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From "participant" to "friend": the role of Facebook engagement in ethnographic research

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From "participant" to "friend": the role of Facebook engagement in ethnographic research

Introduction

Engaging with participants on Facebook during ethnographic fieldwork has become increasingly prevalent in research, especially when exploring complex and sensitive consumption issues (Chenail, 2011; Piacenti et al., 2014). Such engagement not only provides a complementary medium of communication but also provides a context and a source of data from which emic and etic interpretations can be made (Baker, 2013; Dogruer et al., 2011). Despite, extant literature focuses predominantly on "how-to" aspects of integrating Facebook in ethnographic research (Baker, 2013), thus, creating a need to amiliorate epistemological and methodological issues of integrating Facebook in ethnographic research. For example, further research can help ethnographic researchers to understand the ways in which Facebook, as a methodological tool in ethnographic research, can encourage close rapport with participants leading to rich and thick interpretations of complex phenomena.

The purpose of this paper, therefore, is to theorise epistemological and methodological implications of integrating Facebook in conventional ethnographic research. Accordingly, we present three research questions. Firstly, how to engage with participants on their Facebook profiles to build a productive rapport with them during ethnographic fieldwork? Building on friendship theories (Owton and Allen-Collinson, 2014; Tillmann-Healy, 2003), we suggest that Facebook engagement encourages rapport building by enabling researchers to gradually develop dialogical researcher-participant relationships by paying close attention to aspects such as practice, pace, context, and the 'ethics of friendships' (Tillmann-Healy, 2003). Secondly, what challenges inherent to conventional ethnographic research does increased rapport enable researchers to overcome? We propose that Facebook helps overcome three challenges inherent to conventional ethnography: 1) negotiating access and immersion, 2) developing multiple perspectives, and 3) providing rich and thick interpretations. Thirdly, how Facebook engagement enables the navigation of these challenges? Our findings contribute to consumer and cross disciplinary ethnographic literature (Baker, 2013; Piacenti et al., 2014) and provide evidence that utilising Facebook allows researchers to overcome such challenges by expanding the researcher's field, improving participants' trust and confidence of the researcher, bringing both insider and outsider perspectives, and diluting the power hierarchy often found in participant-researcher relationships.

However, we also propose that our contributions have implications beyond conventional ethnography and are relevant to wider netnographic (Kozinets, 2010; 2015) and social media-oriented ethnographic research (Postill and Pink, 2012). Our proposed framework could be useful for netnographic researchers seeking to build a close rapport with participants as it sheds light on epistemological and methodological issues about one of the popular social networking sites that provides, as Kozinets (2015, p. 35) classifies, a "hyving social experience". In addition, we also contribute to an emerging body of cross-disciplinary literature on "friendship as method" (Owton and Allen-Collinson, 2014; Ellis, 2007; Glesne, 1989; Tillmann-Healy, 2003) by theorising the role of Facebook engagement in inspiring and sustaining 'friendships' with participants during ethnographic research.

We have structured the paper as follows: Firstly, we engage with cross-disciplinary literature on ethnography, netnography, theories of friendship, and Facebook. Secondly, we introduce the research methodology, and the overarching ethnographic research process. Thirdly, we draw from our ethnographic fieldwork to illustrate how integrating Facebook facilitates friendships with participants and allows us to investigate deeper and richer details of their everyday lived experiences during important transitions, in our case, the transition from single to marital status. Finally, we discuss some of the important ethical/moral implications of "friendship as method" and the complexities of integrating Facebook in ethnographic research and elaborate on the ways in which we addressed such complexities.

Literature

Ethnographic research, theories of friendship, and the role of Facebook

Having its origins in cultural anthropology (Boas, 1920; Malinowski, 1922; Mead and Boas, 1928), ethnography is increasingly being accepted as a rigorous research approach useful to commercial (Boddy, 2011; Wägar, 2012), public policy making (Arnould, 2001; Mosse, 2006), and marketing research (Arnould and Price, 2006; Harvey and Myers, 1995). Expecting to "clarify the ways culture simultaneously constructs and is formulated by people's behaviours and experiences" (Arnould and Wallendorf, 1994, p.485), ethnography is capable of exploring mundane (Miller, 2008), private (Schouten and McAlexander, 1995), sensitive (Hill, 1991), and marginalised (Kates, 2002) consumer experiences.

Contemporary consumers continuously traverse online and offline contexts in their consumption and identity pursuits (Kozinets, 2015; Piacenti et al., 2014). Consequently, this

has resulted in the extending of boundaries of conventional ethnographic approaches. In response, netnographic (Kozinets, 2010; 2015), virtual (Beneito-Montagut, 2011; Hine, 2000), and social media (Postill and Pink, 2012) ethnographic approaches have become increasingly popular in consumer research. Netnography, in particular, is increasingly adopted by interpretive researchers to investigate and explore online cultures and communities (Kozinets, 2015). Current research pays extensive attention to understanding various online cultures and discusses methods that are used to examine different aspects of these online contexts (Chenail, 2011; Postill and Pink, 2012; Wali, 2010). However, there is lack of depth in online ethnographic research covering epistemological and methodological implications of engaging with different communities. For example, even though the intermittent interactions and observations prevalent in social media sites such as Facebook seem an obvious and common sense context for netnographic researchers, we have limited understanding of the actual processes involved and, especially, of how Facebook allows researchers to become sensitised to understanding new consumption experiences coalescing in both online and offline spheres.

Categorised as a platform that provides a "hyving social experience" (Kozinets, 2015), over a billion registered users (Toma and Hancock, 2013) engage on Facebook to meet two basic online/offline social needs: 1) the need for belonging (Seidman, 2013) and, 2) the need for self-expression (Dogruer et al., 2011). There is an extensive body of literature discussing how semi-public Facebook profiles provide an interface for people to link online and offline identities (Postill and Pink, 2012) by expressing feelings and emotions (Al-Saggaf, 2011), share personalities (Zhao et al., 2008), discuss routine experiences (Moore and McElroy, 2012), seek self-assurance and emotional support (Ross et al., 2009), and enhance a sense of self-worth and integrity (Toma and Hancock, 2013). In addition, Facebook not only facilitates connecting people with similar interests (Nadkarni and Hofmann, 2012) but also enables maintaining of offline social relationships in the online sphere (Ellison et al., 2007; Onwuegbuzie et al., 2010) by letting people to track changes in their friends' lives (Nadkarni and Hofmann, 2012) and uploading moments from their own lives (Al-Saggaf, 2011). Researchers across disciplines have increasingly used Facebook as a qualitative research tool to aid sampling, data collection, and participant engagement and retention (Baltar and Brunet, 2012; Gregori and Baltar, 2013; Mychasiuk and Benzies, 2012). For example, Piacenti et al. (2014, p. 226-227) acknowledge that Facebook has the capacity to expand the ethnographic researcher's "field" and introduce new ontological and epistemological dimensions of

online/offline consumer experiences. In addition, it not only provides a supplementary medium of communication for online and traditional ethnographic research (Langer and Beckman, 2005; Garcia et al., 2009; Kozinets, 2010; 2015) but also brings a rich context and source of data (Baker, 2013) for researchers to build a close rapport/relationship with participants (Dogruer et al., 2011; Moore and McElroy, 2012; Seidman, 2013). However, extant research does not discuss how Facebook and other social media platforms enable researchers' immersion in participants' lives and help them better understand intricate and intimate consumption experiences linked to their online and offline identity pursuits. Thus, as Kozinets (2015, p. 6) points out, current literature will benefit from an epistemological and methodological debate on various approaches and tools used within online ethnographic research.

As suggested in some of the seminal ethnographic work (Belk et al., 1988; Malinowski, 1922; Mead and Boas, 1928; Schouten and McAlexander, 1995), developing a strong rapport with participants is integral to developing relationships that may enable rich ethnographic interpretation. Therefore, seeking to build close emotional bonds (Miller, 2008), and, in some cases, lasting friendships with participants (Edirisingha et al., 2014), is intuitive to most ethnographers as they look to understand deeper cultural meanings which are not usually visible in more superficial responses (Crowley, 2007; Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995). Similarly, aiming to understand various online cultural phenomena, netnographic researchers also suggest the importance of strong relationships with participants which are built upon trust, confidentiality, and respect (Kozinets, 2002; 2006; 2010; Langer and Beckman, 2005; Rokka, 2010). Though, most extant ethnographic and netnographic studies advise maintaining a scholarly distance from participants (Schouten and McAlexander, 1995) and avoiding friendships that negatively influence researcher objectivity (Glesne, 1989; Labaree, 2002), there is a concomitant emergence of advice that promotes the importance of developing close "friendships" with participants, especially when exploring complex socio-cultural phenomena (Glesne, 1989; Tillmann-Healy, 2003).

References to friendship within ethnographic research appear across disciplines (Allen-Collinson, 2014; Christie, 2015; Edirisingha et al., 2014; 2015; Fiske, 1991; Higgins, 1996; Tillmann-Healy, 2003) where it is recognised as a meaningful and desirable bonding activity between humans that also has implications for their personal wellbeing (Adams and Kurtis, 2015; Antonio, 2001; Caroline, 1993; Gomez, 2014; Tesch et al., 1981). Importantly,

friendship is an inter-dependent and mutually negotiated attachment (Buote et al., 2009) that is embedded and enacted within the normality of everyday social engagements (Buhrmester, 1996). There is also consensus in this literature which recognises the importance of love, caring, trust, empathy, confidentiality, respect, and support as essential traits of friendships (Mackinlay and Bartleet, 2012; Sassi and Thomas, 2012; Tillmann-Healy, 2003). Online interfaces are also increasingly important in the establishment and maintenance of contemporary friendships (Jiali, 2007). Regardless, there are important contextual and situational differences between friendships that are situated in online and offline environments (Adam and Kurtis, 2015; Leeuw et al., 2012), which make some research contexts and topics inaccessible through online spheres (Langer and Beckman, 2005). In addition, the purpose of online friendships is not always the pursuit of social interaction but can encompass a range of other motives such as knowledge production and dissemination (Kozinets, 2015). Researchers have observed that online friendships tend to be temporal as people are less inter-dependent and committed in online friendships (Chan and Cheng, 2004). Similarly, attachment people are willing to embrace (Buote et al., 2009) and the type of behaviours they perceive as trustworthy also differ significantly across online and offline friendships (Henderson and Gilding, 2004).

In addition, there is a growing body of ethnographic literature that promotes "friendship as method" (Ellis, 2007; Glesne, 1989; González-López, 2010; Leeuw et al., 2012; Owton and Allen-Collinson, 2014; Tillmann-Healy, 2003) as a useful methodological approach. Building close friendships with participants allows ethnographers to shift between insider and outsider perspectives (Browne, 2003) and ones which can produce trust, commitment and engagement at a more personal level within the researcher-participant relationship (Ellis, 2007; Fine, 1994; Owton and Allen-Collinson, 2014; Tillmann-Healy, 2003). Increased trust and rapport between the researcher and participants ease participants into sharing more intimate and personal details that are otherwise concealed from outsiders (Mazzei and O'Brien, 2009; Taylor, 2011). For example, as suggested in some feminist studies, befriending participants lead to increased levels of enthusiasm and corroboration by the participants (Kirsch, 2005; Stacey, 1988; Taylor, 2011; Wheatley, 1994) and also increased the researcher's own capacity to empathise with and develop an understanding of intricate cultural cues concealed in mundane consumer experiences (Edirisingha et al., 2015).

Despite this growing interest across disciplines, there is much to learn about the methodological implications of seeking to build friendships, especially during consumer-oriented ethnographic research (Edirisingha et al., 2015). Particularly, an in-depth understanding of different research tools capable of initiating and sustaining friendships during ethnographic research would help researchers to navigate inherent challenges of the approach, such as gaining access, building trust, and sustaining immersion (Arnould and Wallendorf, 1994). In addition, a better methodological conceptualisation is needed to understand potential applications of friendship as method and the sorts of mundane insights it might help to reveal during ethnographic fieldwork. To address these gaps, we build on methodological foundations of "friendship as method" discussed by Tillmann-Healy (2003) and others (Ellis, 2007; Owton and Allen-Collinson, 2014; Tesch et al., 1981). We present evidence from fieldwork upon which we theorise how Facebook can be used to enrich conventional ethnographic research by aiding the initiation, maintenance, and the development of a close rapport with research participants.

Research Context and Methodology:

Adopting a multi-method, longitudinal, and two-staged ethnographic research process we explored identity interplay and re-formation in new family households. Investigating topics in identity formation and its negotiation has been a challenging topic across disciplines, especially in the context of family (Epp and Velagaleti, 2014; Fiese et al., 2006). Family identity negotiation during transitions evolve over a period of time in confined spaces of home through negotiations of mundane and cherished family possessions (Curasi, 2006; Curasi et al., 2004; Miller, 2008; 2010). Consequently, our ethnographic research explored new family lived experiences and identity negotiations during family formation.

We selected a purposive sample of nine Sinhalese Sri Lankan families by drawing from the first author's personal network (Hoffman, 1980). In so doing we intended to overcome difficulties of recruitment and issues relating to building participant trust. Even though prior acquaintances were useful in revealing individual expectations of marriage and provided deeper insight into personal reflexions of family formation, they did not provide access to or immersion in mundane family life. Accordingly, we recognised the importance of building a strong rapport and encouraging friendly relationships with participants (Tillmann-Healy, 2003).

When we discuss forming friendships with participants, we refer to taking a "stance of friendship" (Tillmann-Healy, 2003, p. 735), rather than merely aiming to develop strategically guised relationships to gain access to the private lives of participants. We specifically aimed to build and sustain lasting friendships that bridge online and offline contexts through casual conversations and everyday involvement (Owton and Allen-Collinson, 2014). We paid close attention to normative practices, pace, and morals of friendship (Ellis, 2007; Tillmann-Healy, 2003) in order to create dialogical-based and emotionally genuine relationships (Owton and Allen-Collinson, 2014).

We also adapted the ethnographic research process throughout data collection (Edirisingha et al. 2014) and used multiple methods including casual conversations, Facebook engagement, and various elicitation tasks to facilitate emerging friendships. As we illustrate in this study, closer friendships with participants gradually emerged during Facebook interactions and provided us with a rather unanticipated source of data. In addition, the first author's familiarity with Sri Lankan customs, values, and traditions provided a useful emic perspective (Asselin, 2003; Brannick and Coghlan, 2007) during data collection and interpretation. However, it is important to distinguish this approach of seeking to build close friendships with participants through Facebook engagement to negotiating access with participants in netnographic research. We were not seeking to build online Facebook friendships as we had already met our participants offline and our friendships continued to progress through offline ethnographic fieldwork. Facebook provided us with a useful platform to engage with participants and foster our friendships that last beyond the research project and which traverse online and offline environments. Nonetheless, we suggest netnographic researchers could benefit from our detailed theoretical conceptualisation of how taking a friendship as method approach could help them overcome issues of immersion and access.

Our two-staged ethnographic research process lasted over two and half years and explored mundane consumption practices such as family sharing (Belk, 2010), acts of mutual reciprocity (Arnould and Rose, 2015), and gift-giving (Sherry, 1983). Specifically, we examined activities such as: family meal preparation, grocery shopping, displaying of furniture, and the negotiation of inter-family relationships. The data collection combined a range of tools including video recorded participant observations, semi-structured in-depth interviews, informal sessions, and social-media engagement. During the initial stages of the research, Facebook interaction aimed at introducing the research project to the participants,

however, as the research progressed Facebook conversations (chat) and observations (timeline observations) became an increasingly rich source of data that complemented more conventional tools.

We discussed the multi-method and adaptive nature of our ethnography with participants during the first meetings. It was at this stage that we invited participants to become Facebook friends; however, it was primarily to stay in touch (Baker, 2013) and to discuss research specifics such as arranging interviews and observation sessions. As we further discuss in the next section, participants frequently engaged through Facebook creating a rich seam of insight into their personal lives. For example, passive timeline observations enabled us to understand subtle changes and details of participants' lives on a regular basis. It brought an unanticipated but rewarding opportunity to gradually build friendships with our participants, thus, enhancing trust in the researcher-participant relationship. Therefore, we sought separate permission from participants to consider Facebook material such as chat histories, pictures, and status updates in data analysis and interpretation building.

Discussion

This section draws from the findings of our two and half year ethnography to illustrate the ways in which Facebook engagement becomes useful to develop friendships with participants and produce material for researchers to draw "rich" and "thick" interpretations to conventional ethnographic research. Specifically, we address three challenges of traditional ethnography that could be negotiated by integrating Facebook as one of the research tools (Figure 1.1): 1) negotiating access and immersion, 2) developing multiple perspectives, and 3) building rich and thick interpretations.

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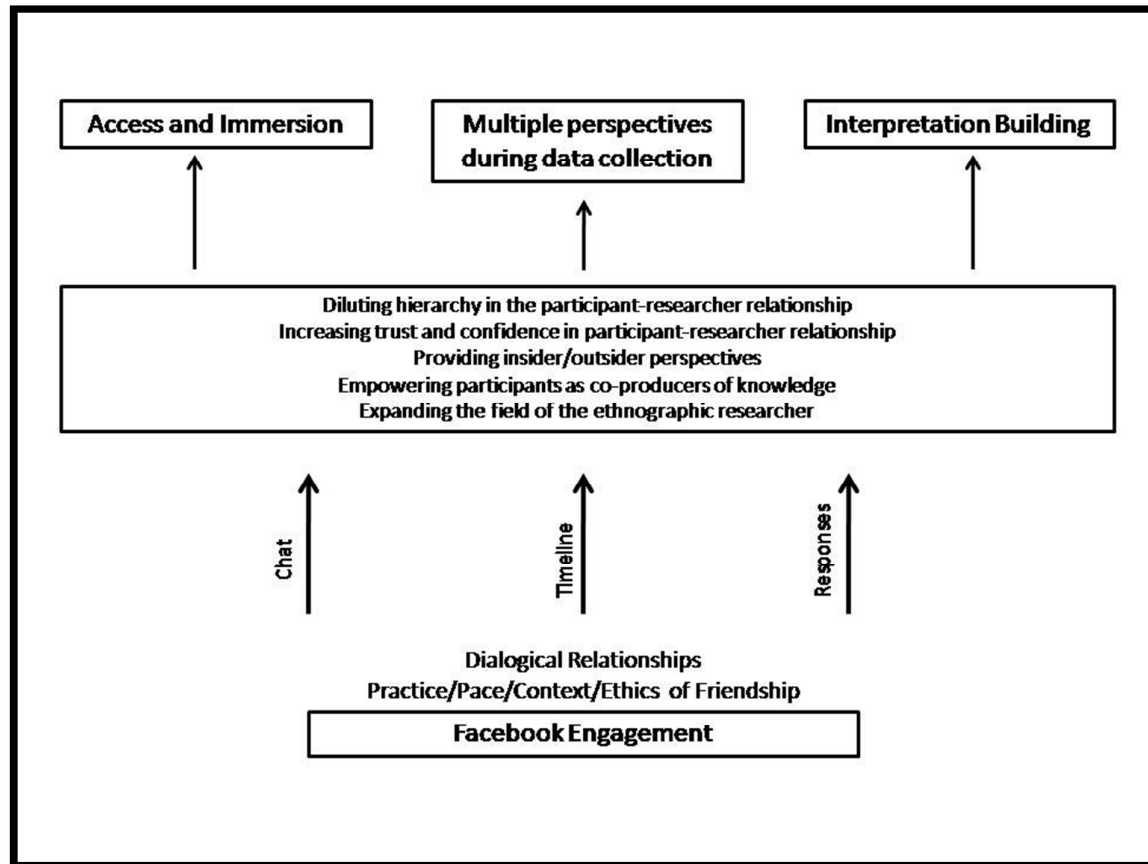
Figure 1.1: Framework of role of Facebook engagement in ethnographic research

Gaining access and sustaining longitudinal immersion

Here we discuss how Facebook allows access to and immersion in informants' everyday lives and help develop rich and thick interpretations. We argue that using Facebook can complement traditional ethnographic methods by enhancing trust and confidence in the participant-researcher relationship.

Integrating Facebook in our adaptive ethnographic research process allowed us to gain closer access to participant families and also enabled deeper immersion in their mundane lives. Negotiating initial access involved conducting first meetings with participants and learning about their everyday lives. We used Facebook to introduce the research when the first author's physical presence was impractical. Adhering to normative practices and respecting the pace of friendship development (Tillmann-Healy, 2003), our preliminary conversations covered casual topics about participants' families, occupations, lifestyles, and hobbies as we would normally do when we first meet someone. We occasionally "liked" participants' Facebook postings and left "comments" for their timeline updates (such as picture, video, and

status updates), which was also normative for Facebook 'friends'. It also provided a way of making them aware of our presence and conveying our genuine and continuing interest in their lives. Thus, adopting Facebook in the research process provided us with a casual way of introducing the research in an environment that is already familiar to participants. It helped us gradually build trust through practices which are normative to conventional offline friendships by allowing sufficient time for friendships to evolve through mundane interaction (Tillmann-Healy, 2003).

One of the most challenging tasks of our ethnography was to remain fully immersed in participants' lives during data collection. Especially, it was not practical to observe everyday consumption practices when the first author was not living in Sri Lanka. There were also changes in participants' family circumstances, such as getting a new job and moving away to a town where frequent research visits were impractical. In such circumstance we used Facebook as a communication medium (Piacenti et al., 2014) to access their otherwise inaccessible lives.

We also used Facebook chat during on-going fieldwork to catch up with participants, to discuss emerging themes, and to arrange future data collection sessions. These informal conversations occurred during multiple time points whenever the participants were available online and free to engage, another example of respecting the pace of conventional friendships develop over time. We discussed a range of topics such as about their material possessions, relationships, lifestyles, and family issues. Also, keeping track of participants' Facebook updates and other interactions such as shared posts and conversation threads helped us to observe changes in aspects relevant to family identity negotiation. There were also occasions when participants shared details about mundane and everyday practices on their Facebook timelines. This expanded our field as ethnographic researchers by enabling us to access participants' everyday lives at a more personal level and to create an immersive experience than we would be able to by using conventional observation methods. For example, during Facebook chats our participants shared details about what they were doing on a specific day such as how they assigned specific household duties, thus, providing us with a real-time access to mundane family practices (Baker, 2013):

"In the morning we cleaned up the house, mostly I did the cleaning and he kept complaining...We are making Chinese rolls...He is helping me..." – Shani (Female) during Facebook chat

As the research progressed, some participants took an interest in the first author's personal life and started 'liking' and 'commenting' on his personal Facebook postings. This encouraged a friendlier and more reciprocal relationship between the first author and some of the participants based on their shared interests and lifestyles. It also enabled us to develop a more "dialogical" (Tillmann-Healy, 2003) participant-researcher relationship adhering to the ethics, practices, and pace of conventional friendships. For example, one of our female participants joined the research project because of her husband's close relationship with the first author's family. Initially we felt that she was reluctant to talk about her new family relationships such as with in-laws. However, she started to engage often on Facebook by "liking" and "commenting" on the first author's Facebook postings, thus, leading to a closer friendship based on shared hobbies and interests. She eventually became more comfortable with discussing deeper and more personal topics, but we were also careful not to probe too much on Facebook. We normally let the participants set the duration and frequency of such intimate conversations. Often it took several lengthy conversations to develop rapport and to be able to discuss particularly sensitive family issues underlying family conflict and tension, as it would with conventional friendship development. As we discuss later relating to ethical implications, letting participants set the pace helped us overcome potential ethical and moral pitfalls such as being too intrusive.

Facebook also enables researchers to be perceived as "ordinary people" with families and hobbies rather than as objective researchers who disappear after the desired data saturation is achieved. Just as it helps learning about participants' lives through their profiles, Facebook also provides a foray into the researcher's (first author's) own personal life. As Chamal, one of the male informants explained, having a Facebook account where he could "*see the first author's personal life, interests and family*" helped perceiving him as a more "*real individual with genuine interests*". It enabled Chamal to feel more comfortable in inviting the first author into his home and discussing his personal family matters.

The friendships gradually evolved over time as the research progressed and contributed to removing the traditional hierarchy in the participant-researcher relationship. Some of the families became close friends with the first author's family during the research process. As a result of the increased levels of trust and confidence they contributed to co-constructing ethnographic knowledge by suggesting various consumption occasions and methods to capture "rich" and "deep" insight. For example, another male participant, Sohan, asked the first author to join their evening meals in order to help him better understand how they

"*managed their relationship with the parents*" and how they "*dealt with members of the extended family*". This provided us with a useful context to capture layered family interactions relating to their family structure and generational orientation, which are essential components of family identity (Epp and Price, 2008).

Developing multiple perspectives

Much of the richness in ethnographic research is rendered from acknowledging the coexistence of divergent perspectives identified in data, particularly, that gathered using multiple methods (Arnould and Wallendorf, 1994). Both redundancy and variety in the data are needed to capture vivid representations of lived experiences and to develop a critical perspective to such emic understanding by developing deep etic interpretations (Arnould and Wallendorf, 1994). In this section we argue that Facebook chat, timeline observations, and responses to posts complement other traditional ethnographic methods such as in-depth interviews, participant observations, and casual conversations, thus, providing an additional layer of perspectives from which to understand participants' everyday lived experiences.

Facebook chat improves the researcher's ability to access useful "perspectives of action" while timeline observations produce powerful "perspectives in action" (Baker, 2013) of everyday family practices, routines, and conventions. Observing Facebook activities such as how participants share posts, what they share and how they respond to comments in their timelines expand the researcher's field by providing insight into participants' lives such as weekend routines and the complex yet temporal emotions that underpin mundane activities that may go unnoticed during interviews or planned observations. Such Facebook engagement also enables a continuous immersion in participants' lives and increases the opportunities for identifying potentially revelatory moments (Trigger et al., 2012). Both Facebook chat and timeline observations are useful when exploring sensitive and mundane experiences around new family tension and conflict.

There are also occasions that participants cannot discuss changes in their lives because they are embedded within the normalcy of everyday lives and are too subtle for them to recognise. Also, in some situations they are rather undesirable changes which they do not want to share with outsiders. Therefore, participants either do not realise such changes are actually taking place in their lives, simply fail to recall those moments, or try to deliberately conceal those from outsiders. However, developing trust and confidence through Facebook friendships bring an insider perspective, thus, making the changes to mundane routines and practices

become more visible on timelines through postings of pictures and status updates. Using such material as prompts during subsequent ethnographic sessions can enable the exploration of the complex emotions that underpin mundane consumer behaviours, adding another layer of rich insight.

In addition, dialogical interactions on Facebook chat reveal routine details about participants' everyday lives such as their mundane family practices, which are difficult to obtain through traditional in-depth interviews and planned participant observations. Frequent catch ups on Facebook chat helps staying current on changes such as adjustments in family practices, family structure, inter-generational values, and developments of family relationships. For example, Haran (male) often revealed mundane details of their lives:

"She (wife) usually wakes up before I do and prepares lunch for us to take. I wake up slowly and take almost an hour to finish the tea. Then I start to get ready and we leave around 8.30...Today we woke up really late, didn't hear the alarm...I had to help her in the kitchen, at least I thought I should help to scrape the coconut or something. But she didn't want me in there…" – Haran (Male) during Facebook chat

It is important to note that our participants were going through a phase of liminality (Turner, 1969) and were negotiating ambiguity and uncertainty (Barrios et al., 2012) in their family identity pursuits. They were continuously discovering new aspects relating to their family structure, character, and intergenerational aspects but often failed to articulate such changes during in-depth interviews and planned participant observations. Facebook provided us with a context to create fresh perspectives about changes that were taking place in people's lives, which were hard to articulate. In particular, Facebook engagement became useful in developing multiple perspectives of mundane aspects of everyday lives. Following up sensitive emotions and family issues on Facebook chat was more comfortable for some of the individuals. For example, one participant shared pictures about her routine life after marriage (after becoming a housewife) on Facebook. In response to her friends' comments, she also discussed further details about how "boring" her life as a housewife was and how she attempted to overcome frustration associated with the new role identity. By closely following how she constructed and maintained her Facebook profile through uploading material, sharing personal emotions, and responding to her friends, we were able to capture details of the complexities associated with navigating liminality and negotiating aspects of a new identity in her family status.

There were also participants who frequently updated their Facebook status with emotional messages such as how they felt about their partners, their value systems, and future expectations. Facebook timeline updates (status updates, shared quotes, and picture posting) signalled on-going tension, stress, and ambiguity in new relationships such as how they did not like leaving behind special possessions and how they negotiated the enactment of new family practices. Facebook chat frequently produced powerful expressions of sensitive emotions such as their expectations of marriage life, reasons for leaving behind favourite possessions, tensions in new relationships, and how they were dealing with such situations. Naomi, for example, provided the following intimate insight into her emotional state:

"Marriage is about understanding. It is about been there for the other person and not making them feel alone...When we come home after work all he does is playing video games and I have to go to kitchen and make dinner. First it was OK but I am tired of it now...I need a change" – Naomi (Female) during Facebook chat

Facebook timelines also provided access to map changes in participants' lives throughout the transformation to a new family identity. Some individuals completely re-designed their Facebook timelines after marriage by re-customising their privacy settings, updates, and shared pictures. For example, Shani (female participant) removed some of the old pictures from her night-outs and parties from the times before her marriage and uploaded new pictures about herself and her husband. Mapping gradual and sometimes substantial changes to their personal timelines and following up the meanings behind such changes during subsequent interviews and observations helped us develop layered perspectives across multiple time points on how they re-negotiated new meanings and adapted to the transition.

Capturing disjunctures, glosses and overgeneralisations

Multiple perspectives constructed during Facebook engagement create a rich source of insight during the process of interpretation. Here we discuss how dialogical friendships on Facebook enabled us to identify disjunctures, overgeneralisations, and glosses (Arnould and Wallendorf, 1994) in the process of identity formation.

There are times when participants contradict their Facebook conversations during offline interviews and observations. There are also instances that they narrate everyday experiences quite differently to their Facebook friends (as replies to friends' comments) than how we as

researchers recollect such moments. For example, during in-depth interviews, Chamal mentioned that he was an open-minded person with a 'different way of thinking':

"I don't think my wife should be just a housewife and take care of all the household things. She is an educated girl. My way of thinking is very different. I am not traditional. I want her to be able to go out and move with the society, because I am also like that" – Chamal (Male) during an in-depth interview session

However, his Facebook timeline posts and comments projected a different set of beliefs that are typical of a traditional and conservative Sri Lankan male. Similarly, another male participant claimed that he would "*never*" discuss his personal life with others including his family and friends as it is against the Buddhist teachings. However, he frequently posted and shared personal details relating to his family life on Facebook. His responses to friends' comments also often revealed on-going issues with the members of his extended family. Integrating Facebook added a new perspective to our longitudinal research where we could converse with and observe our participants and identify potential disjunctures, overgeneralisations, and glosses (Arnould and Wallendorf, 1994) that were evident in such narratives. Therefore, integrating Facebook engagement contributed to deepening the etic perspectives during interpretation building. We used excerpts from Facebook conversations and postings as prompt to stimulate discussion and aid participants' reflexion during ethnographic fieldwork. In response, participants often attempted to justify their actions revealing a myriad of differing perspectives:

"I think it is best if she can stay home… There is no doubt about that. That way it is good in the future when we have children, household things are in order, and easy on me as well… That is what both my grand-mother and mother did. But today it is different… My wife is well educated. She had put so much time to it. I can't just ask her to stay home, can I? Plus, these times are not easy… We both have to earn if we have to build a house and live well"- Chamal (Male) during Facebook chat and ethnographic conversations

Using material from Facebook posts in elicitation enabled us to learn more about family tensions and conflicts such as pertaining to household duties and each other's roles in the new family. For example, following up on a Facebook status updates revealed the disappointment and stress Dinu was going through in her family:

"I knew he was going back to school. I was fine with it. But when he studies he really studies. It is like he is not home… I have to do everything on my own…I am bored and don't want to go crazy…It feels like I have put my life on hold" – Dinu (Female) during observation session

Raising these issues during interviews and observations enabled us to obtain more reflexive responses about how participants negotiated such challenges. Discussing issues in the presence of both individuals (when appropriate) allowed us to initiate rich discussions about each other's emotions and helped us to observe how they clarified, responded, and negotiated divergent meanings.

Using Facebook material such as shared pictures, quotes, comments, conversation histories, and status updates in elicitation also generated differing perspectives. Firstly, some of the Facebook material used in elicitation are chosen by the participants and are more immediate representations of their lives. Thus, such material enhanced informants' ability to reflect and provided insightful responses about their behaviours. For example, some of the pictures we used included favourite material objects, their holiday trips, special family occasions, and ordinary household consumption activities such as preparing meals and occupying domestic spaces. Secondly, reflecting on these pictures during in-depth interviews and participant observation sessions provided us with an opportunity to create a rich seam of data by generating animated discussions between our participants (Heisley and Levy, 1991; Kozinets, 2002).

Managing ethical implications

In this section we discuss key challenges of building friendships with research participants through Facebook engagement. Firstly, we outline the ethical implications we confronted during the data collection process. Secondly, we discuss two ethical frameworks we adopted and how these frameworks helped us negotiate the ethical implications. Specifically, we elaborate on how we managed the ethical implications of perusing "friendship as method" by paying attention to the ethics of friendship suggested by Tillmann-Healy (2003). Finally, we discuss how adopting the guidelines of online ethical conduct suggested by Kozinets (2010) are useful in navigating challenges of integrating Facebook in ethnographic research .

Adopting "friendship as method" (Tillmann-Healy, 2003) creates potential boundary crossing situations and could be problematic to the ethics of professional and personal conduct

(Taylor, 2011). Firstly, setting out to develop friendships in order to gain access and immersion could be viewed as a manipulative intrusion into participants' lives (Taylor, 2011). In addition, downloading personal material such as Facebook pictures, observing timeline activities, and joining on-going conversations could be considered intrusive and exploitative. Secondly, leaving the ethnographic fieldwork after data saturation is achieved could be particularly tricky. For example, maintaining contact after data collection was expected by some of the participants and was important to them. Such post-data collection interaction is essential to ensure that participants do not feel exploited and also to manage the intensity of these post-data collection relationship. Finally, managing confidence and trust in terms of privacy could be particularly challenging when the research framework is continuously evolving in the online environment (Langer and Beckman, 2005). In addition, since Facebook is considered a semi-public space, adopting Facebook chat and timeline observations could bring new ethical challenges relating to participant confidentiality and privacy (Baker, 2013).

Accordingly, we adopted two frameworks to overcome these ethical challenges. Firstly, as Tillmann-Healy (2003, p. 734) proposed, we adopted "the practices, the pace, the context, and the ethics of friendship" which are normative to traditional friendships. Specifically, the most important requirement of this approach is to research with an ethic of friendship which includes "a stance of hope, caring, justice, and even love" (Tillmann-Healy, 2003, p. 735). Secondly, we adopted the guidelines for online ethical conduct proposed by Kozinets (2010; 2015) and disclosed our presence, affiliations, and intentions; asked for permission; ensured confidentiality of informants; cited and acknowledged contributions of informants, and took caution relating to informants' semi-public material.

By adopting these frameworks, we disclosed ourselves and the nature of our study to all the participants at the beginning and gained their informed consent. We respected individuality and worked to protect confidentiality throughout the study, even between husbands and wives. There were occasions when individuals discussed family conflict and tension during Facebook chats and following up such issues may have produced deeper insight. However, we consulted the individuals before bringing up such issues in the presence of their partners.

Even though participants' online actions can be a reflection of their social selves (Kozinets, 2002), we considered their Facebook pages as a private space and respected their privacy and authority, just as we would do in their homes. We explained what kind of information we would be interested in and how we would be recording their behaviour. During the

subsequent data collection, we recorded important status updates, conversation histories and multiple conversation threads. We also collected visual material such as pictures of informants using their favourite material objects which were uploaded by the informants. Even though it was normative as Facebook friends to browse through informants' Facebook profiles, comment on their posting and engage in chat, we sought separate permission when downloading their material. In addition, if these texts or pictures became an important contribution in the presentation of our findings (as quotes or supplementary material) we also made participants aware of our intentions. At all stages they had the right to refuse the use of any or all of the material.

However, we are not promoting the manipulation of Facebook friendships to extract intimate details of people's lives. Instead we argue that genuine friendships between participant and researcher can evolve within Facebook interactions over time. The first author developed a genuine interest in participants' everyday practices, hobbies, and lifestyles and it created a shared context within which to build trust and confidence in the participant-researcher relationship. As a result, some individuals and families became close friends with the first author and his family and continued to interact with them after the research project. During this stage, Facebook engagement provided a useful medium to manage the exit strategies with such close friends and helped preserve their trust and self-respect. For example, chatting and browsing through timelines enabled us to stay in touch with these participant/friends and learn about and share the joys of interesting moments in their lives such as having children and moving to a new house.

Contributions and conclusions:

We acknowledge that there are situational and contextual factors that need deliberating prior to adopting Facebook engagement as a research tool in ethnographic fieldwork. There are research contexts that are inaccessible in online spheres (Kozinets, 2010; 2015), whilst there are also topical areas more appropriate to offline methods (Langer and Beckman, 2005). Therefore, our aim is not to universalise Facebook as a rapport building tool in ethnographic research. Rather, the purpose of this paper is to provide empirical evidence to address the epistemological and methodological implications of Facebook engagement in conventional ethnographic research, especially when exploring complex and sensitive topics. However, considering the ontological, epistemological, and methodological similarities between conventional and online ethnographic research, we also suggest that our framework could be of relevance to other interpretive researchers who are seeking to build close rapport with

participants, especially in online communities that provide 'hyving social experiences' (Kozinets, 2015).

In addition, our research contributes to "friendship as method" approaches (Ellis, 2007; Owton and Allen-Collinson, 2014; Tillmann-Healy, 2003) by illustrating how friendships with participants could be developed and maintained. Despite growing literature in friendship as method, there is limited understanding of how friendships could be initiated and sustained during ethnographic fieldwork. There is also a need to address ethical issues related to adopting friendships, especially in online contexts. Our framework and subsequent discussion address these issues and support Facebook as a useful tool within the contemporary ethnographic researchers' toolkit that provides the opportunity to initiate and foster strong rapport with participants. As such we are clarifying how three research methods intersect, conventional ethnography, netnography/online methods, and friendship as a method. As researchers seeking to understand the complexity of consumers operating in many spheres, we must reconsider and revise appropriately the tools available to address complex research questions.

In conclusion, we argue that engaging on multiple Facebook platforms brings new opportunities for ethnographic researchers to build genuine rapport with participants. By adering to practice, pace, context, and the ethics of friendships, researchers can facilitae trust and encourage dialogical researcher-participant relationships. We propose that the increased rapport helps overcome three challenges inherent to conventional ethnography: 1) negotiating access and achieving immersion, 2) developing multiple perspectives, and, 3) providing details of the experiences that enable the construction of rich and thick interpretations. Finally, our findings contribute to a rich body of consumer and cross disciplinary ethnographic literature (Baker 2013; Piacenti et al. 2014) by demonstrating how incorporating Facebook allows researchers to expand their field of reference, improves participants' trust and confidence in the researcher, brings both insider and outsider perspectives, dilutes the power hierarchy in conventional participant-researcher relationships, and increases the likelihood of discovering those revelatory moments of consumption experience (Trigger et al., 2012).

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