

Micro-Paper 68: *Digital Ethnography*



#TeamLaV¹

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Defining the Term

Ethnography has its roots in the anthropological studies that took place in small and rural communities during the early 20th century. Since then, it has become a widely used approach in qualitative research with the intent of studying and getting first-hand insights about certain groups of people, teams and communities; their worldviews, culture and actions as well as the nature of the places that they inhabit.

One important consideration when conducting ethnography is remembering that our main sources of information are the people and the communities that they build and belong to. It is important to recognize that human societies are constantly evolving. The approaches that researchers use to study those social interactions and surroundings should adapt to those changes and evolve as well.

Digital ethnography, as the study of the communities and interactions of the twenty-first century, recognizes this need to explore social interaction evolution. Digital ethnography, therefore, is interested in studying for the growing influence and presence of the internet and other technologies in people's daily lives. In other words, digital ethnography serves as the most appropriate approach to inquire about and understand the subtleties of the technologically mediated social practices and communities of today's world.

Connecting it to LSLP

LSLP does qualitative research in both urban and virtual spaces. As researchers, it is important to recognize and define what is the most fitting approach to study a community, their interactions and their surroundings. Digital ethnography has become particularly useful for #TeamLaV and our gaming literacies studies because most of the communities built around video games and their interactions take place in the online world, whether inside the video game itself or other common places such as forums and chats.

However, we see potential for the use of digital ethnography beyond gaming. Our research teams are now exploring the use of digital literacies and social media in fandom communities, school literacies, and other digital spaces beyond video games. Keeping in mind this growing landscape, digital ethnography will help us to define the most appropriate methods for data collection and analysis and it will lead us to a better understanding of the dynamics of the online communities of the twenty-first century.

Expanding Second Language Research

Today's language communities are relying on digital tools and spaces to engage in interaction. There are some interactions in digital spaces that make the creation and alteration of use of the language much easier than it may be in physical spaces. Researchers in second language studies need to find better and more effective ways to understand the language subtleties that happen in these spaces.

In this sense, digital ethnography becomes very useful for researchers to conduct first-hand observation about different virtual communities, their social features, and language cues. Using digital ethnography can better guide researchers to understand how second language acquisition takes place in these communities. Second language studies will also need to envision implementing more digital ethnographic studies as a means to keep the track of how language evolves and works inside and outside all these different realities.

References

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