design: An Interactive Approach, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

North, T. (1994) The Internet and Usenet Global Computer Networks. www.vianet.net.au/~timn/ MA thesis.

Paccagnella, L. (1997) Getting the Seats of Your Pants Dirty: Strategies for Ethnographic Research on Virtual Communities. JCMC 3.

Parks, Malcolm R. and Floyd, K. (1996) Making Friends in Cyberspace, Journal of Communication 46(1). 96.

Patton, M.Q. (1990) Qualitative evaluation and research methods, 2 edn. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Preece, J. (2000) Online Communities: Designing Useability, Supporting Sociability, Chichester: John Wiley & Sons.

Rheingold, H. (2000) The Virtual Community: Homesteading on the Electronic Frontier, Revised edn. Cambridge: MIT Press.

Saule, S. (2000) Ethnography. In: Williamson, K., (Ed.) Research methods for students and professionals: Information management and systems, pp. 159-176. Wagga Wagga: Centre for Information Studies, CSU.

Schwandt, T.A. (2000) Three Epistemological Stances for Qualitative Inquiry: Interpretivism, Hermeneutics, and Social Constructionist. In: Denzin, N.K. and Lincoln, Y.S., (Eds.) Handbook of Qualitative Research, 2 edn. pp. 189-214. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Smith, M. and Kollock, P. (1999) Communities in Cyberspace. In: Smith, M. and Kollock, P., (Eds.) Communities in Cyberspace, London: Routledge

Smith, M., Shelly, F. and Drucker, S.M. (2000) The Social Life of Small Graphical Chats . ACM SIG CHI 2000

Tedlock, B. (2000) Ethnography and Ethnographic Representation. In: Denzin, N.K. & Lincoln, Y.S., (Eds.) Handbook of Qualitative Research, 2 edn. 455-486. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage

Thomsen, S. R., Straubhaar, Joseph D. and Bolyard, DM (1998) Ethnomethodology and the Study of Online Communities: Exploring the Cyber Streets. edn. Bristol, UK: (1998).

Turkle, S. (1995) Life on the Screen: Identity in the Age of the Internet, New York: Simon & Schuster.

Watson, N. (1997) Why We Argue About Virtual Community: A Case Study of the Phish.Net Fan Community. In: Jones, S.G., (Ed.) Virtual Culture: Identity & Communication in Cybersociety, pp. 102-132. London: Sage.

Wellman, B. & Gulia, M. (1999) Net-Surfers Don't Ride Alone: Virtual Communities as Communities. In: Wellman, B., (Ed.) Networks in the Global Village: Life in Contemporary Communities, pp. 331-366. Colorado: Westview.

Willson, M. (1997) Community in the Abstract: A Political and Ethical Dilemma? In: Holmes, D., (Ed.) Virtual Politics: Identity and Community in Cyberspace, London: Sage Publications

Williamson, K. (2000) Research methods for students and professionals: Information management and systems, Wagga Wagga: Centre for Information Studies, CSU.

Wong, A. (2000) Cyberself: Identity, language and stylisation on the Internet. In: Gibbs, D. and Krause, K.-L., (Eds.) Cyberlines: Languages and Cultures of the Internet, pp. 175-206. Australia: James Nicholas Publishers

COPYRIGHT