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GLOBAL NETNOGRAPHY CONFERENCE




**İZMİR UNIVERSITY
OF ECONOMICS**



PROCEEDINGS NETNOCON 2026



İzmir, Türkiye | June 17 - 19, 2026
Conference Theme: Cultural Crossroads

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NETNOCON 2026 CONFERENCE THEME

“CULTURAL CROSSROADS”

In 2026, Netnocon returns—to celebrate thirty years since the introduction of netnography and to mark how far we've come. From its invention in Toronto, Canada, and its introduction in Tucson, USA, the method has found eager adopters around the world—from Türkiye to Norway, Brazil to Australia—and it continues to evolve in fresh, creative, and culturally rich directions. This year, we gather in Izmir, a vibrant coastal city with deep roots and wide horizons. It is a place shaped by centuries of trade relations, spiritual movements, immigration, food cultures, and connection. Izmir is the perfect setting for this year's theme: Cultural Crossroads.

We come together at an unprecedented time when cultures are more connected, and more complex, than ever before in human history. Family cultures, national identities, religious and political traditions, fandoms, subcultures, countercultures—all of them are now intersecting with one another online, building with and weaving into technocultures that shift and adapt faster than we can track. Netnography gives us tools to immerse ourselves within and try to make sense of it all. And Netnocon gives us a special dedicated space to share what we've discovered in these remarkable times.

If you have been to Netnocon before, you already know that what makes this gathering special isn't just the research, it's the people. We attract a diverse, passionate, considerate, and growing global community, with many early-career scholars, researchers from many academic fields, creative thinkers, forward-looking individuals, and practitioners bringing energy, insight, and originality to every conversation. A cultural crossroads in itself, Netnocon is a special place of collaboration and curiosity, of new friendships and fresh ideas.

If you have not joined us yet, we invite you to come for the scholarship and to join our growing community. This year, we gather to celebrate both 30 years of netnography and to explore the cultural crossroads of our shared work and lives.

Join us for Netnocon 2026 in Izmir and experience the crossroads of culture, creativity, and connection.



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Professor Robert V. Kozinets develops methods and theories that are widely used around the world. His work aims to provide a human-centered understanding of technocultures as well as the social structures and passions that surround them. Netnography, his major innovation, is transforming research practices throughout industry and across the social sciences.



Dr. Ulrike Gretzel is a Senior Fellow at the Center for Public Relations, University of Southern California and Director of Research at Netnografica. She has over 15 years of experience conducting academic and practice-focused netnographies, with topics ranging from the experiences of black vanlifers to the collective activism among fans of a Chinese TV drama.



Rossella Gambetti is professor of branding and consumer culture at Labcom, Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore in Milan. Her research focuses on emerging technocultural phenomena shaping contemporary branding and consumer culture. Rossella is a “netno-enthusiast” who conducted several netnographic explorations across diverse social media worlds.

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Lena Cavusoglu is an Assistant Professor of Marketing at Pacific University in Forest Grove, Oregon. Her research focuses on diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility in marketing, focusing on creative industries such as film, social and digital media, entertainment, and fashion. For NETNOCON 2026, she leads efforts in local logistics coordination, branding, and sponsorship outreach.



Romas Malevicius, Assistant Professor of Marketing (Lecturer) at King's College London, UK, is a digital artist passionate about marketing, sustainability, and education for sustainability (EfS). He is a business consultant with 10 years of experience in business and management education and community engagement.



Sema Misci Kip is a Professor in Public Relations and Advertising at İzmir University of Economics, Türkiye, where she teaches advertising, brand, and marketing communication. Her research focuses on marketing communication, advertising, social media, websites, and sustainability. For NETNOCON 2026, she serves on both the organizing and media & sponsorship committees.

NETNOCON 2026 CONFERENCE CO-CHAIRS



Ebru Uzunoğlu is a Professor of Marketing Communications and Public Relations at the University of Ljubljana and affiliated with Izmir University of Economics. Her research focuses on integrated marketing communications, particularly brand perception, stakeholder engagement, and corporate messaging in digital contexts. For NETNOCON 2026, she supports student involvement as an applied learning experience and assists in budgeting.



Burak Doğu is Dean of the Faculty of Communication at İzmir University of Economics. His research focuses on environmental communication, networking, and social movements. For NETNOCON 2026 he coordinates the local organizational activities. This includes facilitating communication and collaboration among the university's various administrative and academic departments, and handling relationships with external partners and stakeholders.



Zeynep Aksoy is an Associate Professor of Public Relations and Advertising at Izmir University of Economics. Her research focuses on intercultural communication, cultural identity, corporate, and healthcare communication. For NETNOCON 2026, she contributes to media visibility, sponsorship, and promotional efforts.

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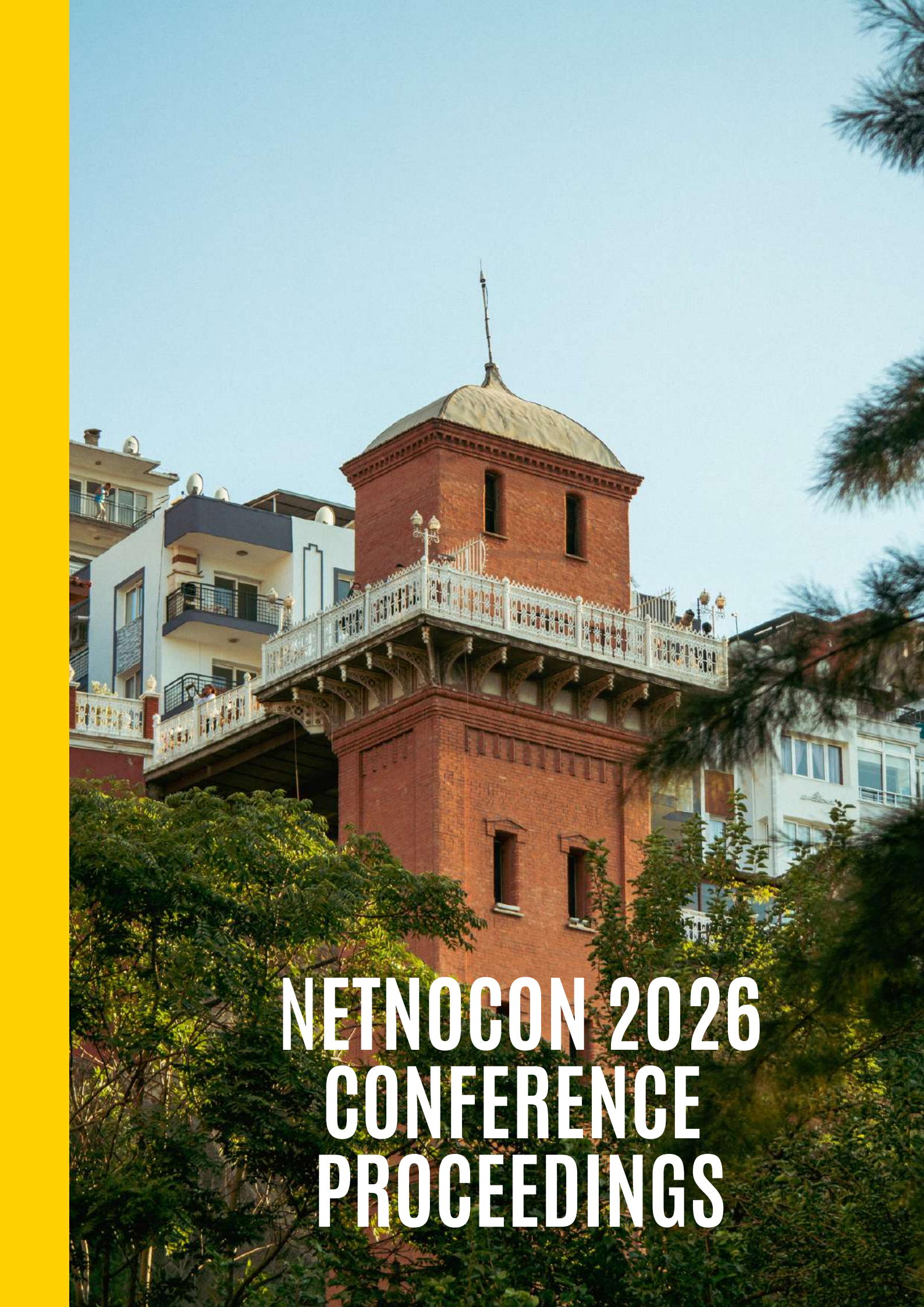


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NETNOCON 2026 CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS

Session 1

Advancing netnographic research practice

Session chair: Ross Gambetti

Predicting vs. Understanding the Future with Netnography

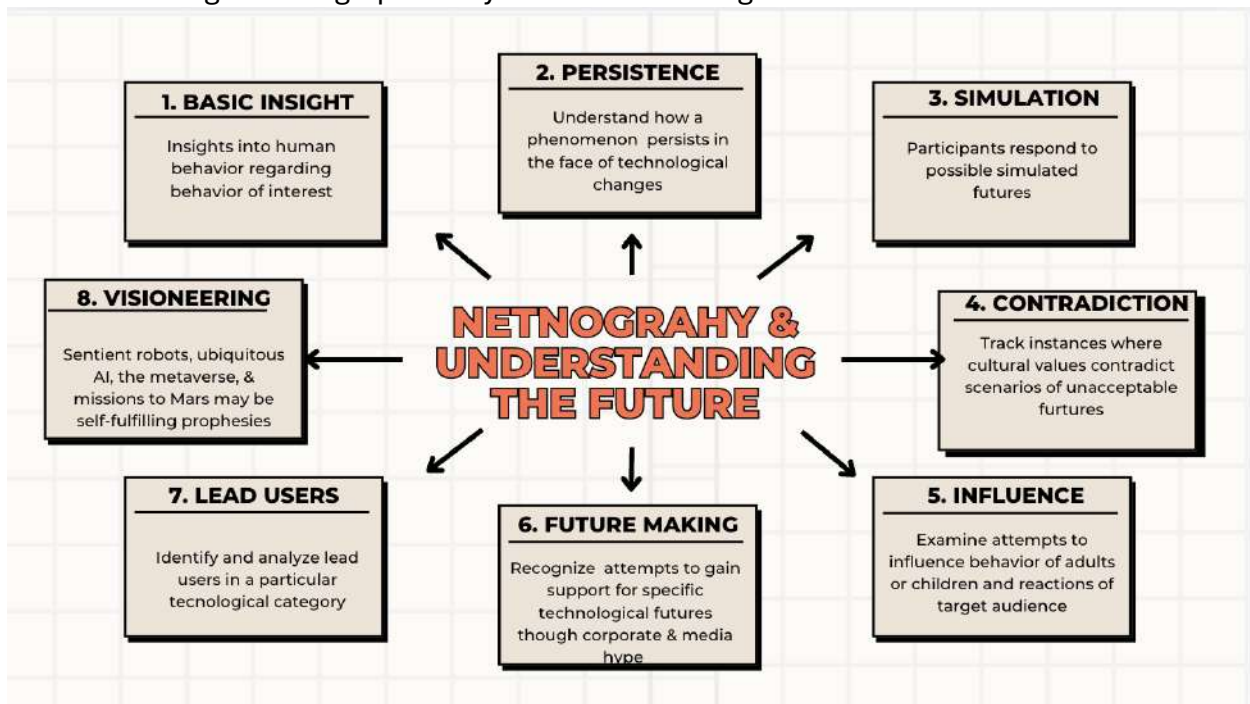
Russell Belk, Schulich School of Business, Toronto, Canada

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Abstract

Contemporary statistical predictions of future consumption a decade+ in the future are no better than reading tea leaves or animal entrails (Bowler 2017). Revelatory popular media forecasts do little better (Potts 2024). Speculative (science) fiction also largely fails (Beckert 2016). And despite attempts by the US Geological Survey to use social media posts to predict earthquakes and by Google Flu Trends to predict waves of influenza from popular search terms, netnography predictions also fail. We argue that netnography is neither equipped nor intended to predict or forecast.

Rather, it can help us *understand* consumer anticipations of the future in several useful ways. We envision eight netnographic ways of understanding consumer futures:



We especially emphasize the sixth and eighth process in this presentation. The sixth netnographic process recognizes instances of the Gartner Hype Cycle (see Belk, Weiyo, and Kozinets 2021). It helps explain the annual promotion-fueled enthusiasm that marketers and

consumers co-create in their excitement about the next new thing (e.g., the next model iPhone). The exuberant reception of last year's new thing has hardly subsided when anticipatory speculation about the next new thing starts to build. Belk, et al. (2021) call the consumer blindfold that allows this self-seduction "disenchanted enchantment." It involves a willingly suspended disbelief. Cyclical susceptibility to marketing hype is nurtured by consumers and influencers who speculate online about each coming wonder based on their entrenched brand loyalty and desire.

The eighth process, visoneering, is not aimed at consumers as much as venture capitalist potential backers. A current example is generative AI. In a review of Ray Kurzweil's (1999) book, *The Age of the Spiritual Machine*, McGinn (1999) wrote, "...is the whole idea [of machines taking over the world just a clever marketing ploy for the investment-hungry artificial intelligence industry?" Unlike the buzz-creation of the sixth process, visioners like Kurzweil are key motivators in actually bringing AI about along with attracting the venture capital to make it happen. Like Disney's Epcot and Musk's mission to Mars, the visioner seeks to create a community of believers and ideally a self-fulfilling prophesy. Netnography helps us see this wishful-deception unfold in real time.

Keywords: *prediction, understanding, hype, visoneering, futuress*

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Journaling with AI: Implications for Netnographic Immersion

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Abstract

This study considers what happens when gen-AI enters auto-netnography during the immersion movement (Witteborn, 2026). We situate this inquiry within critical conversations

around algorithmic intimacy (Elliott, 2022) and artificial sociality (Depounti & Natale, 2025), asking what changes when an interface becomes field site, data source, conversational other, and interpretive temptation.

Methodologically, this paper draws on reflexive team netnography in which researchers experimented with conversational LLMs during immersion. This engagement produced fieldnotes, transcripts, and annotations documenting human-machine interaction (van Voorst & Ahlin, 2024). Our findings suggest that AI spaces can support immersion by preserving timestamps, organizing conversational traces, and prompting researchers to notice gaps. Yet immersion is not simply note-taking, but is a self-directed movement through a cultural field: following clues, becoming confused, feeling attraction or resistance, noticing silence, and learning what matters. When AI writes, rewrites, polishes, or organizes the immersion journal, it occupies the place where the researcher's encounter should appear. The journal must remain a human-authored record of situated experience. AI-generated language, if included at all, should be clearly marked as external material rather than absorbed into the researcher's own voice (Witteborn, 2026). Even AI questioning may favor early or premature interpretations, steer attention toward familiar or popular themes, or close down the wandering openness that the immersion movement depends upon.

Delegating the researcher's sensorium, perspective, or phenomenological presence has numerous risks, including the erasure of "absent-present data": silences, omissions, hesitations, and ambient frictions learned through acts of patient observation (van Voorst & Ahlin, 2024). We conclude by urging researchers to carefully consider the minimal benefits (perhaps easily replaced by as checklist and disciplined practices) with the many risks of incorporating AI into the immersion movement of netnography (Lupton, 2026). Rather than accepting generative tools as neutral assistants or partners, netnographers must delimit their use while valuing and repeatedly considering the nature of human reflection and experience in an increasingly automated world (Bajohr, 2024; Witteborn, 2026).

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Thick Description in Netnography During the Times of Increasing Human–AI Interaction

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Abstract

This study problematizes how increasing human–AI interactions transform the capacity to produce thick description in digital culture research. Thick description, as defined in Geertz's (1973) anthropology, is not merely the description of behaviors; it is the researcher's closeness to the community and the establishment of an interpretive alliance that will “thicken” cultural meaning. As in Geertz's account of Balinese cockfighting, ethnographic knowledge is formed through insider status and acceptance. Svensson (2014) extends thick description as a practice of interpreting silences, gaps, and hidden power relations beyond the visible; according to him, overinterpretation is not an error in critical ethnography but a necessary practice for unraveling the cultural fabric.

In the context of netnography, thick description is a methodological depth used in Kozinets' (2010, 2020) studies to understand the multi-layered structure of digital cultures. Netnographic thick description is not merely content analysis; it is a multi-component structure that includes platform architecture, user practices, discursive norms, and the researcher's reflexive positioning (Kozinets et al. 2018; Kozinets & Gretzel, 2024).

However, in today's digital culture, Artificial Intelligence has become decisive both in the production of cultural content and in the analysis process of research. Generative AI content, bot accounts, and algorithmic interactions make it difficult for researchers to approach the community from within by hybridizing the source of data (Ferrara, 2024; Fernández Gambín et al., 2024).

The main objective of this study, which examines how AI's transformation into both a producer of digital content and an analysis tool has changed thick description, is to develop theoretical propositions aimed at redefining this concept by relating classical thick description debates to contemporary netnography literature and, in particular, transformations in the context of AI.

Keywords: Netnography, Thick Description, Artificial Intelligence

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Data Crossroads in Netnography

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Abstract

Cultural crossroads are spaces where different perspectives meet and interact, enriching understanding through exchange. This paper extends that metaphor to netnographic practice, proposing that the three data collection movements create a crossroads where different types of data synergise to overcome each method's limitations; thereby creating a dataset that is greater than the sum of its parts. Drawing from a netnographic study of the wheelchair-using community's air travel experiences, this paper demonstrates how immersive, investigative, and interactive movements each capture distinct aspects that the others miss.

Triangulation in qualitative research has evolved from early emphasis on validation (Denzin, 1989) towards understanding how different methods extend the range of insights and knowledge (Flick, 2018). Whilst validation through convergence remains one application, Flick argues that different methods extend knowledge and produce better insights. Contemporary netnography has developed three movements of data collection, immersion, investigation and interaction, that produce reflective, discursive, and dialogic data respectively (Kozinets & Gretzel, 2024). Whilst netnography recognises that each movement illuminates distinct facets of understanding, this paper extends that recognition to emphasise how the data crossroads also addresses their respective blind spots.

The inquiry employed all three movements; algorithm curated immersion in Twitter's wheelchair-using community over six years, investigative API text mining of tweets, and interactive semi-structured interviews with twenty-two members of the wheelchair-using

community. The algorithm curated immersion captured community solidarity and advocacy evolution, particularly when the community declared themselves "unapologetically disabled" emerging from COVID-19. However, Twitter's algorithm filtered the feed to prioritise within community content. Investigative API text mining revealed what the algorithm excluded, external discourse about wheelchair users, most significantly airline employees' derogatory language. Interactive interviews uncovered what neither Twitter extant data could; private trauma narratives. Participants described being financially exploited whilst separated from wheelchairs and physical pain due to inaccessible toilets.

At this crossroads, the three movements exchange uniqueness, providing not only further knowledge and information, but different perspectives. Immersion provided community context and longitudinal perspective but missed external attitudes and personal distress. Investigation revealed external attitudinal barriers but lacked community context. Interaction exposed private psychological impacts but could not capture broader patterns. Together, they enabled holistic understanding that no single movement could achieve by itself.

This paper offers two contributions. Firstly, it positions netnography data collection practice as creating a data crossroads, providing the opportunity to see different perspectives and create a dataset with greater depth and quality. Secondly, it demonstrates that whilst platforms, algorithms, and social contexts shape what each movement captures and excludes, this data crossroads offers an opportunity for dataset synergy rather than methodological limitations, enabling understanding that goes beyond knowledge extension towards holistic understanding.

Keywords: netnography, data crossroads, dataset synergy

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Session 2

Activism, backlash & civic engagement

Session chair: Nicole Bridges

“Transform Your Consumption Power into Resistance”: A Netnographic Study of Political Boycott Call in Türkiye

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Abstract

After İstanbul's mayor and opposition presidential candidate, Ekrem İmamoğlu, was arrested in March 2025, the Republican People's Party (CHP) called for a boycott. The party urged people to "transform your consumption power into resistance," essentially telling them to use their spending habits to protest the arrest. This study examines how online communities mobilized around this political call, translating ideological convictions into consumption practices. Employing netnography, the research analyzes social media discourse, hashtags, and user comments to understand how political ideologies are enacted in digital spaces. Drawing on political consumerism literature, social capital literature, and netnography, the study explores how trust, norms, and online networks facilitate collective action; the narratives and rhetoric used to frame consumption as resistance; and the ways in which individual and collective identities are constructed through engagement with the boycott. The findings provide insights into the intersection of consumer culture and political activism, demonstrating how consumption becomes a medium for ideological expression and digital resistance in contemporary Türkiye.

Keywords: political consumerism, consumer boycott, resistance, social capital, nethnography

1. Introduction

In March 2025, following the arrest of İstanbul's Mayor and opposition presidential candidate Ekrem İmamoğlu, the Republican People's Party (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi - CHP) called for a boycott campaign under the slogan "transform your consumption power into resistance (tüketim gücünü direnişe dönüştür)." This initiative exemplifies the growing intersection between political ideologies and consumer behavior, highlighting how citizens increasingly translate their political convictions into everyday consumption choices. Such campaigns reflect the principles of political consumerism, where purchasing decisions become a medium for expressing dissent, supporting preferred values, and influencing social or political outcomes (Micheletti, 2003; Boström, 2005). The boycott call mobilized online communities and social networks, enabling individuals to participate in a form of digital activism that combines personal agency with collective action. By framing consumption as a tool of resistance, the campaign not only engaged supporters in practical acts of political expression but also fostered a shared sense of identity and solidarity among participants. The rise of political consumerism reflects broader shifts in contemporary politics. Researchers argue that declining trust in institutions, the professionalization of politics, and the increasing commodification of everyday life have encouraged citizens to articulate political agency through lifestyle and market practices (Copeland & Boulianne, 2022). In digitally mediated environments, these practices are further amplified by the connective affordances of social media, where hashtags, images, and viral discourses allow individuals to publicly perform political identities (Kozinets, 2002; Hou & Poliquin, 2024).

In Türkiye, where opposition actors often face restricted access to media and institutional politics, the marketplace provides an alternative sphere for resistance. Boycotts allow citizens to express discontent, enact solidarity, and construct collective identities even when formal democratic channels appear obstructed. At the same time, the country's deep political polarization raises critical questions: Are such campaigns effective in mobilizing broad constituencies, or do they primarily reinforce partisan boundaries? Do they operate primarily as instruments of economic leverage, or as symbolic performances of identity and unity? This study addresses these questions through a netnographic analysis (Kozinets, 2002; 2006; 2019)

of the 2025 boycott campaign. By examining social media discourse, hashtags, and user comments, the research explores how ideological convictions are translated into consumption practices, how trust and solidarity are mobilized online, and how identities are performed through acts of political consumerism. The analysis is situated within three interrelated literatures: political consumerism, social capital, and digital activism. The study makes three contributions. First, it shows how peer-driven trust and solidarity can substitute for weakened institutional trust, sustaining collective action under semi-authoritarian conditions. Second, it highlights how boycott campaigns in polarized societies become arenas of identity performance and symbolic resistance rather than tools of consensus. Third, it extends political consumerism literature by demonstrating how consumption practices function as both expressive citizenship and survival strategies in contexts of democratic backsliding.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1. Political Consumerism

Political consumerism is the intentional decision to buy or avoid certain products, goods, or services based on political beliefs or values (Copeland & Boulianne, 2022). Further, Stolle and Micheletti (2013) define political consumerism as the usage of market choices as a form of citizenship and political action, encompassing both refusal (boycott) and reward (buycott) strategies as well as discursive practices surrounding those choices (e.g., campaigning, labelling, public shaming). This formulation highlights political consumerism's hybrid nature: it is simultaneously economic action and political speech, enacted within market transactions and mediated by civil society actors. Contemporary typologies commonly distinguish between (a) boycotts (Stolle & Micheletti, 2013) -organized refusal to purchase goods/services, (b) buycotts (Micheletti, 2003) -targeted purchases to reward practices or actors-, (c) discursive consumerism (Kelm et al., 2018) -online naming/shaming, advocacy, reputation management-, and (d) every day or lifestyle political consumerism (Copeland & Boulianne, 2022) -the politicization of routine consumption choices-.

A central debate in political consumerism focuses on why individuals engage in it, with two main explanations. First, ideological and conviction-based accounts argue that consumers make political consumption choices based on their moral beliefs, with studies showing that partisanship and issue attitudes strongly predict boycott and buycott behaviors, indicating that such actions reflect genuine political commitments rather than mere signaling. Second, signaling and identity theories emphasize the social benefits of visible consumption choices, like status or in-group signaling. While some experiments show that signaling effects occur when consumption is observable, recent research suggests that these behaviors are more likely when they align with personal identities or the expectation of social rewards. These mixed findings have led scholars to advocate for using mixed-methods (surveys, experiments, and qualitative analyses) to capture both private convictions and public performances (Kam & Deichert, 2020).

2.2. Social Capital, Trust and Norms

The literature on social capital provides a useful framework for understanding how individual motivations are transformed into collective outcomes. Social capital—conceived as networks of social relations, trust, and shared norms—plays a critical role in shaping political consumerism and protest participation alike (Putnam, 2000; Bourdieu, 2018; Coleman, 1988). It influences collective action by transmitting information about political or economic targets, enforcing group norms through social sanctioning and approval, and lowering coordination

costs (Paxton, 2002; Rothstein & Stolle, 2008). Empirical studies indicate that both individual-level connections (e.g., friendship and organizational memberships) and contextual social capital (e.g., regional associational density) are associated with heightened engagement in political consumerism and activism (Zmerli & Newton, 2013). In this sense, online networks that replicate or amplify social capital have been shown to mobilize consumption-based and protest-oriented repertoires effectively (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012).

This theoretical perspective sheds light on the protests and boycott campaigns following the detention of Ekrem İmamoğlu—a figure whose previous electoral victories against Recep Tayyip Erdoğan’s party (AKP) symbolized democratic resilience. The rapid mobilization that ensued was significantly powered by pre-existing social capital among İmamoğlu’s supporters and broader opposition networks. Shared identity, emotional solidarity, and organizational infrastructures within the CHP and affiliated civic groups provided a ready-made framework for collective action. The ability of these protests to draw hundreds of thousands (Ateşçi, 2025) across diverse ideological lines illustrates how social networks functioned as conduits of information and trust, enabling rapid coordination beyond formal party mechanisms. Notably, the spontaneous mobilization by students and youth underscored the potency of informal and digital networks in expanding the scope and speed of collective responses (Tüfekçi, 2017). Despite government bans on public gatherings and harsh police crackdowns, the public’s strong participation in mass protests and boycotts shows they trusted the opposition’s message and felt a stronger connection to their civic values than to the government’s official narrative. This was further reflected in the overwhelming support for İmamoğlu during the CHP’s primary election, where over 15 million votes were cast, emphasizing the public’s trust in the opposition and their rejection of the government’s efforts to undermine its leaders (Bianet, 2025a). Thus, the 2025 protests exemplify how accumulated social capital can transform latent political discontent into tangible collective action.

The boycott campaign initiated by the CHP introduced new norms of resistance and civil disobedience into the political landscape. Although the CHP had traditionally focused on working within official political channels, the events of March 19 and the strong public reaction that followed pushed the party to take to the streets and support boycotts (Tuğal, 2025). The boycott campaign focused on businesses and media groups viewed as being closely aligned with the ruling government—like the coffee chain Espressolab and certain media companies like NTV etc. This marked a shift toward using economic pressure as a new form of political protest (Bianet, 2025b; Zaccour, 2025). The campaign proved its strength by winning public support and even leading international artists to cancel their shows, all despite the government’s efforts to downplay it. This showed just how powerful this new kind of collective action could be.

2.3. Digital Activism

Digital platforms have profoundly transformed how political consumerism is organised, enacted, and studied. The emergence of networked communication has blurred the boundaries between citizenship, activism, and consumption (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012; Lim, 2020). Online environments enable what Bennett and Segerberg term “connective action”—mobilisation based on personalized sharing rather than hierarchical coordination. In this model, individuals participate by circulating symbolic acts—hashtags, memes, screenshots of cancelled subscriptions—that simultaneously express personal conviction and contribute to collective narratives. Hashtags, in particular, serve as organising infrastructures: they aggregate dispersed actors, provide frames and labels for campaigns, and delineate the

symbolic boundaries of collective identity (Yang, 2016). They allow digital publics to coalesce temporarily around political causes, facilitating what Poell and van Dijck (2018) call “platformed activism,” where mobilization is structured through the technological and algorithmic affordances of social media. Influencers and public figures play a key role as amplifiers and frame brokers—actors capable of rapidly translating political messages into culturally resonant, shareable formats. Moreover, platform affordances such as retweeting, sharing, and algorithmic trending functions shape the visibility, tempo, and perceived efficacy of consumer campaigns. These affordances can create bursts of attention that simulate momentum, producing a sense of collective efficacy even in the absence of formal organization (Theocharis et al., 2015). However, researchers caution that the same dynamics can also lead to rapid fragmentation, co-optation, or performative engagement as campaigns compete for algorithmic visibility (Mundt et al., 2018). Empirical studies using digital trace data and temporal network analysis show that online boycott calls often generate rapid but uneven diffusion patterns, highly sensitive to local partisan composition and pre-existing offline networks (Copeland & Boulianne, 2022). This hybrid configuration—where online symbolic participation overlaps with offline political infrastructures—illustrates how digital activism can operate simultaneously as expressive, affective, and strategic action (Lim, 2020).

In the context of Türkiye, these dynamics are particularly salient. Limited media freedom and institutional polarization make social media both a site of surveillance and a critical space of dissent. Boycott campaigns like “Transform your consumption power into resistance” exemplify how digital platforms allow citizens to enact political agency through market practices while negotiating visibility, risk, and belonging in algorithmically mediated publics.

3. Methodology and Data

This study employs netnography, an established qualitative method for studying online cultures and communities (Kozinets, 2002; 2019). Netnography adapts ethnographic techniques to digital environments, allowing researchers to analyze interactions, discourses, and identity work as they unfold in online spaces. This approach is particularly suitable for examining political boycott campaigns, which rely heavily on social media platforms to mobilize support, circulate narratives, and construct collective identities.

3.1. Data Collection

Data were collected from X (formerly Twitter) and Instagram between 25 March 2025—the date marking the beginning of the official boycott call—and 20 April 2025, encompassing the first month following Ekrem İmamoğlu’s arrest and the subsequent launch of the boycott campaign. Using hashtags such as #Boykot, #BoykotYap, #İmamoğlu, #espressolabboykot etc., a purposive sampling strategy was employed to capture the range of discursive activity surrounding the movement. The final dataset comprised approximately 12,500 posts (including tweets, comments, reposts, and memes), all of which were archived and anonymized prior to analysis. To ensure a balanced representation of online discourse, high-engagement posts—those with significant numbers of retweets, likes, or shares—were included to capture the circulation of influential narratives, while lower-engagement posts were purposively sampled to include grassroots expressions and peripheral voices within the conversation. For qualitative depth, a subset of approximately 1,500 posts was selected for close interpretive coding, reflecting variation in platform, political orientation, and discursive form. This approach is consistent with the methodological requirements of netnography, which necessitates

engagement with extensive datasets, diverse participants, and dynamic online interactions (Kozinets, 2006, 2019).

Following Kozinets' (2019) ethical guidelines for netnography, all data were handled with strict attention to participant privacy. Posts were paraphrased rather than quoted verbatim to prevent traceability through search engines, and all identifiable information (such as usernames or personal images) was excluded. Given that the data were drawn from publicly accessible social media platforms and addressed a political event of broad public significance, the study adheres to established ethical standards for research in online public spheres (Markham & Buchanan, 2012; Kozinets, 2019). This ensures the protection of users' dignity while maintaining the integrity of scholarly inquiry.

4. Findings

4.1. Framing consumption as resistance

The central slogan, "Transform your consumption power into resistance," was quickly taken up by online communities as both a frame of empowerment and a call for solidarity. Users repeatedly emphasized the symbolic equivalence between everyday purchases and political agency. Hashtags such as #Boycot and #BoycotYap were framed as acts of "citizen responsibility," constructing the marketplace as an alternative arena of political struggle when institutional channels were perceived as blocked. This aligns with earlier findings that political consumerism thrives in contexts of institutional distrust, where citizens use consumption to reclaim agency (Stolle & Micheletti, 2013; Copeland & Boulianne, 2022). Users consistently equated consumption with political agency:

"Every lira I don't spend on their products is my vote against tyranny." (X post, March 26, 2025)

"They may silence the ballot, but not our wallets." (Instagram post, March 25, 2025)

Boycott until everything is fixed. Boycott is rehabilitation. Who are we rehabilitating? Capital! If capital is fixed and considered rehabilitated by the people, they can return to our midst. Until that day, continue the boycott, my brothers and sisters (Instagram comment, March 25, 2025).

These statements illustrate how the marketplace was reframed as an alternative political arena, consistent with earlier findings that citizens turn to political consumerism when they perceive institutional blockages (Stolle & Micheletti, 2013). As in prior boycott studies (Kam & Deichert, 2020), refusal to purchase was not presented merely as an economic calculation but as a moral act of resistance, amplifying the symbolic dimension of political consumerism.

Counter-discourses were also visible: pro-government voices mocked the boycott as ineffective, framing it as an "elite urban performance." Such contestation reveals how boycott calls not only mobilize supporters but also polarize discourse, reinforcing ideological boundaries rather than bridging them.

"Do you think not buying coffee will free anyone? This is just an Istanbul game." (X comment, March 25, 2025).

You're joking. The organizations you're boycotting are insignificant. A glass of coffee at EspressoLab after dinner would be perfect. I'll go get one (Instagram comment, April 4, 2025).

This antagonism reveals how boycott calls are embedded in polarized environments, reinforcing partisan boundaries rather than creating broad-based collective action (Copeland & Boulianne, 2022).

4.2. Narratives of trust, solidarity, and moral obligation

Analysis of comments and reposts highlights the importance of trust-based appeals. Users invoked collective responsibility (“we must stand together”), drew on interpersonal trust (“if we all stop buying, they will feel it”), and used moral imperatives (“consumption is complicity”). These findings resonate with social capital theories that emphasize how trust and norms of reciprocity sustain collective action (Neilson, 2006).

“If we all stop buying, they will feel it. Trust me, this is our strongest weapon now.” (X post, March 27, 2025)

“Let’s stand together. Your neighbour, your friend is counting on you to resist.” (Instagram post, March 29, 2025)

Interestingly, while distrust toward state institutions was a strong narrative (“the system is broken, but we can resist through our wallets”), trust in peers became the enabling mechanism of mobilization. This suggests that digital campaigns do not merely circulate information but actively construct norms of belonging, where participation in boycotts becomes a marker of loyalty to both party and community. These narratives exemplify how peer trust and social norms sustain mobilization. Rather than appeals to institutional legitimacy, users leaned on horizontal trust—confidence in fellow citizens—echoing Neilson’s (2006) argument that social capital facilitates collective political consumerism. The moral obligation frame also recalls Micheletti’s (2003) observation that political consumerism transforms everyday acts into arenas of moral responsibility. At the same time, distrust toward political institutions was a recurring theme:

“The courts are theirs, the media is theirs. But consumption is still ours.” (X reply, April 14, 2025)

This dual structure, distrust of institutions paired with trust in peers, resonates with Stolle et al.’s (2005) insight that political consumers often combine low institutional trust with strong civic or peer-level trust.

4.3. Identity work and digital performances of citizenship

Boycott participation was not only a consumption decision but also a performance of political identity. Users presented screenshots of cancelled subscriptions, shared shopping receipts with excluded brands, and created memes portraying “resistant consumers” as patriots. These practices functioned as signalling acts, publicly displaying partisan alignment and moral conviction.

“Just cancelled my subscription to D&R. Resistance starts at home.” (X post, March 31, 2025)

“Resistant shopping list complete.” [Post illustrates boycott brands within a shopping bag] (Instagram post, March 28, 2025)

At the same time, qualitative coding revealed that ideological conviction—not just signaling—was a major driver: many users framed participation in terms of deep moral duty rather than image management. This supports recent findings that political consumerism is often grounded in conviction, even when performed in visible online spaces (Hou & Poliquin, 2024).

“This is not for show. I refuse to support them with even one kuruş.” (X reply, March 30, 2025).

This duality—conviction plus signaling—confirms recent work that political consumerism cannot be reduced to image management alone; identity performance is often deeply intertwined with moral duty (Copeland & Boulianne, 2022).

4.4. Perceived efficacy and scepticism

Despite strong mobilisation, a recurring theme was doubt about efficacy. Users questioned whether the boycott could materially harm conglomerates linked to the government, while others argued that “at least it shows our unity.” This tension underscores the dual function of political consumerism: even when economic effects are uncertain, symbolic and expressive outcomes—strengthening group identity, amplifying grievances—become valuable in themselves.

“These conglomerates are too powerful. They won’t notice us.” (Instagram comment, April 2, 2025)

“Even if it doesn’t hurt their profits, it shows our unity. That’s enough.” (X post, April 4, 2025).

This ambivalence reflects broader debates about boycott efficacy (Liaukonyte et al., 2023). For many participants, the boycott’s symbolic power outweighed economic impact. In line with Stolle & Micheletti (2013), participation served as a form of expressive citizenship, sustaining identity and solidarity even where material outcomes seemed unlikely.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

This study demonstrates how political consumerism in Türkiye has been mobilized through digital networks as a response to perceived institutional closure. The boycott campaign initiated after Ekrem İmamoğlu’s arrest illustrates how citizens transform everyday consumption practices into political statements, reinforcing existing theories of political consumerism while also extending them in important ways.

Existing literature has shown that political consumerism flourishes where citizens distrust political institutions but retain faith in their own civic agency (Stolle & Micheletti, 2013; Neilson, 2006). The Turkish case reinforces this pattern; while distrust toward courts and media was widespread, online discourses revealed strong horizontal trust in peers, neighbours, and digital communities. This suggests that social capital in the form of peer-to-peer solidarity may compensate for weakened institutional trust, enabling consumer-based collective action even under authoritarian-leaning conditions. However, the Turkish case also highlights the polarizing nature of boycotts in highly divided contexts. Rather than bridging constituencies, the boycott became a symbolic battleground between pro-opposition and pro-government voices. This dynamic resonates with research that shows how political consumerism may reinforce partisan cleavages rather than build broad coalitions (Copeland & Boulianne, 2022).

The findings further support literature that frames political consumerism as both moral conviction and identity performance (Kam & Deichert, 2020; Hou & Poliquin, 2024). The sharing of shopping receipts, subscription cancellations, and boycott-related memes reveals how consumption choices are publicly displayed as acts of citizenship. Yet, participants also emphasized sincerity and moral obligation, underlining that signaling cannot be reduced to “virtue signaling.” Instead, identity work in this campaign combined expressive and

performative dimensions, making consumer practices both tools of self-definition and acts of collective resistance.

A recurring theme in user discourse was scepticism about material efficacy. This reflects long-standing critiques that boycotts often fail to inflict substantial economic harm on targeted firms (Liaukonyte et al., 2023). Yet, participants reframed efficacy in symbolic terms: unity, solidarity, and visibility. This supports Stolle & Micheletti's (2013) argument that political consumerism functions as a form of expressive citizenship, where the symbolic articulation of resistance may be as important as tangible economic impact. In Türkiye, where formal democratic channels are perceived as constrained, symbolic politics in consumption may serve as an essential outlet for oppositional expression.

By situating this campaign within Türkiye's contested political landscape, the study contributes three insights to the literature: 1) Peer-driven mobilization where trust in peers and digital networks can substitute for weakened institutional trust, sustaining political consumerism even in semi-authoritarian contexts. 2) Polarization dynamics through polarized societies, boycotts function less as broad moral coalitions and more as arenas of partisan identity performance. 3) Symbolic power of consumption as showing boycotts may achieve limited material impact but hold significant expressive and identity-forming value, sustaining political communities under pressure.

This netnographic study of the "transform your consumption power into resistance" boycott illustrates how digital platforms enable the translation of ideological convictions into consumption practices. In Türkiye's polarized digital sphere, political consumerism emerges as a hybrid phenomenon which simultaneously an act of resistance, a performance of identity, and a symbolic gesture of unity. The findings reaffirm the relevance of political consumerism theory while extending it to contexts of democratic backsliding, where consumption serves not only as a tool of influence but also as a language of survival and solidarity.

Future research could expand on this by conducting comparative studies across different boycott movements, combining netnography with survey or experimental data to measure efficacy perceptions, and examining the long-term sustainability of political consumerism in contexts of authoritarian consolidation.

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The Unequal Labour of Colin and Connie: A Netnography of Gender, Value, and Authenticity in Consumer Culture

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Abstract

This paper examines how gendered hierarchies of labour and cultural value are reproduced and naturalised in digital consumer culture through the case of Marks and Spencer's 'Colin and Connie the Caterpillar cakes'. These anthropomorphised confectioneries: Colin, the "original" male product, and Connie, his feminised counterpart, offer a microcosm for understanding how contemporary markets and audiences attach differential worth to masculinised and feminised forms of value. Within the UK context, Colin occupies a culturally iconic and nostalgic position associated with celebration and retail heritage, amplifying the affective intensity of authenticity claims surrounding the brand.

Drawing on a two-month team netnography and collaborative immersion journal (Kozinets, 2020) conducted across Reddit and Instagram, the study captures the humour, irony, and emotional participation surrounding the Caterpillar Cake phenomenon. Researchers engaged in sustained observation, reflexive journalling, analytic memoing, followed by reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021) to interpret how online interactions and brand narratives reproduce gendered constructions of authenticity, creativity, and labour value. Here, authenticity is conceptualised not as an inherent product quality but as a culturally constructed attribution of originality and creative authority that confers symbolic and economic value within gendered market hierarchies (Grayson & Martinec, 2004)

Using feminist theories of labour and value (Fraser, 2016; Hochschild, 2012) and Nochlin's (2015) critique of the myth of male genius, the analysis shows how Colin's representation as the "authentic original" aligns creative and economic authority with masculine-coded originality, while Connie's feminised representation marks the derivative, supportive, and care-oriented forms of labour historically coded as lesser. Consumer and media discourses mirror these hierarchies, positioning humour and care as feminised affective work that sustains both brand identity and audience engagement. Although grounded in a UK case, the findings suggest broader cross-cultural dynamics through which gendered claims to authenticity structure value within contemporary consumer cultures.

Situated within Netnocon 2026's theme of *Cultural Crossroads*, this study demonstrates how gendered labour functions as connective tissue between culture, commerce, and digital participation. Methodologically, it contributes to the growing body of feminist digital research by showing how team-based, reflexive netnography can be used to interrogate the reproduction of value and inequality within digital consumer cultures, foregrounding the interpretive labour of researchers as part of the analytic process.

Keywords: gendered labour; cultural value; authenticity; feminist digital methodology; netnography

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De-iconizing Bud Light: A netnographic analysis of conservative backlash and the limits of brand activism

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Abstract

Introduction

This study examines the Bud Light crisis of 2023–2024 as one of the most significant cases of consumer backlash in contemporary branding. A brief Instagram activation featuring transgender influencer Dylan Mulvaney sparked intense conservative outrage, leading to a nationwide boycott and a prolonged decline in sales. This escalation cannot be adequately explained through conventional brand activism frameworks, which rely on psychological models of authenticity and congruence (Vredenburg et al., 2020). This research addresses this theoretical gap by adopting a cultural perspective capable of explaining the collective dynamics of the crisis.

Methodology

The study employs a multiplatform netnography (Kozinets, 2020) in combination with Holt's method of brand genealogy (Holt, 2004; Holt & Cameron, 2010), an approach adapted from critical discourse analysis. Netnographic data capture how conservative users on X, Reddit, YouTube, Instagram, and comment forums interpreted and responded to the Mulvaney activation, generating a dataset of over 1,000 textual artifacts collected between April 2023 and March 2024. The genealogical layer complements this by analyzing the broader cultural production of the period, such as films, music, and media commentary, tracing Bud Light's and Budweiser's historical role in articulating myths of Americana, masculinity, and communal belonging. Together, these two empirical components provide the cultural and historical

context necessary to interpret the symbolic intensity of the backlash and explain why the incident resonated so deeply within contemporary identity politics.

Preliminary Findings

Preliminary analysis identifies two dynamics that structured the backlash. First, the Mulvaney activation became a symbolic trigger through which conservative users projected wider anxieties about gender and cultural change. Second, because Bud Light functioned as an iconic brand grounded in shared myths of Americana and masculinity, the incident was interpreted as a violation of a long standing identity contract. These discursive processes transformed the collaboration from a minor marketing activation into a culturally relevant moment that redefined the brand's public meaning.

Discussion

The study demonstrates that dominant psychological models of brand activism, centered on individual level attitudes, are insufficient for understanding brand crises in polarized sociopolitical environments. The Bud Light crisis shows that iconic brands operate within collective identity systems in which meaning is produced socially rather than individually. When such brands intervene in contested issues, audiences do not evaluate them through cognitive judgments of fit but through public narratives that negotiate identity and ideology. Genealogical and cultural perspectives therefore offer a more effective analytical lens.

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Navigating Informality: Digital Inclusion and Social Media Engagement Practices of Western Sydney Not-for-Profits

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Abstract

Not-for-profit organisations (NFPs) in Western Sydney play a critical role in promoting diversity and inclusion, often serving culturally and linguistically diverse communities, people with disabilities, and other underrepresented groups. Social media offers a low-cost, accessible avenue for outreach, yet many NFPs face significant barriers to strategic engagement due to limited resources, staffing, and expertise. A 2025 survey of 874 Australian charities found that 77% reported an increase in demand for their services over the last 12 months (Mason, September 12, 2025). Residents of Western Sydney often “struggle with barriers such as poverty, language barriers, illiteracy, mental illness, physical and mental disabilities,

addictions and lack of education and access to resources,” (“WEXPO Charity Partner is an advocate for the vulnerable,” 2025, July 10). This is why, Western Sydney NFPs are feeling the pressure as they are facing increasing demand for their services, experiencing a steady decrease in donations and volunteers but, their support is needed more than ever before (Hathaway-Wilson, 2024, December 19).

This paper presents findings from a netnographic study exploring how Western Sydney NFPs use social media to connect with their audiences and promote inclusive outcomes (see figure 1). Drawing on immersion journaling, interviews, and survey data, the study reveals that social media practices are largely informal and driven by volunteers or staff without formal training in communication or marketing. Most organisations lack a documented social media strategy, relying instead on intuitive decision-making and personal platform preferences. This often leads to mismatches between platform choice and audience demographics, and in some cases, organisational content is posted via personal accounts, risking continuity and audience retention.

Content misalignment also poses reputational risks. Posts that inadvertently conflict with the organisation’s mission, such as promoting adult-only events for child-focused charities, can undermine trust and engagement. Despite these challenges, NFPs expressed a strong desire to improve their digital communication but cited a lack of time, knowledge, and access to analytics tools.

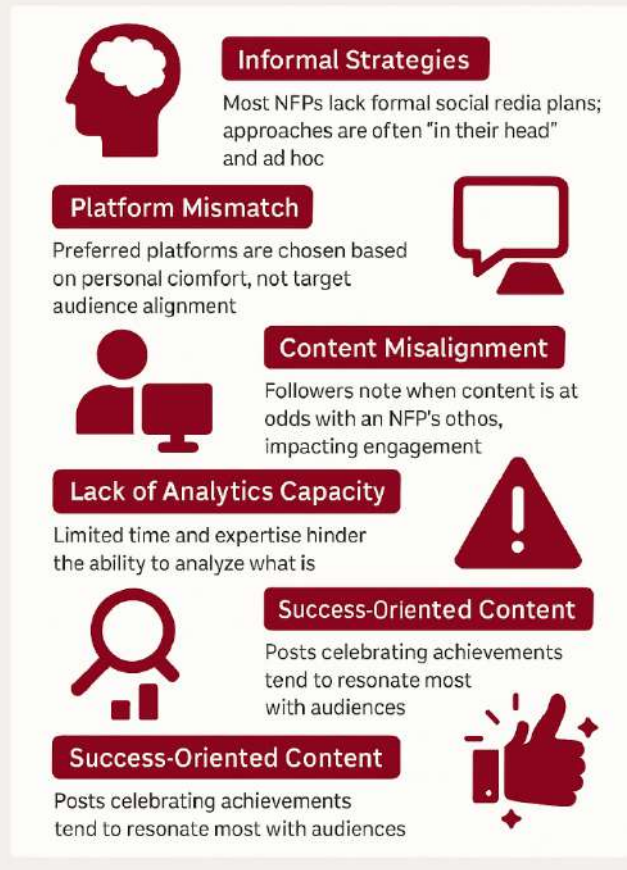
Importantly, the study found that success-oriented content; content that celebrates milestones, donations, awards, and member achievements, consistently generated the most positive engagement. These posts fostered emotional and behavioural responses from followers, including likes and love responses, positive comments, and shares, and contributed to a sense of community and relational capital. This suggests that authentic storytelling aligned with organisational values can be a powerful tool for inclusion and engagement, even in the absence of formal strategy.

The research explores implications for NFP public relations practice, particularly in diverse and resource-constrained environments. It advocates for low-barrier strategies that empower informal communicators to craft inclusive, mission-centric content. Recommendations include platform-specific guidance, storytelling templates, and basic analytics literacy to help NFPs understand what resonates with their audiences.

Ultimately, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of how grassroots organisations promote inclusion through digital communication. It underscores the need for support structures that enable NFPs to build visibility, trust, and community online. This is a powerful mission, especially as they work to improve outcomes for some of Western Sydney’s most vulnerable populations.

Figure 1: The main themes to be explored through this presentation.

Navigating Informality: Digital Inclusion and Social Media Engagement Practices of Western Sydney Not-for-Profits



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Session 3

Affordances, narratives & sentiments

Session chair: Marie Kerekes

Privacy by Design? A Systematic Evaluation of Affordances Across 14 Social Media Platforms

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Abstract

We stand at a cultural crossroad where platform homogenisation has transformed the way we use social media. So, when Instagram adopts TikTok features, LinkedIn mirrors Facebook, and platforms enable cross posting and recommending users based on contacts, how do users maintain privacy boundaries on these platforms? Privacy concerns have intensified as social media becomes central to daily life, prompting both policymakers and users to seek greater control over personal information. While users employ various strategies to protect their privacy online, questions remain about how different platform affordances support or hinder these efforts through their design. This research presents the second phase of our inquiry into how platform affordances shape users' privacy management online. Building on our initial investigation, we propose a privacy matrix – a systematic tool for identifying and evaluating social media privacy features.

Our theoretical framework draws on Goffman's (1959) theory of dramaturgy. As social interaction increasingly occurs in digital spaces, users seek to offer different performances and manage distinct impressions of themselves across various platforms. However, our analysis reveals a significant challenge, akin to what Goffman termed "context collapse." Contemporary social media platforms encourage cross-posting, account linking, and content sharing across multiple sites, meaning users increasingly perform for merged audiences they may not even know exist. As such, we ask what specific affordances indicate or enable privacy? How do these affordances facilitate users' ability to create different impressions for different audiences?

To address these questions, we developed a privacy matrix grounded in Trepte's (2021) framework of social media affordances, specifically examining anonymity (the ability to obscure identity), editability (control over modifying content), association (managing connections and visibility), and persistence (controlling how long content remains accessible).

Our methodology involved netnographic systematic analysis of privacy settings, features, and policies across the 14 most widely used social networking sites based on user count, documenting the presence, accessibility, and granularity of privacy controls in each domain. The resulting matrix reveals significant variation, with some platforms offering robust controls across all dimensions, while others provide limited options, particularly regarding content

persistence and audience segregation. Our matrix provides a flexible assessment tool that evaluates platforms across four dimensions, offering a clear overview of how users can safeguard their privacy while engaging with each platform. By grounding our matrix in the most widely used platforms, we ensure our findings have broad applicability while maintaining flexibility. In other words, the matrix can be applied to evaluate any current or emerging social networking platform.

Our research contributes both a practical tool for assessing platform privacy capabilities and theoretical insights into how digital affordances shape contemporary identity performance and privacy management in an era of persistent context collapse.

Keywords: Privacy, Social Media Affordances, Self-Presentation, Context Collapse, Impression Management

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Co-creating Fiction of the Louvre Jewellery Heist : a Netnographic Approach

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Abstract

Although it was a real crime, the global online community treated it the 2025 Louvre Jewellery Heist like co-created fiction. People created memes, videos, AI deepfakes, and storylines. The narrative evolved collectively, mixing humor, pop culture references, and alternate “plots.” The audience essentially turned a real-world event into a shared fictional universe, co-authored by millions. Co-created fiction refers to a type of storytelling where the narrative is not created by a single author or creator but collaboratively developed by multiple participants, often including the audience or community (Finn & al., 2024). It blends traditional storytelling with participatory culture, allowing users or fans to actively contribute to the story’s content, meaning, or evolution. A story is shaped collectively rather than authored by one person. The audience become co-authors, contributing ideas, characters, plot twists, or even entire narrative arcs. This fiction often emerges in digital environments where sharing and collaboration are easy. It encourages participation and creativity rather than passive consumption and reflects how modern media landscapes (social media, fan culture, AI tools) blur the lines between fiction and reality. Based mainly on the theories of cultural convergence, participative culture and transmedia concepts (Jenkins, 2006, 2013, 2015), this research aims to gain a better understanding of co-created fiction and more largely of co-creation. More specifically, the research focuses on creating fiction on media from a real event. Relying on a netnographic approach, a qualitative study was carried out in the world (Europe, America, Asia, Africa) on the content created from this Louvre jewellery Heist in different media : Twitter

memes, TikTok parody videos, Instagram edits, Reddit discussions, Brand advertising, AI-generated fictional “episodes”... Empirical findings describe a typology of creative content: short movies, fictional series, humour takes and parodies, fashion outfits, fake news, brand stories, about various themes... Through Jenkins’ theory, the Louvre Heist becomes a) a participatory phenomenon, built collectively by users, b) a cultural remix, not just a criminal act, c) a transmedia narrative, evolving across platforms, d) a case study in global spreadability, d) an example of how pop culture shapes public perception of real events.

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Whisper to a Scream: Meta-Netnographic Insights on Consumer Pricing Sentiments

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Abstract

Since 2003, I've served as an expert witness in consumer pricing disputes across multiple industries. Over 22 years, I conducted repeated netnographic investigations (Kozinets, 2020), applying comparative synthesis inspired by meta-ethnographic principles (Noblit & Hare, 1988). My method uses abductive reasoning (Belk & Sobh, 2019) to iteratively refine frameworks like marketplace sentiments (Gopaldas, 2014) and Gricean norms (Grice, 1975).

Positionality and Ethics

As an embedded interpreter, I translate between consumer vernacular, legal standards, and regulatory policy. Adversarial context stress-tests interpretations—opposing counsel challenges every claim. Yet communities didn't consent to expert-witness interpretation. I reconcile this through reciprocal contribution: making visible the collective intelligence communities possess, demonstrating institutions should learn from rather than surveil them. This parallels Kozinets' netnography, which exposes tobacco marketing targeting youth (Kozinets et al., 2019), where ethical complexity is reconciled through advocacy for vulnerable populations.

Cultural Mechanism

Consumer communities perform distributed cultural surveillance through a consistent three-stage process:

1. *Individual Confusion*. Isolated consumers encounter pricing anomalies and post uncertain queries: "My bill increased—is this normal?"
2. *Community Validation*. Public posting enables parallel observation and evidence pooling. Patterns invisible to individuals become visible through collective discourse shaped by platform affordances.
3. *Collective Moral Formation*. Validated patterns crystallize into moral consensus and protective warnings: "Don't fall for this." This is care infrastructure communities build.

Communities signal this progression through linguistic escalation: "Expensive" → "Overpriced" → "Ripoff" → "Scam"/"Fraud". When debate shifts from economic critique ("overpriced") to moral condemnation ("fraud"), communities define cooperative norms governing marketplace exchange.

Theoretical Contribution

This work specifies how collective moral evaluations (marketplace sentiments) form through distributed evidence pooling and phased development (confusion → validation → condemnation), shaped by platform affordances. Linguistic escalation reflects communities' negotiation of cultural boundaries against Gricean norms.

Methodological Contribution

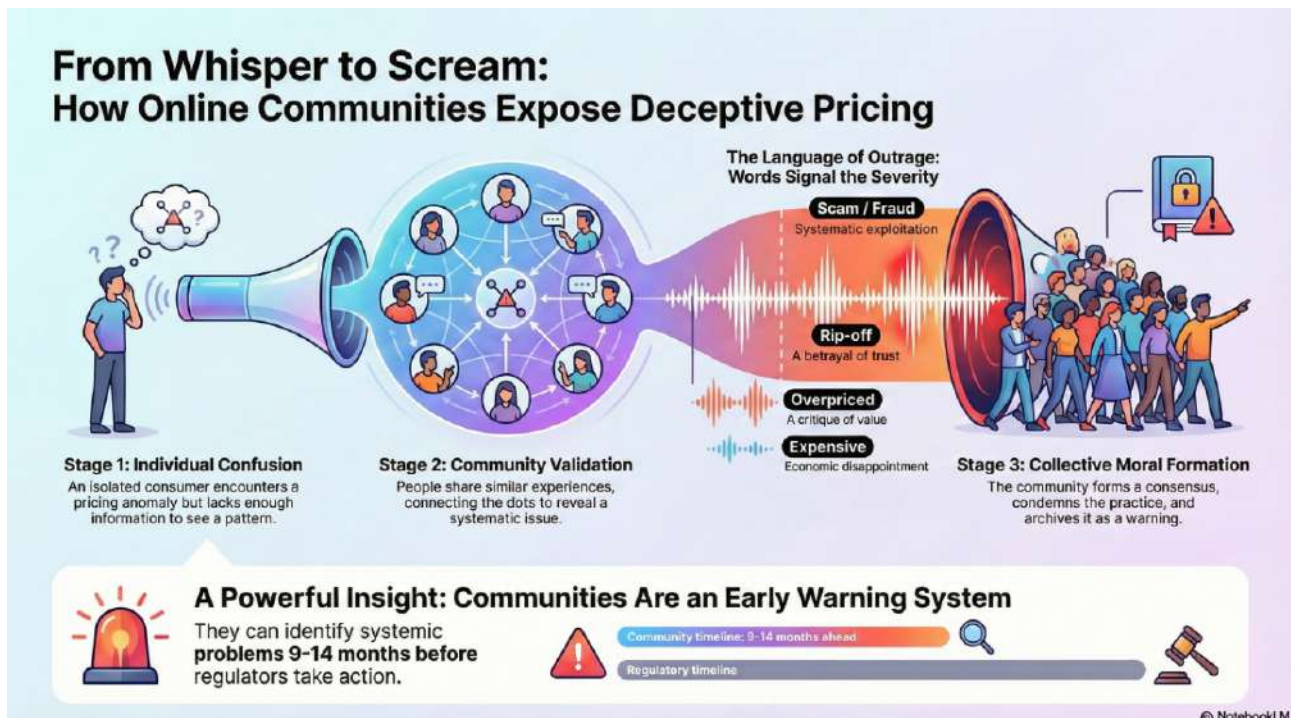
I propose abductive meta-netnography for professional researchers (consultants, expert witnesses, policy advisors) conducting repeated investigations: (1) multiple immersions, (2) cross-case synthesis, (3) theory-evidence iteration, (4) adversarial validation, (5) reflexive positionality. This suits researchers embedded in professional practice, where access and stakes create opportunities and constraints.

Practical Contribution

Communities detect violations before institutions do. In one case (Rogers telecom, r/PersonalFinanceCanada), consensus crystallized 9-14 months before regulatory enforcement. If discourse reliably provides advance warning, institutions could monitor this intelligence, requiring validation and institutional humility.

Keywords: *Meta-netnography, Abductive Research, Expert Witness, Marketplace Sentiments, Consumer Protection*

Figure 1 – From Whisper to Scream



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Netnography for Citizen Engagement in European Union Energy Initiatives: Evidence from ENPOWER

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Petar Gvero, University of Banja Luka, Bosnia and Herzegovina

Eghosa Uhunamure, University of Cape Town, South Africa

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Abstract

There is a growing need to address energy poverty and social inclusion (Boostani, Pellegrini-Masini & Klein, 2024). It is estimated that more than 50 million people in the EU experienced energy poverty in the last decade (EU Policy Report, 2019). (Thomson and Bouzarovski, 2018). This growing need is currently championed by several institutions within the European Union area <https://energy-poverty.ec.europa.eu/> and other parts of the globe. This need birthed the ENPOWER project www.enpower-bih.eu Using the ENPOWER project which consists of four case studies. The focus of this paper will be on one of the case studies, "Socioeconomic Aspects of Energy Poverty in Bosnia and Herzegovina." Its aim is to study the implications of energy poverty—social, economic, and health-related—particularly for vulnerable populations in Banja Luka and across Bosnia and Herzegovina. It seeks to identify the specific challenges faced by marginalised communities and to propose targeted solutions to alleviate energy poverty for these groups, including exploring the role of smart/AI tools in ensuring justice and fair access to energy.

The study's objective is to analyse the factors leading to energy poverty in Bosnia and Herzegovina, understand its impact on citizens, and develop mitigation recommendations, including through the application of AI technologies.

From an analysis of successful 31 innovative energy EU projects carried out within the EU states (EU Policy Report, 2019), it was found that most of the projects focused on using quantitative data collection tools to collect data. Where a small number of the projects used qualitative data as part of their methodology, this was less organic and perceived to be controlled by the researchers. This might have been the reason for some of the key issues identified from the projects. The report identified the need to understand more around the attitude of citizens, enhance trust & understanding between project initiators and citizens, understand more around behavioural approaches, terminologies that will build a comprehensive picture of the social dimension that will be accessible to other stakeholders.

In addressing the gaps above, the ENPOWER project will adopt netnography as part of an integrated methodological framework for mapping and analysing Horizon Europe ecosystems. Netnography combines Social Network Analysis (SNA) with qualitative ecosystem intelligence to capture both the structural and contextual dimensions of collaboration networks (Kozinets, 2019). Using Netnography as a qualitative methodology to address how a Social Network Approach could contribute to the creation of a holistic view of citizen engagement during and post completion of the ENPOWER project. Especially as the need for community inputs (pre, during & post project) as a criterion for sustainable projects outcomes cannot be over emphasised (Vernon et al., 2005; Fraser et al., 2006; Palm et al., 2025). Using existing social media platforms e.g Reddit and project generated online communities to carry out the aspects of Netnography with citizens, the themes from the immersion journals will be used to set the stage for the national household surveys. Beyond descriptive mapping, Netnography will support longitudinal monitoring of ecosystem evolution, allowing assessment of changes in

connectivity, diversity, and balance over time that goes beyond the project life cycle. The use of netnography could provide a robust analytical bridge between network science and research policy, offering a scalable and replicable tool for evidence-based design and evaluation of European research and innovation ecosystems that will address the concerns from previous projects. Using the six steps of netnography as part of this project will be first of its kind in addressing the impact of sustainable projects in fostering engagement and empowerment especially within the European Union research/project space. It will also be the very first project of its kind to use an innovative methodology to collect qualitative data from stakeholders that will further help to measure impact during and after completion of the project.

Some of the expected outputs are: National Energy Poverty Framework & Open Dataset- A comprehensive, national-level framework for analysing energy poverty in Bosnia and Herzegovina, accompanied by an open dataset highlighting regional disparities, causes, and impacts on quality of life. Community Engagement Report - A report detailing outcomes from participatory workshops and consultations, translating community input into actionable recommendations for energy empowerment and household efficiency. White Paper on Energy Poverty - A strategic policy document offering evidence-based recommendations to address gaps in BiH's energy poverty framework, improve multi-level coordination, and outline how AI can enhance transparency in poverty alleviation measures. It will also provide accessible data post project for future researchers and policy makers.

Session 4

Gendered lives online and the struggle for visibility and value

Session chair: Angela Beccanulli

Consuming Motherhood Podcasts as a Tool for Reducing Vulnerability

Thaysa Nascimento, COPPEAD UFRJ, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

Fernanda Scussel, UFSC, Florianópolis, Brazil

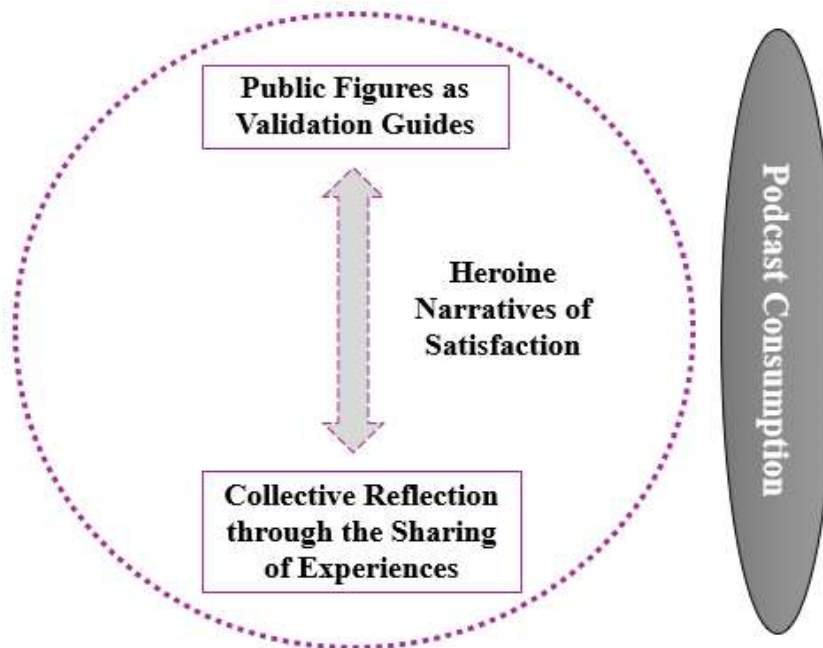
Abstract

Motherhood is a transformative journey that places many women in vulnerable situations. Although vulnerability is a widely studied theme within the literature of marketing and consumer behavior, little is still known about the role of technology, especially social media, in reducing consumer vulnerability. In this sense, this article aims to fill this gap by analyzing how the consumption of motherhood podcasts contributes to reducing the vulnerability of female consumers. To this end, a netnography was conducted focusing on the two largest Brazilian podcasts dedicated to the theme of motherhood. Our findings demonstrate that podcasts function as arenas of symbolic negotiation, where, through the collective sharing of

experiences and the role of public figures as reference guides, consumers feel a sense of belonging, with their performances validated and given new meaning. Thus, we seek to contribute to the vulnerability literature by pointing out possible ways in which social media can help consumers adapt to stigmatized markets.

Keywords: Motherhood; Consumer Vulnerability; Podcasts; Netnography.

Figure 1 – Podcast Consumption as a Tool for Reducing Vulnerability



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Netnography at the Margins: Digital Social Reproduction and Feminist Resistance in Southern Italy

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Abstract

This paper investigates how the *Femminismo Terrone* (a feminist movement emerging from Southern Italy) mobilizes digital platforms to reproduce feminist knowledge, cultivate solidarity, and challenge cultural marginalization. Drawing on an ongoing cross-platform netnography primarily on Instagram, with exploratory observations on TikTok, Reddit, and YouTube, the study examines communities such as @claudiafauzia (once @lamalafimmina), @wehatepink, and @ccanisciunefessa, which articulate an explicitly Southern feminist discourse (Fauzia & Amenta, 2021). These spaces translate everyday experiences of gendered and regional marginality into accessible forms of digital activism, transforming social media into infrastructures that sustain political consciousness and cultural memory.

Data collection integrates observation, systematic screenshotting, fieldnotes, and micro-archiving, in line with established netnographic procedures (Kozinets, 2020; Kozinets & Gretzel, 2023). Crucially, the research is grounded in sustained digital co-presence and immersive engagement, following conversations, affective cues, and micro-conflicts as they unfold in real time (Kozinets, 2023). Particular attention is devoted to linguistic markers (vernacular speech, dialect use), visual markers, affective expression, community guidelines, and practices of mediation, which enable the production of deep, situated, and relational data.

An immersive journal (Gambetti & Kozinets, 2024) forms the core of this approach, functioning as a performative space where field encounters, emotional resonances, platform rhythms, and multimodal digital traces are assembled into thick, situated interpretations. Through collage, deep-data assemblage, and iterative reflexive writing, the journal becomes an analytic site in itself, enabling a dynamic oscillation between proximity and distance. The two researchers' dual positionality - one Southern Italian and one Northern Italian - operates as a shifting epistemic lens that reveals how belonging, marginality, and recognition take shape differently across their perspectives. In this sense, the netnographic stance unsettles normative

interpretive frames, recalibrates the “North gaze,” and allows Southern feminist voices to emerge on their own terms from the entanglement of user practices, platform affordances, and researchers’ introspective reflection.

Drawing on the Social Reproduction Theory (Federici, 2019; Bhattacharya, 2017), the study interprets the *Femminismo Terrone* as an emergent form of digital social reproduction that maintains feminist communities and enables their continuity within algorithmic environments. Practices such as moderation, storytelling, translation of theory, conflict mediation, and the curation of safe spaces operate as reproductive activities that sustain collective life and shared meaning, valorizing feminized and undervalued forms of care and configuring decolonized technosocial imaginaries (Jasanoff & Kim, 2015).

By situating netnography into feminist cultural work, this study shows how digital infrastructures mediate new forms of belonging, visibility, and resistance at the cultural periphery. The work of maintaining feminist communities online, understood here as digital social reproduction, mirrors and contests offline hierarchies of gender, region, and class. The paper’s contribution lies in reframing digital feminist activism as reproductive infrastructure: a set of everyday practices that sustain collective worlds under algorithmic conditions. By mobilising Social Reproduction Theory, it demonstrates how platform-mediated practices of reproduction both foster and perpetuate the voice of marginalized feminist publics (Downey & Fenton, 2003) rather than simply expressing resistance, thereby sustaining feminist knowledge, solidarity, and Southern identity within global technocultures.

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From Platforms to Queer Mycelial Network: A Netnographic Study of Chinese Queer Feminist Community

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Abstract

Our paper adopts a netnographic research method, combined with offline ethnographic data, to study the queer women's community D Village in Southwest China. It explores how digital platforms serve as crucial sites for connection, care, and the formation of both online and offline community networks. In particular, under the conditions of neglect and silencing of queer consumers in the Chinese market (Yang and Blazquez, 2024), we investigate how queer women use online platforms to balance visibility with the risks of stigmatisation and censorship.

This study investigates how queer women in D Village, an intentional eco-community in Southwest China, mobilise digital platforms to build connections, sustain livelihoods, and nurture networks of care. D Village was originally composed of a number of abandoned ancient hamlets, whose primary remaining residents were elderly women from China's Yi ethnic minority groups. The village now also includes community spaces designated for sexual minorities, such as guesthouses, schools, and youth hostels. In China, digital platforms have emerged as a vital infrastructure for promoting utopian lifestyle imaginaries, particularly those structured around gendered subjectivities. However, the platformisation of utopian ideals—particularly those associated with marginalised groups like queer communities—remains under state surveillance and control (Liao, 2024). It nonetheless offers partial empowerment on utopian thinking, but the role of platformisation in mediating such thinking is the research position of our paper.

Methodologically, we adopt a netnographic approach with an ethnographic approach for interactive data. With observation and immersion of related social media accounts within D village, our final data draws from three sources: (1) content from social media and podcast accounts managed by queer eco-entrepreneurs, (2) online observation and reflexive fieldnotes, and (3) ten in-depth interviews and on-site fieldwork conducted during an immersive visit to D Village. This triangulated design enables us to capture both online and offline dynamics, situating digital traces within lived experiences.

Initial Finding

Our findings reveal that queer women in D Village weave what we term a queer mycelial network. Much like the underground entanglement of fungal root systems, these networks

balance between viability and inviability—between visibility and invisibility, resistance and conformity—under China’s increasingly restrictive market and political conditions.

At the micro level, platforms function as roots, enabling scattered queer individuals to discover the community and establish initial connections. Podcasts, WeChat groups, and lifestyle posts on Xiaohongshu act as spores that attract newcomers, transforming them from digital followers into residents or collaborators. These flows create decentralised, reciprocal relationships, contrasting with hierarchical influencer–follower dynamics. At the meso level, platforms act as trunks that mediate visibility through a form of “masked expression.” Rather than foregrounding explicit queer or feminist claims, villagers tactically embed their politics into eco-living and cultural entrepreneurship. At the macro level, platformisation sustains the community’s canopy—its broader cultural and economic infrastructure. Platforms thus serve both as distribution channels and as connective tissues for care networks, transforming precarious rural living into a viable alternative to capitalist-heteropatriarchal urban life.

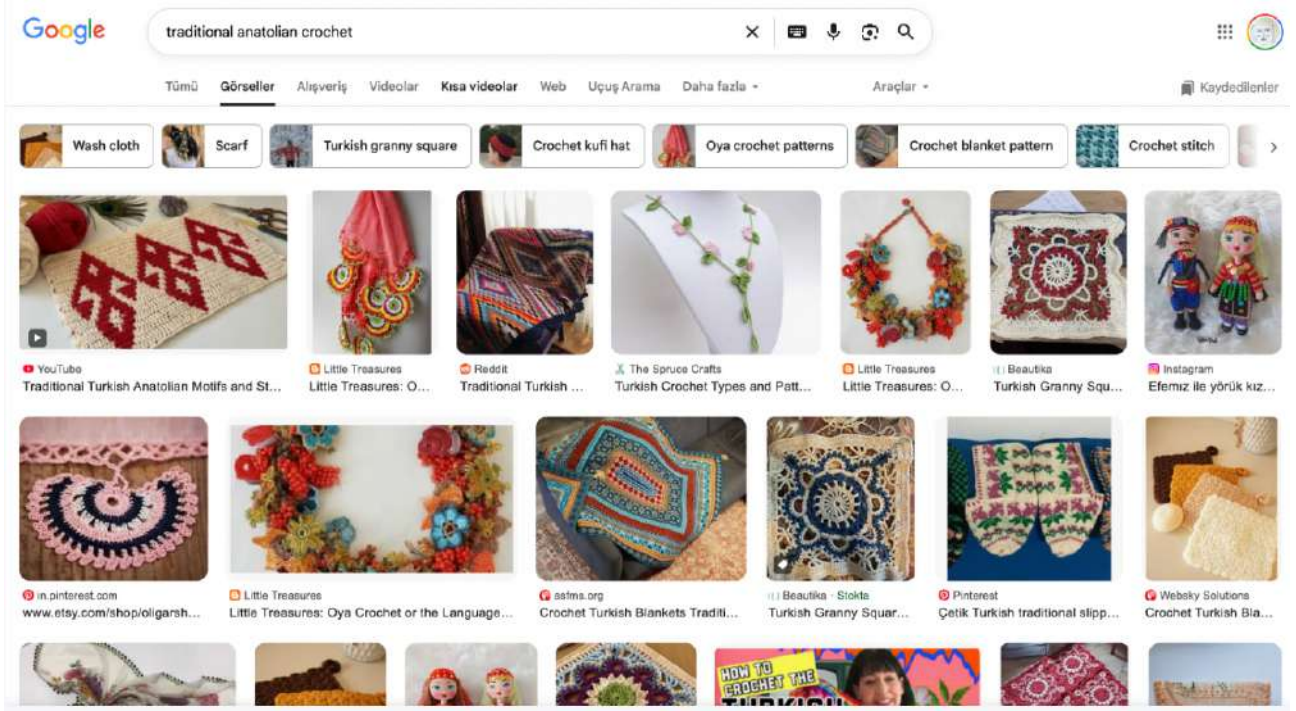
A Netnographic Analysis of the Transformation of Anatolian Craftswomanship: Navigating the Digital Labor

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Abstract

As women’s labor continues to be taken for granted and, therefore, unpaid, this ignorance becomes even more striking in local artisanship, where women’s skills and contributions are frequently globally marginalized. In Türkiye, the case is no different, but it has taken on a new dimension with the presence of local artisans on social media, particularly on Instagram. Traditional skills such as embroidery, crocheting, weaving, beadwork, and knitting were historically classified as purely feminine household activities. Although when offered as dowries by the brides, they represent their core family’s honor, the true value of the women who produced these products is rarely acknowledged. This complex and time-consuming production is now becoming a commodified trade item under the pressures of digital capitalism. As the feminist autonomist Mariarosa Dalla Costa (2014) has argued, assigning monetary value to labor shapes its social perception; consequently, uncompensated traditional women’s artisanship is often dismissed merely as domestic labor or taken for granted as a hobby with no material value. This study examines the visual and verbal patterns on Instagram accounts and how this tangible artifact is performed as part of the online personae in an anthropological sense. Ultimately, Netnographic data collected from Instagram are reinforced with semi-structured interviews to reveal how Turkish craftswomen perceive what they are actually producing and how they navigate traditional practices within digital requirements. Drawing on Lila Abu-Lughod’s (2021) caution against generalizing cultures—which often stereotypically tilts perceptions of the “Anatolian craftswoman” towards a universal image of oppression and passivity—this study examines the active, complex intergenerational transmission of female roles and transformation of women’s artisanship.

Figure 1 – Traditional Anatolian Crochet



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Session 5

Negotiating identities across geographies

Session chair: Irina Gewinner

Digital Conversations on Gender, Sexuality, and Feminism in Nigerian Social Media

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Abstract

This qualitative internet based study examined how information, misinformation, and disinformation influence gender narratives and feminist discourse in Nigerian digital spaces. Using a netnographic approach, we analysed publicly accessible posts and comment threads on X and Facebook over a sustained observation period. The findings show that conversations on gender equality remain shaped by deeply rooted cultural and patriarchal stereotypes. Women were frequently evaluated through frames of morality, marital status, sexuality, and domestic expectations. Disinformation amplified misogynistic tropes, contributed to victim blaming, and fuelled sexualised defamation of women, while engagement farming posts distorted feminist messaging for visibility. At the same time, counter narratives emerged. Users shared accurate explanations of feminist principles, contextualised women's rights within Nigerian history, and highlighted structural inequalities. Digital advocacy from traditional leaders, religious figures, and community influencers demonstrated that online spaces also function as sites of resistance, education, and the re framing of harmful norms. These opposing forces illustrate the dual nature of social media as both a generator of gendered misinformation and a catalyst for transformative feminist discourse. The study contributes to literature on gender, digital sociology, and African feminism by showing how users negotiate meaning making in contested online environments. It also underscores the potential for feminist digital activism to challenge discriminatory narratives and proposes the need for improved platform accountability, media literacy, and gender responsive digital governance in Nigeria.

Keywords: Netnography, Gender narratives, Feminism, Disinformation, Nigeria

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Waves, Feeds and Tangping: Chinese female surfers negotiating gender, work and algorithms

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Abstract

In recent years, surfing has gradually transformed from a niche sport in China's coastal areas into an important cultural practice combining leisure, lifestyle and status symbol (Wengel et al., 2024). After COVID-19, young women have become increasingly visible in emerging surfing zones along the eastern coast, most notably on Hainan Island. On visually dominant platforms such as RedNote and Douyin, they document their learning processes, share physical experiences, and build their self-images. Situated within postcolonial feminism and algorithmic culture, this study focuses on Chinese women's surfing practices across physical and digital spaces.

First, this research analyses how Chinese female surfers position themselves within multiple power structures (Brewer, 1993; Said, 1977). On the one hand, they are situated in a broader social context and sporting discourse dominated by men. On the other, they imagine surfing as a pathway to a global "free lifestyle", drawing on visual and narrative elements such as the discourse of "lying flat" (tangping 躺平). The study examines how this pursuit of freedom, relaxation and de-urbanisation intertwines with mediated imaginaries of Western beach culture and the figure of a "white surfer", and how such imaginaries are re-localised on Chinese social media.

In contemporary China, decisions such as quitting a job to spend months surfing or travelling are widely associated with tangping, as they deviate from normative expectations of relentless labour, saving and investment in marriage and child-rearing. Following Stebbins' (1982) work on serious leisure, surfing is understood as a skilled, committed and potentially career-like form of leisure. By contrast, casual leisure (Stebbins, 1997) tends to be more socially accepted, as it aligns more easily with dominant ideals of hard work and familial responsibility. Even when pursued "only" as a hobby, regular surfing is often judged as an irresponsible use of time and money, a refusal to do what one is "supposed" to do regarding career, marriage and parenthood. Yet serious leisure such as surfing is still frequently framed as a form of "lying flat", rendering young female surfers legible as figures who quietly contest prevailing scripts of work, gender and responsibility.

Second, building on research on algorithmic culture, this study examines how recommendation mechanisms, trending lists, tag systems and commercial traffic logics affect the visibility and classification of female surfing content. Through netnography (Kozinets, 1998, 2010), long-term observations of representative female surfer accounts and topic communities are conducted on RedNote and Douyin. The study collects and analyses images, text and short videos, supplemented by comment-section interactions. It asks which body images, clothing styles and narrative frameworks are more likely to gain exposure; which experiences are amplified or silenced; and how algorithms shape the image of the "surfer girl".

The innovation of this research lies in three aspects: integrating China's emerging surfing culture with postcolonial feminism and algorithmic culture; centring the surfing experiences of Chinese women; and reflecting on how to conduct netnography in an algorithm-driven environment. The study offers empirical insights and theoretical reflections on the bodies and identity politics of young Chinese women in digital spaces.

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Digital Dis/Connection in Migrant Networks: A Netnography of Expat Online Communities in Türkiye

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Abstract

Immigration has become an increasingly common phenomenon in our globalized world (Sassen, 2018). Since the 1960s, the image of 'the globalized expat' came to denote any citizen living abroad, while also implying a somewhat privileged status different from that of more common immigrants (Green, 2009; Kunz, 2020). Though growing, research on expats is still relatively new and limited in the field of migration studies (Kunz, 2016; McNulty & Brewster, 2017), particularly the role of digital platforms and online communities in facilitating the relocation and acculturation processes (Polson, 2015). This study seeks to add to that literature by examining four self-described 'expat' Facebook groups using a netnographic approach (Kozinets, 2019) combining online participant-observation with qualitative in-depth interviews (N=38). Specifically, this study explores critically how these digital platforms may contribute to the isolation of expats from their host countries, by keeping them virtually 'connected' to their

country of origin and other expats while simultaneously ‘disconnected’ from their country of residence.

Moreover, research on expats has primarily examined movement between European countries or of high-skilled temporary professionals in Southeast Asia (Cranston, 2017; Polson, 2015). Case studies of expat migration to developing and Global South countries, factoring in global inequalities and privileged lifestyles, are still lacking (King et al., 2021; Kunz, 2020). This study contributes to the literature by focusing on expat online communities based in Türkiye and users originating from developed ‘Western’ countries and cultures (i.e., North America, Europe, Australia, etc.). In Türkiye, this form of migration has become increasingly prevalent in the 21st Century. Like other developing countries, such migration rates are relatively smaller than other nationalities, yet they hold a unique social status compared to other immigrant groups. This study offers an important opportunity to expand our scholarly understanding of this phenomenon.

Keywords: Migration, Expatriates, Facebook, Digital Platforms, Netnography

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“Pure Germans” in Southern Brazil: A Netnographic Study of Digital Identity

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Abstract

Southern Brazil's cultural landscape has been shaped by migration. The bicentennial of organized German immigration in 2024 underscored the enduring role of migration histories in defining collective identity and belonging. These legacies continue to structure how groups perceive ancestry, ethnicity, and cultural authenticity, with discourses about whiteness and "purity" retaining symbolic power. As Jeffrey Lesser (2015) observes, Brazilian national identity has often been constructed through negotiations that incorporate immigrant legacies while reinterpreting them within broader notions of "brasilidade." This historical depth provides a framework for understanding how migration narratives are revived and contested in digital culture today.

This study analyzes a viral YouTube video about so-called "pure Germans" in Southern Brazil (Matheus e Guigo Show, 2025), which presented a satirical "recipe" for producing a German baby. The video reached more than 574,000 views and 9,200 comments, transforming into a site of interaction where ethnic identity was performed, negotiated, and distorted. By humorously invoking traits such as blond hair, blue eyes, white skin, and hard-to-pronounce surnames, the artifact triggered wide-ranging debates over heritage, authenticity, and belonging.

Methodologically, the research employs netnography (Kozinets, 2020), treating the viral video as a bounded digital fieldsite where cultural meaning circulates both through the artifact and audience engagement. The analysis emphasizes three discursive dimensions: (1) ancestral pride and genealogical claims, where commenters highlight surnames, family origins, and local histories; (2) visual and performative stereotypes, associating Germanness with outdated clothing, phenotypical traits, and caricatured performances disconnected from contemporary Germany; and (3) humor, satire, and contestation, which simultaneously destabilize essentialist claims of purity while reinforcing their digital visibility.

Grounded in Braudel's (1958) notion of the *longue durée*, situating these digital performances within multiple temporal layers: the immediate virality of the video, the persistence of twentieth-century stereotypes of German-Brazilian identity, and the deeper historical structures of nineteenth-century immigration. Rather than "invented traditions" in Hobsbawm's (1983) sense, what emerges are distortions and selective reinterpretations of cultural practices with factual historical bases. These practices illustrate how authentic heritage is reframed, exaggerated, or misrepresented in the digital arena.

Findings highlight the duality of online identity-making: some interactions reproduce essentialist narratives rooted in migration histories, while others employ irony to subvert them. This interplay shows how digital culture operates as both a site of preservation and transformation of belonging. By foregrounding intersections of migration, ethnicity, and digital performance, the study contributes to netnographic research on diasporic identities and situates Southern Brazil's German heritage within global debates on cultural diversity, whiteness, and digital identity.

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Session 6

Posthuman and more-than-human realities

Session chair: Russ Belk

More-Than-Human Gifting: Meaning and Reciprocity in Human-Corvid Relations

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Abstract

Gift exchange is a foundational social system that builds, sustains, and defines human relationships (Giesler, 2006). Building on anthropological accounts of gift systems pioneered by Mauss (1925), consumer researchers have examined multiple dimensions of gifting, from dyadic exchanges (Sherry, 1983; Liu et al., 2024) to broader consumer networks (Joy, 2001). Across these studies, gifting emerges as a meaning-making process in which both giver and receiver construct value and emotional significance (Belk and Coon, 1993; Lowrey et al., 2004). Yet, prior research has focused exclusively on human-to-human gift systems (Givi et al., 2023), overlooking exchanges that extend beyond the human realm, despite growing attention to human-animal relationships in studies of consumption and culture (Belk, 1996; Shamayleh and Arsel, 2025).

Outside consumer research, behavioral studies reveal that animals also engage in acts resembling gift exchange. Among corvids and other species, these behaviors serve social functions such as courtship (McCallum and Shaw, 2024), hierarchy building (Duque and Stevens, 2016), and cooperation (Lambert et al., 2017). Emerging multi-species research highlights how communication and cooperation underpin cross-species social organization

(Andrews et al., 2025). Anecdotal accounts have documented gifting between domesticated or wild animals and humans — cats offering prey (Jessup, 2004) or crows presenting small objects to those who feed them (Marzluff and Angell, 2012) — yet these interactions have rarely been examined through a consumer-cultural lens.

This study explores how consumers document and narrate their gifting relationships with wild corvids (crows, ravens, magpies, and jackdaws) on digital platforms. Using a netnographic methodology (Kozinets, 2020), data collection focuses on naturally occurring online content and conversations across several social media environments. The study analyzes threads and subreddits, Instagram, Facebook community groups, and YouTube channels dedicated to human–corvid interactions. To complement these digital observations, in-depth interviews are being conducted with participants active in these online spaces to understand how they interpret their exchanges with corvids.

Three research questions guide this work. First, how do consumers who engage in human–corvid gifting narrate these exchanges in digital spaces? Second, how do experiential elements such as frequency, familiarity, and shared routines shape expectations of reciprocity and continuity? Third, how do online audiences contribute to assessments of value, authenticity, and meaning in these gifting narratives?

By examining how gifting between humans and corvids is represented, discussed, and negotiated online, this research aims to extend consumer culture theory on gifting beyond human boundaries. Ultimately, this study reframes gifting as a more-than-human relational practice, where notions of value, gratitude, and care circulate not only among people but also between humans and the intelligent others who share their everyday worlds.

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The Assembled Consumer: A Netnography of the Technogenetically Extended Subject

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Abstract

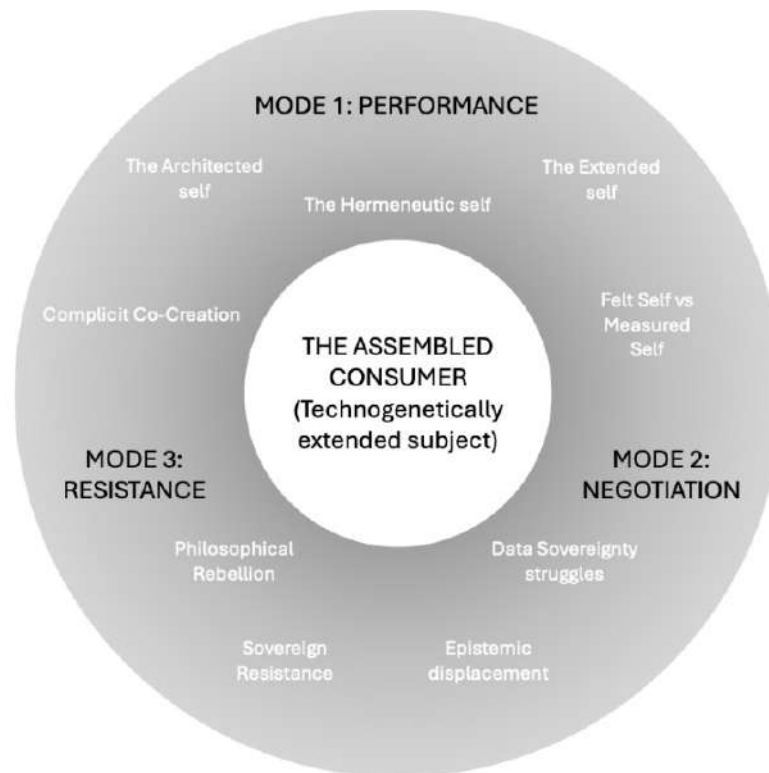
Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) has firmly established the consumer as an active agent using marketplace resources for identity projects (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). Extending the field’s posthumanist and materialist lineages (Belk, 2013; Giesler & Venkatesh, 2005; Hoffman & Novak, 2018), this research conceptualises the contemporary consumer not merely as a user of tools, but as an ontologically distinct technogenetically extended subject. This study distinguishes the general ontology of the assembled subject from the specific mechanisms of

digital platforms. By placing the analytic focus on the public cultural scripts of these assemblages, this research traces how the felt self and measured self are negotiated within the structural constraints of platform capitalism.

To analyse the cultural production of this subjectivity, an observational multi-site netnography was conducted across four paradigmatic online technocultures: r/QuantifiedSelf, r/homeautomation, r/Notion, and r/productivity. These sites represent a spectrum of entanglement, from the hermeneutic interpretation of biological data to the architectural control of domestic space. The analysis reveals that the Assembled Consumer is forged through three overlapping modes of co-constitution: Performance, Negotiation, and Resistance. First, consumers perform identity by architecting digital environments. In communities like r/Notion, the self is not found but built; users construct second brains and digital dashboards, effectively externalising their cognition into tradeable, aestheticised assets. Second, consumers negotiate their subjectivity through epistemic displacement. This construct describes the phenomenological friction where the authority to define reality is contested between the user's felt experience and the device's measured data. The findings demonstrate that users frequently transfer agential authority to the algorithm, allowing opaque metrics (e.g., a "Readiness Score") to override embodied wisdom. Third, consumers resist the terms of their assemblage. The study identifies a critical distinction between productive tinkering—workarounds that platforms recuperate as uncompensated innovation—and sovereign resistance, in which users build independent, self-hosted systems to sever ties with corporate surveillance architectures (Zuboff, 2023).

Theoretically, this research advances a structural framework that distinguishes between the general ontology of the assembled subject—which resonates with diverse posthuman assemblages, including climate and biological contexts—and the specific, historically contingent mechanisms of digital platform capitalism. It demonstrates that the platform's architecture acts as a structural condition of agency, determining whether resistance functions as genuine subversion or value-generating co-creation. By mapping these dynamics, this research contributes a vital framework for understanding how identity is stabilised, contested, and commodified in an increasingly posthuman marketplace.

Figure 1 – The Assembled Consumer



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At The Threshold Of The Digital Sacred: Posthuman Rituality And Algorithmic Re-Enchantment

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Abstract

In today's digital landscape, technological systems and spiritual perspectives are becoming increasingly intertwined, fostering new collective practices where ritual, artistic expression, and technological innovation intersect in fluid and hybrid ways. While modernity's secular tendencies have long been associated with the erosion of the sacred, contemporary digital practices suggest a renewed form of re-enchantment, where algorithms, immersive media, and computational systems are reimagined as carriers of ritual and divinatory significance. Within

this landscape, spiritual agency becomes distributed across human and nonhuman actors — a perspective aligned with posthuman thinking (Haraway; Ferrando) and with relational ontologies that conceptualize socio-technical systems as assemblages of interdependent agents (Latour). This paper presents a techno-spiritual platform, The Birth of a Digital Ritual Engine, currently in prototyping phase, designed to explore how immersive and algorithmic environments can generate collective transformative rituals in contemporary digital culture. Designed as a labyrinthine virtual environment accessible via web and VR platforms, the project explores how collective ritual, emotional release, and spiritual interpretation can arise within digital-technological systems, moving beyond traditional religious formats and isolated individual experience. Within this architecture, different ritual rooms function as autonomous and evolving environments. Among them, *Cchiù* constitutes a prototypical collective healing chamber inspired by Mediterranean ritual traditions such as lamenting choirs, collective mourning, ex-voto practices and apotropaic vocal release (de Martino), reinterpreted in a VR ritual environment where participants actively shape the outcome of the rite. Rather than observing a symbolic representation, participants perform the ritual by donating their voice — speaking a word or fragment associated with a wound or constraint. Participant voices are transformed through a custom-built audio-data system that converts vocal input into a dynamic sound environment, simultaneously producing algorithmically generated visual symbols that function as personalized talismans. In this environment, voice-data, algorithms, and immersive interfaces act as nonhuman agents, co-authoring meaning and enacting a polyphonic experience of collective catharsis. Methodologically, this research applies an immersive posthuman netnography, combining participant observation within the prototype environment, multimodal data collection (voice recordings, generative talismans, interface logs), and qualitative feedback from participants. Rather than treating technology as a neutral tool, the research examines how affective intensity, sensory immersion, and algorithmic agency contribute to ritually transformative experience, foregrounding more-than-human relationality as central to techno-spiritual encounter. The project embodies the Netnocon26 theme *Cultural Crossroads*, intersecting traditional Mediterranean ritual knowledge with global digital infrastructures, collective emotional processing with generative computation, and spiritual worldviews with immersive media aesthetics. Participants from diverse cultural contexts contribute to a growing transnational ritual archive, demonstrating how digital platforms can become sites of hybrid forms of belonging, care, and symbolic innovation. Early findings suggest that engagement with the prototype evokes heightened sensations of shared embodiment and emotional depth, indicating that digital ritual experiences can be perceived as both sensorially vivid and emotionally authentic. Future development — through longitudinal fieldwork, collaborative contributions from other artists, and deployment of the operational web-based engine — will allow for comparative study across modalities.

Keywords:

technospirituality; immersive posthuman; algorithmic rituality; digital re-enchantment; curating

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Matters of Care in Non-Domesticated Spaces: An Investigation of Istanbul's Street Cats

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Abstract

This paper explores human-animal interactions in non-domesticated urban spaces, and how societal and political views of care influence their governance and shape care work. There has been a rich stream of research in marketing, where relations between humans and their pets illuminate the moral, emotional, and material dimensions of caregiving (e.g., Belk 1996, Hirschman 1994, Holbrook et al. 2001, Jia et al. 2022, Kirk 2019). In contrast, the study investigates street cats who occupy a liminal position between owned pets and anonymous urban animals, allowing us to extend theorizations of care to morally ambiguous settings and examine collective responsibility and practices of care.

Our empirical context is Istanbul, a city with a rich socio-historical tradition of human–animal care. We combine netnography with archival data, depth-interviews, and participant observations to collect investigative, interactive, and immersive data (Belk, Kozinets, and Fischer 2012; Fischer and Parmentier 2024; Kozinets and Gretzel 2023, 2024). Our archival sources include the animal protection law enacted in 2004, its amendments in 2021 and 2024, newspaper articles and legal analyses (n=37). Additionally, we conducted in-depth interviews with consumers, NGOs, and government officials (n=11) on caring practices, and participant observations in a street-cat-friendly neighbourhood.

We began our netnography by identifying relevant social media accounts and hashtags (e.g., @dortayaklisehir, #catsofistanbul) and immersing ourselves in their posts. When our initial data analysis revealed instances in which caring practices were disrupted either by changes in animal protection laws or negative events (e.g., killings of street cats), we refocused our netnography to investigate these key events, identifying more accounts and hashtags and following their posts and unfolding conversations. We discussed and journaled our observations on the contents of these posts (adoption, treatment, laws) and reactions of followers. We also contacted and attempted to communicate with certain account holders. Our data collection and analysis efforts are still ongoing.

Our findings reveal how everyday care practices of feeding, naming, trapping–neutering–returning and maintaining cat shelters generate durable obligations that are hard to exit, binding humans, animals, and objects into ongoing circuits of care (Haraway 2018; Hodder 2011; Puig de la Bellacasa 2017). Neighborhood WhatsApp groups, Instagram pages dedicated to street cats, and local online forums serve as coordination devices through which residents discuss feeding routines, veterinary costs, conflicts with neighbors, and municipal interventions, share photos of missing or injured cats, surgery and recovery updates, and pool funds. The investigative data from our netnography also shows how crises, such as suspected poisonings or removal attempts, intensify these bindings by mobilizing “vigilant publics” who organize night watches, document incidents with photos and videos, and further use social media to pressure authorities and call for rapid veterinary support. Reading these arrangements as “matters of care” highlights care as labor, affect, and politics at once, foregrounding the ongoing, sometimes ambivalent work required to maintain these multispecies interactions rather than treating care as a purely moral sentiment. It also demonstrates how netnography can illuminate the making and maintenance of shared worlds with non-human others in contested urban spaces.

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Plenary Session: Performing Identity and Culture

Session chair: Robert Kozinets

Performing Youth in Consumer Culture: A Netnography of Anti-Aging Discourses

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Abstract

In contemporary consumer culture, the idealization of youth fuels anti-aging narratives shaped by both consumer demand and institutional influence. These narratives, in turn, shape consumers' experiences and perceptions of aging by influencing social norms, public discourse, and market dynamics. Predominantly spread through social media (e.g., Ghosh, 2023; Makita et al., 2019), discourse around aging is driven by brands, influencers, and user-generated content. Online spaces serve as key sites where cultural negotiations of aging and beauty occur, with discussions on beauty routines, self-acceptance, and anti-aging ideals.

Our interest in the topic grew as one of the researchers' current life cycle stage fostered an interest in anti-aging and longevity, which soon got the younger researcher deeply engaged in the topic. In this ongoing team netnography on anti-aging discourse, both researchers are involved in the immersion, observation, and interpretation of online interactions. In the immersion stage, brand and consumer messages are being collected from public sources, such as Instagram and practitioner or brand websites. We draw on observational data related to aging, beauty, and identity from diverse digital environments, including social media, blogs, online magazines, digital news, and practitioner websites, to capture symbolic, emotional, and ideological layers (Kozinets & Gretzel, 2024). Posts shared by longevity experts provide insight on the practitioner side, while consumer-generated posts and comments offer a window into consumer experiences and market negotiations. Throughout the process, we maintain immersion notes that comprise selected posts during the observation stage and our thoughts, reactions, and positional stance. In the integration stage, we analyze and interpret digitally derived investigative data on the topic of anti-aging while maintaining our immersion journals. The collected data are then categorized, interpreted, and analyzed to identify recurring patterns and meanings within the broader cultural discourse.

Preliminary findings reveal two key categories: market narratives and consumer responses. Market narratives shaped by practitioners and cultural discourse include “aging as a disease,” “idealization of youth,” “anti-aging before aging,” and “responsibilization.” Corresponding consumer responses center on “aspiration of youth,” “empowerment,” “anxiety,” and “resistance.” These narratives amplify youth-centered beauty ideals, normalize preventive interventions, and increasingly target younger females. The market frames age-defying practices as empowerment while portraying natural aging as undesirable, promoting related products and treatments. Such discourses reinforce responsibilization through ideological messaging in advertising, with social media further spreading anti-aging trends among younger users, especially teens. Ongoing analysis will integrate investigative and immersive data to interpret these dynamics. Ultimately, the study explores how practitioners and institutions construct anti-aging discourse and how consumers interpret, resist, or conform to these market norms, focusing on consumer responsibilization.

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Understanding Marine Recreational Fisheries in Kenya: A Netnographic Approach To Describe The Fishers’ Culture

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Abstract

Marine Recreational Fisheries is primarily conducted using a rod and reel in Kenya where the anglers (fishers) are motivated to go fishing for fun and thrill rather than catching fish for food or to sell. It was introduced in Kenya in the 1950s with popular fishing sites in Lamu, Malindi, Watamu, Mombasa, Diani and Shimoni.

In this study, we immersed ourselves into the Marine Recreational Fisheries sector by following the steps in netnography. We focused the online searches on marine recreational fisheries experiences in the Kenyan waters and scouted on Youtube, Facebook, Instagram, Fishing clubs’ websites and fishing booking sites. We then identified specific pages where images and text depicted stories that we later contextualised and interpreted using thick descriptions. During the process, we kept an immersion journal taking notes of our observations, recording

reflections and noting self emerging interests such as examining fishing paraphernalia on sale and subscribing to an online fishing newsletter.

We found that some anglers were regular participants traveling from their countries annually to take part in the sport fishing season. Others would involve their children and spouses thus, the marine recreational fishing activity was a tradition in some families. We also saw that anglers valued community and formed bonds with each other by joining fishing clubs as members or having routine fishing partners. Fishing clubs maintained embodied fishing records including sculptures and photos of extraordinary catches. They also celebrated winners of fishing tournaments by awarding them. Club spaces were used as social spaces to nurture camaraderie and beer drinking was a popular pass time. Additional club activities included quiz nights and market days or philanthropy towards different causes. Clubs also held open day events that would be open to members of the public for free while allowing temporary access at other times through a daily membership fee. More recent developments include anglers acting as marketing influencers who share reviews of fishing gears and equipment as they use them during fishing expeditions.

The angling community is closely knit, values connection and cherishes shared memories which creates an opportunity for social influence which can be positive or negative. Contrary to perceived exclusivity of fishing clubs, entry can be accessed although a sense of belonging may not be easily attained due to the existing members' common history.

Figure 1 – Bluewater Anglers Club



Key words: sport clubs, recreational fisheries, fishing communities, ethnography, Kenya coast

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At the Cultural Crossroads of Youth Mobility: An Impact Study within the European Lead by Nature Network (ELNN)

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Abstract

Since its establishment in 1987, the Erasmus programme has embodied the European Union's commitment to cross-border learning, cultural exchange, and shared values. Over several programme generations, this vision expanded into today's Erasmus+, a unified framework for education, training, youth, and sport (*Erasmus to Erasmus+*, 2025). As the programme's reach broadened, so did the imperative to understand not only educational outcomes but also how mobility shapes identity, cultural understanding, civic engagement, and youth participation across Europe.

As Erasmus+ continues to shape how young people learn, connect, and participate across borders, the European Lead by Nature Network (ELNN) represents a concrete expression of these aims at the grassroots level. ELNN is a collaborative initiative among European youth organisations, funded by the programme and rooted in values of quality, trust, and sustainability.

Given this orientation toward youth development and cross-border learning, understanding impact becomes essential for assessing how such initiatives contribute to broader European objectives. Within the Erasmus+ programme, "impact" is understood as the measurable personal, socio-educational, and professional development gained through mobility, as well as the broader cultural and institutional effects that emerge from cross-border cooperation. Impact is therefore conceptualised across multiple levels: individual learners, youth organisations, and transnational communities (Impact of the Erasmus+ programme). This policy framing directly informs the design of ELNN's Stage 3 impact analysis.

This paper presents Stage 3 (2025) of the ELNN Research, which focuses on impact evaluation—an increasingly central dimension of Erasmus+ policy. Building on Stage 1's (ELNN, 2023) methodological design and foundational themes of *future* and *engagement*, the findings of which were presented at Netnocon 2023, as well as Stage 2's thematic exploration of Mental Health & Well-being and Quality Learning (ELNN, 2024), Stage 3 examines how mobility experiences influence young people's skills, values, and civic identities.

To investigate the impact from multiple angles, Stage 3 uses a dual-questionnaire design: one tailored to young people currently participating in mobility activities, and another for those who previously took part in Erasmus+. Impact assessment follows a three-timeframe model. . *Past*

Impact explores how earlier mobilities shaped personal development, EU value awareness, intercultural competence, and civic engagement. *Present Impact* gathers real-time data from ongoing mobilities to observe immediate learning and transformation. *Future Impact* identifies expectations, anticipated barriers, required support, and desired skill development for upcoming mobilities, including leadership, intercultural understanding, digital skills, civic engagement, and career progression.

Across Portugal, Romania, Greece, Türkiye, and Georgia, 150 responses were collected. By integrating impact assessment with netnographically informed insights into a transnational youth community, this study conceptualises mobility as a cultural crossroads—a dynamic space where identities evolve, values are negotiated, and youth networks take shape across physical and digital environments.

Keywords: Youth Mobility, Impact Assessment, Erasmus+, Intercultural Learning

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Session 7

Influencer netnography

Session chair: Burcak Ertimur

Sustainable fashion as a ethical-discursive field: A Netnographic Study of Instagram Influencers

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Abstract

The global fashion industry valued at US \$1.3 trillion and responsible for 8-10% (Niinimäki et al., 2020) of global CO₂ emissions has become a central site of sustainability debate. While sustainable fashion is widely invoked, its meaning remains ambiguous and vulnerable to greenwashing. Social media influencers, perceived as more trustworthy than traditional advertising, play a crucial role in shaping sustainability discourse. Yet, existing research predominantly examines consumer attitudes, behavioral intentions and brand communication. What remains undertheorized is how sustainable fashion is ethically constructed and narratively enacted in digital influencer culture. Understanding this moral construction matters because it shapes how audiences interpret sustainability claims,

become vulnerable to greenwashing and decide whether sustainable fashion is an ethical obligation or merely a marketing narrative. This gap warrants two questions. What ethical positions emerge around sustainable fashion content of influencers and how do they frame and narrate it?

Netnography is ideally suited to address these questions because it conceptualizes Instagram as a cultural environments shaped by consociality (Schutz, 1962), affordance (Hutchby, 2001), technogenesis and networked individualism (Kozinets, 2019). Unlike surveys or content analysis, netnography centers digital traces as unit of analysis, enabling close attention to moral language and narrative performance. Its core operations allow researchers to examine sustainable fashion as it is lived and circulated through multimodal influencer practices. The study conducted an investigate-immersive netnography of ten Instagram influencers who regularly post sustainable fashion content. Data consisted of 53,227 words of text and visual content collected from August-October, 2025 according to explicit inclusion criteria. Ethical safeguards included restricting analysis to public data, minimizing personal identifiers and maintaining the netnographic principle that the unit of analysis is behavior and digital utterances rather than individual identity. Analysis combined thematic narrative analysis (to identify moral positions) and Labovian structural narrative analysis (to uncover narrative forms).

The five ethical themes show that sustainable fashion on Instagram operates as a moral-discursive field, extending key theories used in sustainability research. The framing of fashion as structurally harmful moves beyond Institutional theory by depicting hidden toxicity and regulatory failures as moral violations, not just market problems. Everyday resistance through minimalism and second-hand consumption aligns with consumer culture theory, revealing sustainable fashion as a routine embodied practice. Transparency work extends greenwashing and persuasion knowledge models, showing influencers exposing greenwashing, curating lists of vetted brands and narrating the blurred boundaries between ads and recommendations. Affective work involving guilt, vulnerability and exclusion demonstrate how moral reasoning becomes publicly performed emotion shaped by platform affordances. Collective moral projects reflect network theory, highlighting communal micro-guides and shared meaning-making. The four narrative forms: Noticing the flaw, Here's how to do it, Calling it out and Life in a slow wardrobe, functions as cultural scripts through which influencers translate abstract sustainable fashion into shared practical routines and invite collaborative learning. Together, these insights advance sustainable fashion scholarship by shifting to ethical-narrative performance in digital storytelling. It reconceptualize influencers as ethical intermediaries and shows the value of netnography for capturing multimodal ethical discourses in digital culture.

Intensity is not a question of reach: A model of parasocial trust in tourism influencer culture

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Abstract

When it comes to the formation of parasocial relationships, past research has assumed that greater outreach or a higher number of followers is a factor in the strength of these bonds (De Veirmann et al. 2017, Su et al. 2021, Hoffner & Bond, 2022, Conde & Casais 2023). The current study tests this concept by analysing Instagram comments directed towards tourism influencers of various sizes, across different gender categories, and scales of audience.

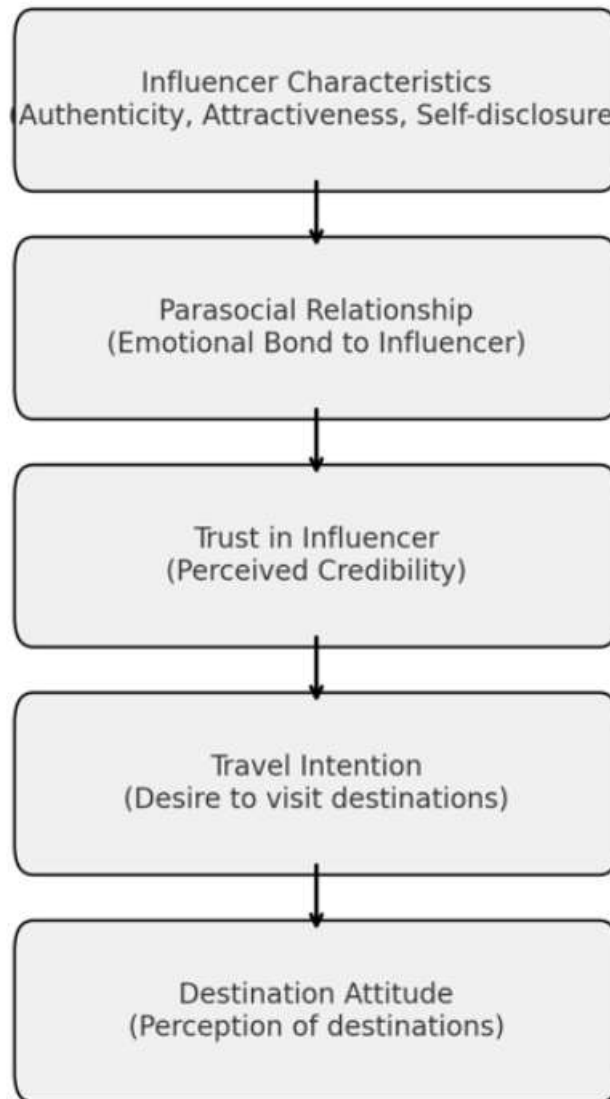
The empirical foundation consists of 6,772 comments across 248 Instagram posts from 16 travel influencers, collected between November 15, 2024, and January 7, 2025. Seven of the influencers are 'mega-influencers', seven are 'macro-influencers' and two are micro-influencers, dealing in themes that cover high-end travel, eco-friendliness, backpacking and nature-related content. We used MaxQDA software and applied netnography (Kozinets 2006, 2019) to code the data, zeroing in on the text comments sent to these influencers so they could understand the complex ways in which people feel, are emotionally attached, and perceive the truthfulness of their favourite influencers.

Our analysis revealed that compelling stories of self-disclosure, moral and rational consistency are what get people hooked in these parasocial relationships, and remarks that are saturated in personal connections and sentiment had a huge impact on these relationships. Interestingly, these phenomena differ by gender and female influencers tend to get a lot more emotional and serious messages from their followers, who are really stressing the importance of connection and close relationships. Looking at the emotional expressions of female and male influencers, female influencers were more emotive, reaching 50.7% high emotionality for macro-influencers, and 87% of those emotions were positive. Male influencers were admired for their expertise, trendy looks and captivating stage presence, and people tend to focus on what the destination can offer rather than getting close to them personally.

The central finding contradicts the widespread industry assumption linking reach to relationship intensity. Macro-influencers are the ones who had the highest levels of emotional intensity but didn't have the biggest following, and mega-influencers showed remarkably low rates of negative commentary (0.7-2.5%), but didn't necessarily correlate with the size of their following. What the study found was that it's not the destination, nor the number of followers that matters most, but the person behind the screen. People can develop a parasocial bond with an influencer after seeing their consistency in day-to-day life, how they perform their gender roles and the style of their storytelling. The emotional reliability of the influencer has a much stronger influence on how well they think of a destination, making influencers basically the main interface for constructing the meaning of a place, rather than just being a means of media.

We propose a multi-stage theoretical model mapping the pathway from influencer persona to follower trust and destination perception: (1) Influencer Persona, composed of authenticity cues, gendered performance, and storytelling style; (2) Parasocial Bonding, co-created through emotionally charged commentary and perceived relational continuity; (3) Trust Formation, signaled through endorsements and moral alignment; and (4) Destination Evaluation, mediated by the influencer's emotional credibility.

Figure 1 – A Multistage Theoretical Model of Influencer Parasocial Trust



Keywords: parasocial relationships, tourism influencer marketing, reach critique, emotional resonance, authenticity.

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Social Media Cultures: A typology for fashion and sustainable fashion influencers on Instagram

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Abstract

This research examines how Instagram influencers in fashion and sustainable fashion communities mobilise genres and storytelling modes to translate sustainable consumption practices into potential adoptable practices. It has been well documented the harms of fast-fashion and the prominence of influencers, but the mechanisms through which platformed influencers could convert consumers in sustainability discourse into everyday action remain underspecified. Treating the fashion and sustainable fashion community as an innovation, this research develops a typology of genres to explain how influence is done and to extend *Diffusion of Innovation (DoI)* to visual, social media environments. Using observational netnography, the study analyses fifteen public Instagram accounts spanning fashion influencers, sustainable fashion educators and activists. The data comprises of reels, carousels, posts, pinned highlights, and comment threads. Iterative coding links content to genres, platform affordances, and indicators of diffusion. Netnography is methodologically apt because the field is a ‘technocultural environment’ in which meaning is co-produced by followers and influencers; it captures situated practices and the relational interpretation of sustainability. Five genres/storytelling modes are defined:

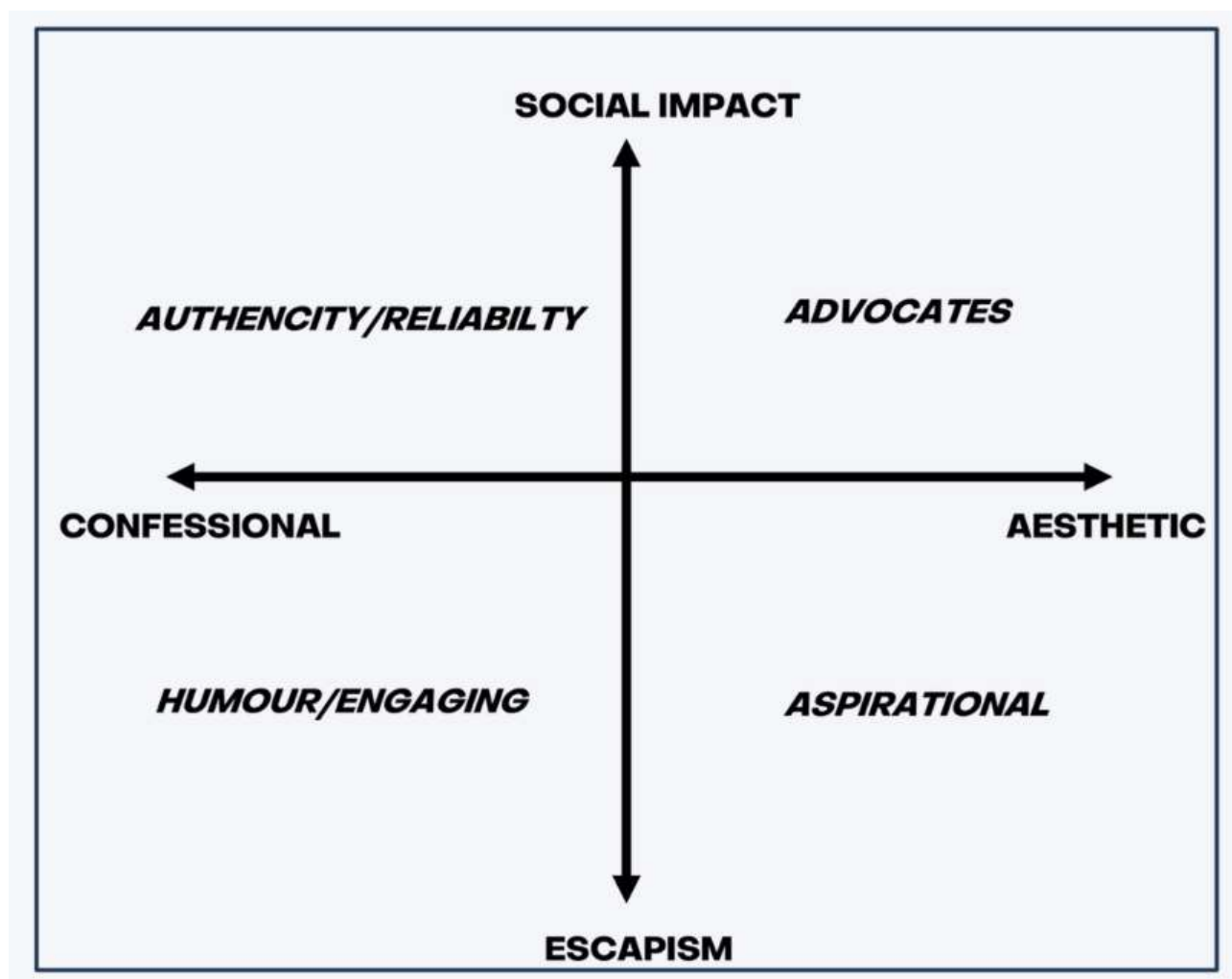
1. *Educational* (explainers, tutorials) reduces perceived complexity and heightens observability (e.g., quality checks, repair demonstrations).
2. *Confessional* (self-disclosure, trade-offs) builds moral credibility and trust.
3. *Testimonial* (identity- and heritage-anchored narratives) situates practice in culture, labour, and memory.
4. *Role-play/Satire* (POV skits, parody) lowers resistance and opens space for learning.
5. *Lifestyle/Aesthetic* (OOTD cycles, day-in-life, coherent palettes) increases compatibility by rendering restraint desirable.

Genres and storytelling modes are not stylistic surface but are *mechanisms of diffusion*. Educational content operationalises DoI attributes by articulating relative advantage, reducing complexity increasing *trialability*, enhancing observability, and cultivating compatibility. Confessional/testimonial modes consolidate early adopters via trust and cultural fit, whereas lifestyle aesthetics broaden reach but risk entanglement with consumerist spectacle. Further, satire destabilises fast-fashion scripts yet often requires educational coupling to convert attention into behaviour. The research recasts DoI as

a *narrative-operational framework* for platformed culture: innovations diffuse as genre-crafted performances enacted by situated messengers, in specific formats, to particular publics. It specifies an authority ecology (educators, testifiers, aesthetic normalisers, satirical disruptors, bridging advocates) whose coordinated outputs address different adoption barriers.

The research sits at a junction of national/diasporic cultures, political-ethical ideologies, fashion communities, and platform infrastructures. The typology shows how these cultures *intersect with technocultural environments*: decolonial testimony travels within diasporic publics; minimalist aesthetics obtain brand-safe legibility; and how humour translates critique for mainstream feeds. Netnography makes these intersections visible, demonstrating how genre choices both reflect and reshape cultural pathways for sustainable fashion. Overall, fashion and sustainable fashion influence does not diffuse as information alone, but it diffuses as story-led, audience-co-produced practice that makes sustainable consumption legible, livable, and worth repeating.

Figure 1 – Genre-Narrative Map



When support is being sold: A netnographic exploration of momfluencers and the commodification of breastfeeding

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Abstract

Becoming a mother is a profoundly transformative experience shaped by social and cultural expectations (Barclay et al., 1997; Laney et al., 2015). In Western societies, motherhood is framed through ideals based on the notion that good mothers should devote extensive time, emotion and money to their children while carefully managing potential risks to their wellbeing (Hays, 1996; Lee et al., 2024). Breastfeeding, a key moral marker of contemporary “good” motherhood, reflects and reinforces these intensive mothering ideals (Faircloth, 2013). Yet, breastfeeding embodies a paradox: although celebrated as a natural and intuitive act, it is simultaneously embedded in a medicalised framework in which mothers are expected to rely on professional guidance to achieve a “successful” breastfeeding experience (Wolf, 2010). Increasingly, this expert authority has extended beyond traditional medical institutions into the digital sphere, where momfluencers, mothers who share their parenting experiences online, have become influential voices shaping maternal feeding practices (Mertens & Beuckels, 2023).

Although previous studies have explored aspects of motherhood, infant feeding, and influencers (Chee et al., 2024; Egmoose et al., 2022; Pilime & Jewett, 2023), the intersection of these domains remains underexplored, particularly from a critical cultural perspective. This study addresses this gap by exploring how momfluencers construct, moralize, and commercialize infant feeding within digital contexts. Methodologically, it employs a netnographic approach (Kozinets, 2020), drawing on eleven months of immersive observation using a double-funnel sampling strategy. Momfluencer profiles discussing infant feeding were initially analysed across Belgium, the Netherlands, the UK, and the US, countries embedded in Western, neoliberal contexts where ideals of intensive mothering and risk management prevail. Patterns of commodification, risk framing, and neoliberal motherhood discourse were most pronounced in UK and US profiles, informing the decision to focus on twelve UK and US accounts exclusively sharing breastfeeding-related content.

Preliminary findings indicate that momfluencers strategically use breastfeeding-related content to construct and perform an online maternal identity aligned with the cultural ideal of the “good mother.” Through affective and relational communication styles, they position themselves as empathetic and authentic figures who share the exhaustion, guilt, and uncertainty experienced by their followers. Yet these performances are deeply entangled with broader discourses of risk culture and neoliberal motherhood. Breastfeeding is frequently framed as a site of risk, such as low milk supply, requiring continuous monitoring and intervention through consumer-oriented solutions, including milk-boosting recipes, supplements, and breast pump technologies. In this process, the natural functions of the maternal body become commodified, transforming vulnerability into affective capital (Abidin, 2016).

Ultimately, the emotional economy curated by momfluencers turns breastfeeding insecurities into market value. Nourishing one's baby becomes inseparable from consuming the "right" products, routines, and expert advice. Following Tronto's (2013) ethics of care, this raises ethical concerns about commodification and moralization of breastfeeding, wherein digital marketplaces suggest that good feeding—and, by extension, good mothering—can be purchased. This logic not only transforms solidarity into strategy and care into capital but also risks marginalizing mothers who lack the financial means to participate in these consumer ideals, thereby reinforcing inequalities within digital motherhood cultures.

Session 8

Food & leisure experiences

Session chair: Anne Gombault

Phygital Labour in Gastro-Experiences: A Netnographic Journey from Farm to Chef's Table

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Abstract

The farm operates as a collective context, signifying a *space* where villagers produce agricultural outputs, while the fine-dining restaurant represents a *place* where consumers engage in experiential consumption of chefs' gastronomical expertise mediated by service providers. Within this selective context, distinctions emerge: consumers who can afford gastronomical delicacies offered by upper-scale brands, and among them, those who possess the cultural capital to appreciate the creative signatures of chefs. Drawing on Bourdieu's (1984) concepts of economic and cultural capital, these capacities form a hierarchy, as democratized foodie identities coexist with intrinsic privileges (Johnston & Baumann, 2010). Veblen's (1899) notion of the leisure class further explains the enthusiastic gastro-consumer subjects who acquire and appreciate objects of fine taste. Taste in our cultures, therefore, remains an implication of elitist mannerisms, even as contemporary processes curate signs of diverse repertoires.

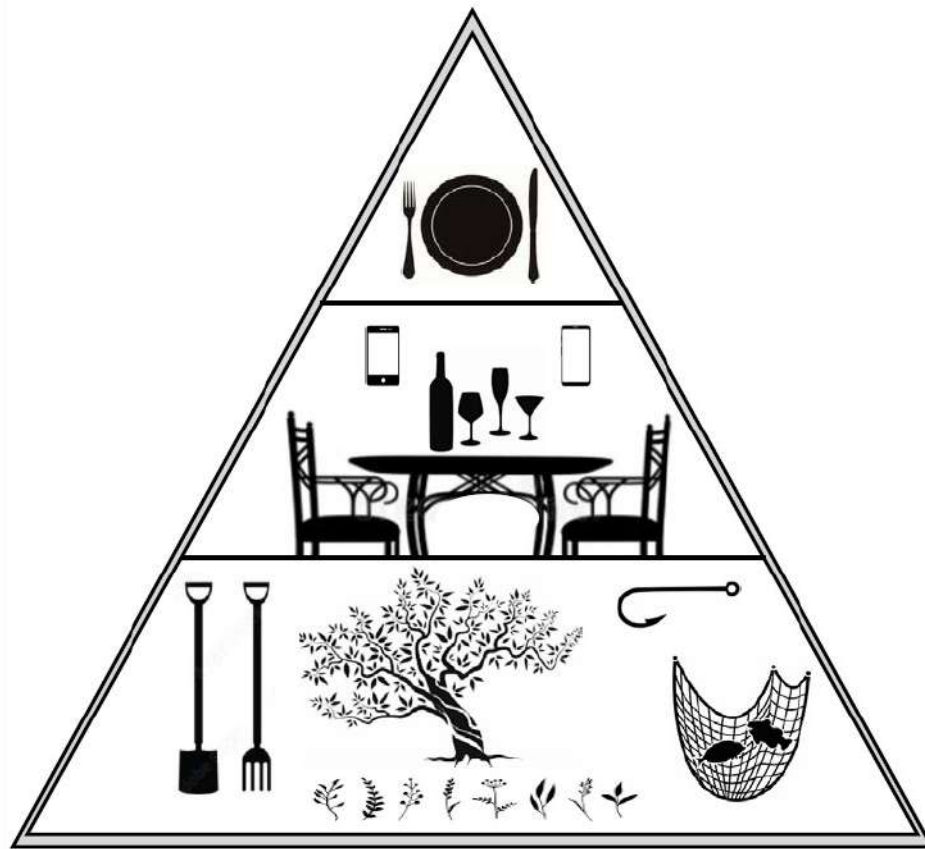
To investigate these dynamics through the cultural works of upscale farm-to-table restaurants, we conducted a netnographic study (Kozinets and Gretzel, 2024) combined with focused ethnography (Woermann, 2018). Our netnographic process involved prolonged engagement with the digital presence of four upscale restaurants of Urla. We closely traced their branding aesthetics as well as their interactions with each other and with the consumer-generated content, such as reviews and tagged posts. This immersion was complemented by on-site

visits to observe physical atmosphere and experiential cues, ensuring a holistic understanding of their branding efforts. This approach enabled us to interpret how the meanings of authenticity, locality, inclusivity, and exclusivity are co-created through storytelling over gastro-experiences, which manifested both in visual and textual forms.

Accordingly, our observations revealed that loyalty to small producers and respect for nature are central to the branding strategies of these establishments. Agricultural production in Urla is not only operationally significant but also symbolically leveraged to construct narratives of environmental sustainability and artisanal quality. However, brand value extends beyond the supply chain. As Erkmen and Hancer (2019) note, consumer satisfaction is influenced by perceptions of fellow diners, while Hyde (2014) emphasizes the role of online reviews in shaping expectations. Likewise, our findings indicate that branding efforts increasingly mirror consumer-generated content, promoting consumer satisfaction. Restaurants frequently repost positive social media content from patrons, reinforcing the participatory nature of branding. Consumers become active agents, contributing to a chain of practices that begins with physical ingredients and culminates in digital representation. We conceptualize this interplay as a pyramid (Figure 1), illustrating how netnography captures the physical and digital labors that shape contemporary gastro-experiences.

This study advances netnography by operationalizing it in a hybrid physical-digital setting, demonstrating how immersive engagement across platforms, places, and spaces can help uncover the process of culminating layered cultural meanings. By sharing our research design employing purposeful selection criteria, multimodal data collection, and iterative analysis, we offer an interesting study to discuss methodological maneuvers we can deliver to explore more of branding, identity, and consumer participation in experiential markets. As a result, we discuss that netnography's adaptability makes it a powerful tool for investigating contemporary phenomena negotiated through both tangible practices and intangible narrations.

Figure 1 – The Interplay Of Physical And Digital Labors In Contemporary Gastro-Experiences



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Unpacking Customer Dissatisfaction in Online Grocery Services: A Netnographic Study of the UK and Italy

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Abstract

This study investigates how customers articulate dissatisfaction in online grocery shopping by comparing two contrasting markets: the UK, a European leader in online grocery adoption, and Italy, a relative laggard. Using a netnographic approach, one- and two-star Trustpilot reviews for the market-leading retailers in each country (Tesco and Esselunga Online) were analyzed through the S–O–R framework. The findings show that not only do the core sources of dissatisfaction differ between the two markets, but the severity of their effects also varies. In the UK, failures often trigger intense anger, loss of trust, and switching intentions. In Italy, similar failures typically resulted in frustration or passive complaints, with many customers continuing to purchase despite recurrent issues.

Keywords: Netnography, Stimulus-organism-response (SOR), Online grocery shopping, Customer dissatisfaction.

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Curating Special Moments through Food Sharing

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to understand the ways in which consumers engage in food-related content sharing during special occasions. To address this aim, this study draws on extant literature on digital consumer engagement and food culture. Digital consumer engagement refers to cognitive, emotional and behavioral connections consumers form with other

marketplace entities across social media platforms (Tafesse, 2016 p.3). Food culture describes individuals' taste preferences, culinary choices, and food-related behaviors (Deng, Xu, Ye, & Sun, 2022, p.1). Digital consumer engagement and food culture intersect across diverse consumption contexts, offering a valuable perspective on capacities, contradictions and negotiations between food, culture, and digitalization (Feldman and Goodman, 2021, p.1228). This relationship becomes particularly important during special occasions, such as birthdays and anniversaries, during which special meanings are created and communicated through diverse kitchen practices. We use netnography (Kozinets, Patterson and Ashman, 2017) to explore food-related consumer experiences. Initially, five Instagram accounts were selected in relation to the research question. The sample was expanded by accessing these initial accounts' follower and following accounts through snowball sampling. In total, 764 Instagram posts on 58 personal accounts were collected for 8 months period from March 25 to November 2025. *In addition, the first author created an Instagram account focused on food, and collected user comment throughout the study period.* The data gathered were coded and analyzed using Gioia method (Gioia, Corley and Hamilton, 2013). Initial findings reveal three key processes marking food-related digital consumer engagement. First, *'embodying consumer emotions through food visuals'* describes a process through which consumer emotions are created, expressed and negotiated through content sharing. Second, *'making meaning around the family table'* denotes a process in which meanings are constructed and shared around the family table, which functions as both a temporal and a spatial place to foster special memories. Finally, *'constructing an occasional identity'* refers to the formation of an ad hoc consumer identity shaped around the feelings of joy, belonging and shared social meaning. This study contributes to research on consumer engagement and food culture by revealing that food sharing does not function merely as a performative act but facilitates consumers to construct and communicate meanings, emotions and an occasional identity.

Keywords: Consumer Engagement, Food Culture, Social Media

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Seeking Solace! Decoding homestay tourism experiences through digital spaces

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Abstract

With the growing urge among travellers for deep experiences and meaningful travel, there is a global surge in preference for homestays in rural and offbeat settings around the globe. Despite this growing popularity, there is limited understanding of the complexity and nuances of homestay experiences, and the role of tranquillity in such scenarios remains unrevealed. Anchored in the theoretical underpinning of experience economy theory, this study employs netnography to examine how travellers experience their homestay consumption. The netnographic analysis of online reviews of the homestays located in the Himalayas was undertaken. The analysis was done using the Gioia methodology, which led to the development of a framework by positioning tranquillity as a central dimension. These findings indicate that the homestay experiences are dominated by escapist and aesthetic experiences in comparison to the educational and entertainment experiences. The study unveiled the multifaceted nature of the homestay experiences, highlighting the interplay between different experiences.

Keywords:

Homestay experiences, Experience economy, Rural homestays, netnography, tranquillity

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Session 9

Rejection, inequality & resistance

Session chair: Lena Cavusoglu

Don't You Know That You're Toxic: Toxicity and Surveillance in the Britney Spears Brandscape

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Abstract

Fandoms are connected to idols, celebrities, and universes that can themselves be considered brandscapes (O'Reilly and Kerrigan 2013). Brandscapes are clusters of meanings promoted by certain market actors and that provide symbolic resources for consumers (Downey and Sherry 2024; Thompson and Arsel 2004). Murakami Wood and Ball (2013) problematize the concept of brandscapes, arguing that these meanings are rooted in consumer surveillance and consumer

data exploitation (Pridmore and Zwick 2011), and also that brandscapes require from consumers affective responses and consumer labor to continuously co-create the brands. It is on this relational nature of surveilling consumer work and providing meanings from this work that entertainment media build brandscapes alongside fandoms (Jenkins 2006).

Fans may continue to affectively invest in a brandscape even when they are affected by changes in actors who constitute it. Muñiz and Schau (2004) have investigated how fans of a brand might continue to invest in its community even after the discontinuation of a focal product and Dressens (2020) shows that fans can engage in toxic practices, feeling entitled and needing to control elements of the brandscape that used to provide them meaning. However, this question gains a renewed importance in the context of music idols and fandoms, whose brandscape is built around surveillance around the idols' personal lives, social media images and visibility under attention economies (Subramanian 2023). Considering idols as brands remain people (Fournier and Eckhardt 2019) subjected to acting inconsistently with the brandscape they feed, we ask: how do fans react to idols' personal journeys and changes when affectively invested in their brandscape?

We investigate the case of the singer Britney Spears and a Reddit forum dedicated to talk about her personal life. We performed a netnography (Kozinets 2020) of the Reddit forum, supplemented with autoethnographic diaries of the authors, who are fans of the singer and have followed her life and career since the 90's, and with press, books, and media materials. We explore how fans dissect, discuss, and analyze the public figure of Spears, connecting it to different aspects of her life that have been the target of major public scrutiny: her body, her love life, and the controversial conservatorship to which she has been subjected and that lies at the origin of the "Free Britney" movement. As the three authors engaged with the data, we understood that surveillance practices of visibility (Lyon 2008) sustain their reaction to changes in the brandscape.

Our findings indicate how fans, when confronted with the social media performances of Spears in her own social media, engage in surveillance practices related to visibility to navigate a brandscape they feel was abandoned by their idol. They try to restore the meanings of the brandscape they were used to by watching the visible parts of Britney's life and career, and by proposing disciplinary measures to restore the brandscape.

Figure 1 – Netnographic Analytical Scheme

Category	Analysis	Example
You drive me crazy: assuming reasons for visibility changes	Fans constantly surveil Spears' videos, photos, and media articles about her behavior. They discuss her actions and constantly attribute to them diagnosis related to mental health or drug usage. In doing this, they also discuss their own personal experiences with this matter, often with a negative tone. They both attribute and dismiss the singer's responsibility in such assumed actions.	"It is a very characteristic symptom of bipolarity and is also common in people with borderline" "Yes that's what I thought when watching this video. I've heard of elderly people with dementia that are in homes and a former teacher enjoys "grading papers" or Dr./Nurse that "visits patients" it made me think of that"
You wanna a piece of me: analyzing the visibility of the body	Fans track all aspects of her body, investigating which plastic surgeries she might have done and how it affected her appearance, the supposed effect of drugs on her looks, what she wears, and which parts of her body she covers or decides to show. There is a nostalgic sense considerably based on the way she looked in her performances and the clothes she wore during her peak stardom era.	"I miss when she used to look clean. Is that too much to ask for again?" "She was such a fucking stunner. Devastating, cause people that beautiful have the ability to look this way until the rest of time if they are healthy. I've seen it in my mom. Actually- my mom and her sister are a very interesting case study in genetics but how ultimately health is what preserves beauty. Growing up, they were both knockouts. 10/10s... but if anything, I might give the edge to my aunt, who shared my moms features but was 5'10 and thin and my mom is a petite 5'4 cutie."

R/unpopularopinion Drone Shows Suck - A Netnography Of Festival Technology Rejection

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Abstract

Technological innovations such as drone shows, virtual reality applications, and AI-driven audience engagement tools are becoming integral to festival and event experiences. Building on recent debates on the digitalisation of events and the technologisation of leisure experiences (Chen & Yu, 2025; Ryan et al., 2020), this study positions festivals and events as contested sites where innovation and tradition clash. While much of the literature highlights the benefits of these technologies—enhanced safety, personalisation, and operational efficiency— (Srivastava, 2025; Sun et al., 2017), less attention has been paid to audience resistance and cultural backlash against such innovations. This paper aims to critically

examine how resistance to technological innovation in festival and event contexts is articulated and negotiated online. Initially focusing on events and festivals, the study explores how perceptions of technological progress intersect with notions of authenticity, tradition, and emotional attachment. The research adopts a team netnography approach (Kozinets, 2020), combining immersive participation with systematic investigation of Reddit communities, such as r/unpopularopinion and r/festivals, and of comments on relevant YouTube videos. Researcher reflections are captured through an immersion journal, enabling a reflexive understanding of online interactions. Thematic analysis will be employed to identify recurring discourses surrounding technology rejection. The analysis is informed by the theory of innovation resistance (Ram & Sheth, 1989), offering a critical lens on how audiences make sense of change in mediated festival/event environments. The findings are expected to reveal key drivers of technology rejection—perceived loss of tradition, emotional disconnection, and aesthetic dissatisfaction—while also highlighting instances of ambivalence and adaptation. The study contributes to event studies and digital leisure research by expanding the understanding of attendees as active cultural participants who negotiate technological change, not only through acceptance but also through resistance. Practically, the paper provides recommendations for event and festival organisers on balancing innovation with cultural continuity and emotional resonance.

Keywords: Innovation resistance, events and festivals, technology rejection, netnography.

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Between Screens and Streets: How Digital Narratives Shape Inequalities in Food Delivery Work

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Abstract

App-based food delivery platforms reconfigured the labor through ratings, algorithmic supervision, and customer evaluation (Huang, 2023). These mechanisms intensify the asymmetry between riders and customers and contribute to material and symbolic vulnerabilities. One in five food delivery workers in the United States has been physically assaulted while working (New York Post, 2024) illustrates the severity of these risks. While research has documented structural forms of marginalization and violence in platform labor (Moares & Betancor Nuez, 2023; Robins, 2025; Zanoni, 2019), far less is known about how digital discourse around rider–customer conflicts reproduces and amplifies these inequalities. This gap matters because public narratives shape moral judgments and normalize expectations about platform labor, yet the discursive infrastructures through which these interpretations emerge remain insufficiently examined (Pangrazio et al., 2023; Recuero, 2024).

Studies on platform governance shows how rating systems, feedback loops, and algorithmic oversight function as mechanisms of symbolic regulation (Cheng et al., 2014; Törnberg, 2023; Jhaver et al., 2023). These systems externalize discipline to customers and turn interactions into datafied exchanges, narrowing recognition and producing transactional closures (Caliandro et al., 2024). Understanding rider-related conflicts therefore requires attention to the digital environments where these events are interpreted and folded into broader narratives about labor, migration, and public order.

The study adopts an immersive netnographic design (Kozinets, 2019; 2023), emphasizing the challenges in locating the digital spaces where meaningful discourse about rider–customer conflicts occurs. An initial difficulty concerned identifying platforms where conversations about riders’ work and the inequalities they face were sufficiently visible and concentrated to serve as analytic material. Although social networks host a large volume of such discussions, they tend to disperse across unrelated topics and appear in fragmented or ephemeral formats, making it challenging to locate stable traces specifically tied to violence. This dispersion led us to use news reports of conflict episodes as an initial entry point. The comment sections attached to these stories offered more stable and traceable discussions, bringing forward affective reactions, stereotypes, and discursive cues that then guided the identification of additional posts across Twitter/X, TikTok, and Reddit. This preliminary mapping guided a cross-platform keyword strategy, allowing systematic retrieval of multimodal content. Initial dataset comprises 45 international news articles and 194-pages of immersive journals. Intersectionality (Collins & Bilge, 2020) informed the inductive relational coding, enabling to trace how identity categories combine with affective elements to produce symbolic hierarchies.

Preliminary findings reveal how digital publics enact symbolic violence through racism, xenophobia, gendered shaming, nationalist framings, and classed territoriality. These conversations expose systems of relational disintermediation in food delivery: platform companies remain largely absent from conflict mediation, while publics assign blame,

legitimacy, or suspicion directly onto riders. This absence of governance contributes to emergence of further discursive and structural violence.

The study shows that digital reactions to rider–customer conflicts help produce the everyday interpretive frames through which platform work is judged. These routine discourses naturalize unequal power relations, revealing that riders’ realities, often treated as platform commonsense (Casas-Cortés, 2021), still contain deeper layers of inequality formation.

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Negotiating the cultural challenges of nonviolent communication: a multi-method netnographic study

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Abstract

Nonviolent communication (NVC), both a common and legitimate tool in health and educational domains, is a significant approach for conflict resolution (Rosenberg, 2003). Regardless of the benefits such as self-compassion and anger reduction (Suarez et al., 2014) it may still pose a challenge in daily life, as it can conflict with prevailing norms of communication. One plausible criticism concerns its assumption of universal human needs ignoring the role of culture in determining needs and values (Julia et al., 2024). The perceived artificiality of the language (Altmann, 2010; Nosek and Duran, 2017) as a structural challenge is specifically of uttermost attention. Practitioners also struggle with the prescriptive nature of the language employed in NVC despite its success in fostering empathy (Juncadella, 2013). This effort emphasized here is interpersonal as well as interactional. As debates over NVC generally move between its normative aspects and complex daily interactions (Burleson et al. 2011) this study aims to fill the gap by immersing in digital communities’ conversing and uncover how cultural frictions are negotiated and transformed.

This study is based on a multi-method qualitative approach. In the first phase, interviews with 21 NVC practitioners were conducted. In these interviews, first-hand insights into practitioner experiences and challenges about NVC in daily life have been captured. The most salient theme was tension regarding the difficulty of the 'request' stage and the formulaic nature of the language, coupled with difficulties towards directness in close relationships which have an adverse effect on its sustainable implementation (Erel, 2025). In order to shed light on these unique tensions through an unbiased and unfiltered negotiation, Reddit has been chosen as it provides access to user-created communities (Proferes et al., 2021) where real-life communication tensions can be expressed more openly with anonymity.

In the initiation phase following Kozinets and Gretzel’s (2023) approach, the netnographic research question was framed as follows: How are the offline cultural challenges created in the

context of NVC negotiated in digital communities, and how does the dual reflexivity of researchers illuminate the path from mechanistic perceptions to authentic meaning-making?

Two of the reserachers, one who has received NVC training and the other who has not, will keep an immersion journal for three months. The first reseracher will provide an insider perspective by documenting the internal struggles in the process, whereas the second researcher will offer an outsider theoretical lens as an expert in the field of intercultural communication. In the investigation phase, comments related to cultural and relational tensions will be collected until saturation is reached.

In the last phase of integration, the data originating from the initial interviews, online community, and dual reflexive journals will be subject to comparison and the outcome will shed light on the re-negotiations and adaptations of NVC method. Results are considered to guide NVC trainers to design culturally relevant content and inspire more authentic and sustainable peace efforts.

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Session 10

Social media and personal branding netnographies

Session chair: Thaysa Costa do Nascimento

The Digital Visibility Paradox: A Netnographic Investigation of Hyperreal Nature, Travel Desire, and Environmental Fragility Across Digital Platforms

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Abstract

This study introduces the Digital Visibility Paradox, referring to the way digital platforms can simultaneously generate travel desire and enable critical reflection on the environmental consequences of that desire. Digital platforms increasingly mediate how fragile environments — destinations facing accelerating threats from climate change — are seen, valued, and imagined. Through continuous digital circulation, these sites are transformed into objects of desire via visual representations that produce hyperreal nature — images more vivid and emotionally intensified than the environments they depict. Follower comments frequently express astonishment, emotional engagement, and strong travel desire.

This study adopts a netnographic approach to examine these behavioral and discursive patterns. The research unfolds across three phases, moving from visual platform analysis to discursive spaces, and toward a synthesizing conceptual framework. Phase I analyzes the content and follower comments of five Instagram travel influencer accounts, selected from an initial pool of twelve based on follower count, content originality, and comment density criteria, focusing on Greenland and Iceland between 2022 and 2025 — destinations where climate change pressures are visible and digital representations actively intensify tourism desire (Smith, 2021).

Supported by immersion journal notes (Kozinets, 2020), Phase I examines how content creators aestheticize environmentally vulnerable destinations while stimulating interest in on-site visitation. Preliminary findings indicate recurring expressions of astonishment (e.g., “unbelievable,” “too incredible to be true,” “extraterrestrial”) and aspiration (e.g., “this is on my bucket list,” “I have to go ASAP”). These expressions can be interpreted through Baudrillardian ideas of simulacrum, as users respond to digitally mediated representations rather than to destinations as complex geographical realities. Instagram comments suggest that travel desire

is driven primarily by aesthetic captivation and mediated perception rather than by explicit urgency or last-chance motivation (Eijgelaar et al., 2010). Importantly, the two destinations produce distinct hyperreality modes: Iceland more frequently activates travel desire, while Greenland generates stronger aesthetic admiration with comparatively weaker expressions of intended visitation.

Phase II examines how these digitally intensified representations are discussed and problematized in discursive spaces. Rather than seeking direct convergence between platforms, this phase maps the structural tensions that emerge when the same destinations circulate as objects of desire on one platform and as sites of critique on another. The analysis extends to Reddit communities, particularly r/Iceland and r/Greenland, where Reddit's deliberative and anonymous architecture contrasts with Instagram's visually performative logic. While Instagram foregrounds aesthetic spectacle, Reddit allows users to discuss concerns around environmental pressure, overtourism, responsibility, and changing relationships to place.

By bringing these layers together, the study develops a conceptual framework around three structural tension points that constitute the Digital Visibility Paradox: (1) desire versus critique — the same destination can function both as a bucket-list object and as a site of ethical contestation; (2) visibility versus protection — digital visibility can raise awareness of environmental fragility while also increasing the tourism pressure that may intensify it; and (3) individual aspiration versus collective consequence — users may express personal travel desire, while online communities negotiate broader questions of responsibility, sustainability, and place-based impact.

Keywords: Hyperreality, Climate Change, Travel Desire, Netnography, Digital Visibility Paradox

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Missionary Masculinity: the role of digital platforms on manhood restoration

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Abstract

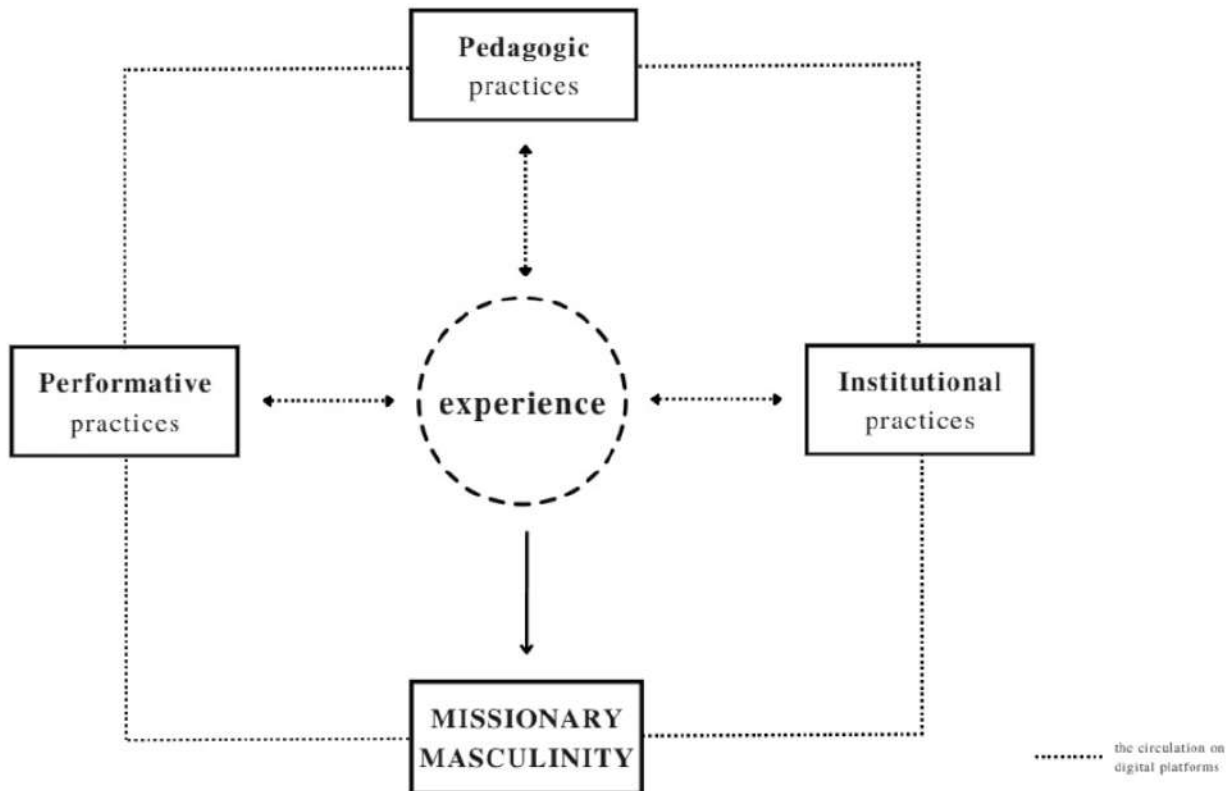
Literature has recently examined the masculinity crisis, where consumption and religion emerge as strategies to restore masculine ideals and repair gender roles (Siles et al., 2023; Coskuner-Balli & Thompson, 2013). These dynamics gain further relevance as these narratives circulate across digital platforms, fostering aspirational masculine models and disseminating conservative gender discourses (Giorgi, 2021). Less attention, however, has been given to the underlying ideologies that circulate through these mediated environments and to the mechanisms that enable their amplification and normalization.

To address this matter, we investigate how digital platforms mediate the production, performance, and legitimation of hegemonic masculinity. Through a netnographic study, we explore the digital narratives of the Legendários, a contemporary Christian men's movement in Brazil that blends physical endurance, moral discipline, and digital performance. Similar to the mountain men described by Belk and Costa (1998), participants seek renewal through hardship, fraternity, and immersion in nature. The difference is that the Legendários adopt a religious rhetoric that seeks to reassert masculinity. Our dataset includes 450 screenshots from Instagram, over 100 reels, the monitoring of more than 20 Legendários profiles from different Brazilian cities, and over 50 pages of immersion notes. To understand how market, gender, and religious discourses intersect and circulate on social media, we adopted discourse analysis.

Findings reveal three interdependent dynamics. First, platforms sustain the *Pedagogy of Masculinity*, a learning structure that instructs men in expected values and behaviors. Practices centered on obedience, service, and physical discipline cultivate leadership, self-control, and resilience, while digital mediation standardizes and circulates these practices as markers of legitimate masculinity. Second, platforms enable *Performative Legitimation* by converting individual experiences into visible, aestheticized acts. Emotional intensity and ritualized behaviors become shareable content that signals devotion and transformation, attracting new participants by portraying change as attainable and socially validated. Third, platforms support the *Institutionalization of Moral Order* through the expansion and coordination of the movement. Digital infrastructures facilitate recruitment, highlight leadership figures, and display event replication across locations, stabilizing the movement's ethos and allowing its pedagogies and moral expectations to be reproduced.

These dynamics co-create a model of masculine authority that we term *Missionary Masculinity*, defined as a form of gendered moral authority in which masculinity is constructed as a collective mission to be learned, performed, and propagated through religiously grounded practices. This conceptualization constitutes the central contribution of our research, with implications for gender studies, consumption, religion, and digital culture.

Figure 1 - The Co-Creation of the Missionary Masculinity Model



Keywords: masculinity, digital platforms, ideology.

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Navigating the Hatescape: How Lgbtq+ Influencers Repurpose Online Opposition For Visibility

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Abstract

Driven by rapid shifts in social identity recognition, the contentious nature of global LGBTQ+ issues is sustained by a feedback loop where increased online visibility both fuels and is amplified by social opposition (Brenchenmacher, 2025). Social media influencers (SMIs) are not immune to this dynamic as digital spaces amplify LGBTQ+ voices, turning their identity and life experiences into forms of symbolic capital. This visibility is countered by growing anti-LGBTQ+ sentiment, exposing queer self-expression to digital backlash (Duguay, 2023), forcing creators to navigate blurred boundaries between personal and public life.

In this context, SMIs' emotional labor (Hochschild, 2012) becomes a continuous process of regulating emotions to preserve marketability, authenticity, and community connection (Heeris Christensen et al., 2024). This work often results in self-exploitation, as identity becomes ongoing labor shaped by platform affordances (Szabo, 2025). While platforms provide tools that support participatory activism, they also enable interactions that facilitate abusive behaviors against LGBTQ+ influencers. Navigating this tension between visibility and hostility, we explore how identity-based creators engage in emotional labor to reframe backlash as a means of 'performing pride' online.

Through netnography methodology and deep data obtained from immersive journaling (Kozinets, 2015), we trace strategies of identity self-exploitation in curated content production. Analyzing Instagram and TikTok accounts from Spanish LGBTQ+ influencers, our study foregrounds how backlash emerges and impacts SMIs' labor. Drawing on the nontarget market effect (Aaker et al., 2000), we examine negative reactions from audiences who feel excluded from the intended message (LGBTQ+ outgroup).

The purpose of this research is to map the labor strategies SMIs employ when identity becomes a marketable form of difference. We aim to highlight the controversy dynamics at stake between SMIs and their audience when the latter is split into detractors and promoters. Preliminary findings show that detractors' backlash can be conceptualized as a visibility strategy reinforcing symbolic capital and promoters' solidarity, forming a backlash-visibility loop. Finally, we intend to reveal how SMIs navigate platform affordances to set barriers against backlash, highlighting how identity burdens migrate into digital sphere and how forms of emotional labor are instrumentalized to leverage the challenges LGBTQ+ influencers face.

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#Delulu Worlds: A Netnography Of Digital Utopianism And Belief-Driven Consumption Ideologies

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Abstract

This paper explores the Delulu phenomenon—a digitally mediated belief system promoting the conviction that fantasies, desires, and imagined futures will materialize through affective investment and manifestation practices. It investigates its circulation across digital platforms through a netnographic lens. While rooted in earlier utopian thinking and “positive mindset” ideologies (Demopoulos, 2023; Patrício, 2024), Delulu has evolved far beyond its initial humorous presence in K-pop fandoms, becoming an influential delusional consumption ideology embedded in contemporary digital consumer culture.

Drawing on ideological consumption theory (Schmitt et al., 2022), we conceptualize delusional consumption ideology as a system of ideas and ideals related to the belief in self-actualization through manifestation, expressed in consumers’ lived experiences, social representations, and communicative actions in digital marketplaces. Following Kozinets’ (2019) framework of digital utopianism, we show how Delulu operates as a utopian apparatus of self-actualization, marketplace formation, and ritualized consumption, blurring the boundaries between aspiration and illusion, fantasy and lived reality. While existing research on aspirational labor (Duffy, 2016), fantasy and escapism (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982; MacLaran & Brown, 2005), and affect in digital spaces (Striphas, 2015; Paasonen, 2021) does not yet account for how fantasy and reality become fully entangled in platformized environments, Delulu dissolves this boundary. It invites consumers to inhabit their imagined futures and to treat manifestation routines, visualization practices, and ritualized witchcraft aesthetics as consumption rituals capable of shaping real outcomes.

Methodologically, we adopt a netnographic research design (Kozinets, 2020), relying on multiple interpretive engagements (Kozinets & Gretzel, 2024) across platform contexts such as TikTok, Instagram, YouTube, and Reddit, where Delulu is preached and practiced. Our dataset

comprises so far multimodal social media traces, including 2,156 comments, 154 archival sources, and 257 pages of immersive journals. Through iterative cultural analysis of discursive flows, visual artifacts, aesthetic routines, and affective practices, our netnography uncovers the “Delulu grammar” as a combination of educational content asserting metaphysical conviction, manifestation journaling practices, ritualized spells and symbolic objects, Chat GPT-mediated scripting, and entrepreneurial reinterpretations of Delulu as a business mindset. These practices collectively affirm a delusional consumption ideology fueled by algorithmic visibility, aestheticized hope, and community validation.

Our findings reveal Delulu as a form of *metopian* world-building—personalized affective scripts enabling consumers to rehearse utopian futures—and as a *wetopian* force of collective empowerment that normalizes an ideology of self-belief reinforced through mimicry behaviors (Kozinets, 2019). We show that algorithmic and affordance structures materially shape technosocial realities—symbolic, material, and connective spaces shaped by platform affordances and algorithmic amplification—in which delusional ideologies flourish, turning fantasies into emotionally compelling, shareable, and monetizable cultural scripts.

This study offers important methodological implications by foregrounding netnography’s capacity to surface ideological entanglements. Immersive journals document how researchers’ own beliefs, emotions, and assumptions are reshaped by engagement with the field, revealing netnography as a co-constructed space of self-awareness and self-transformation where researchers become part of the ideological ecosystem they study. This reflective intimacy positions netnography as a method uniquely suited to examining belief-driven consumption ideologies and their affective, technosocial infrastructures.

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Session 11

Digital intimacies and vulnerabilities

Session chair: Ebru Uzunoglu

Digital Spaces and Netnography in Healthcare Research

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Abstract

Digital spaces have become central to how care is experienced, negotiated, and delivered in contemporary health ecosystems (Marques & Ferreira, 2019). These spaces include digital communities, electronic health records, virtual worlds, wearable technologies, and telemedicine (World Health Organisation, 2023). Their widespread use has driven the exponential growth of digitised health data, now accounting for approximately 30% of global data generation (Thomason, 2024). These datasets are increasingly recognised not merely as sources of information but as strategic assets for research, decision-making, and innovation (Vasilica et al., 2021). However, navigating these complex spaces, where cultures of care emerge and evolve, requires transdisciplinary approaches to create meaning, advance evidence, and inform practice.

Netnography offers a unique methodological lens to examine these spaces, uncovering how individuals and groups co-create meaning, share knowledge, and support each other in digital settings (Sadat et al., 2025). Insights generated through this approach can inform service provision and enhance the design of person-centred interventions.

This paper explores the integration of netnography within healthcare research through a multidisciplinary approach, combining insights from health sciences, social sciences, and digital research. Using a multiple case study design, we analyse three contexts: (1) chronic kidney disease, (2) chronic pancreatitis, and (3) a rehabilitation programme. Studies apply blended elements of auto-, symbolic-, and humanist netnography.

- The first strand examines chronic kidney disease, focusing on how patients and caregivers engage in online communities to manage uncertainty and access peer support. It centres on the Kidney Information Network, a national network for people with chronic kidney disease and carers, comprising over 2,000 individuals with lived experience, and draws on longitudinal insights from micro-communities over a 10-year period. This work also highlights how these insights contributed to the spin-out of KIN into a social enterprise.
- The second strand investigates chronic pancreatitis, aiming to understand patient experiences and identify supportive strategies that enhance care and well-being.
- The final strand examines the use of netnography within a study of social media engagement embedded in a Randomized Controlled Trial (RCT), applying a 'Study Within A Trial' approach and incorporating a qualitative inquiry into patient engagement in research.

Together, these cases demonstrate the value of netnography in capturing the dynamics of care cultures, including patterns of engagement, knowledge exchange, social capital, and long-term impact. This approach also uncovers unmet information needs and contextual factors that shape health and social outcomes. Netnography complements traditional methodologies used in health research such as RCTs and advances knowledge in person-centred and digitally enabled care models. As healthcare systems increasingly rely on digital ecosystems, embedding netnographic methods within research and practice offers a powerful pathway to inform policy, complement structured systems (e.g., electronic health records), enhance service design, and foster organisational learning.

Keywords: netnography, health research, online communities, digital health, health information

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Happily Ever After?: Netnographic Exploration of the Post-Wedding Afterlife

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Abstract

From TikTokker Becca Bloom's Lake Como celebration to Anant Ambani's widely publicized vows, contemporary weddings are re-emerging not merely as symbolic affective rituals but as aestheticized performances. Post-pandemic data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention show rising marriage rates, suggesting a renewed cultural valuation of formalized affective commitments following the COVID-19 rupture of social life. Parallel media narratives indicate that Generation Z increasingly views marriage as a strategy to counter loneliness (Evans, 2025) and navigate intensifying social and economic pressures (Schlott, 2025).

Within this context, contemporary romantic practices celebrating emotional bonding and affective intimacy appear to signal a "new romantic turn": an orientation that seeks to reclaim emotional intensity after years of hyper-individualism, yet one that remains inseparable from the techno-mediation. Consumer research has long examined these transformations, drawing on Bauman's (2013) liquid love and Illouz's (2012) architecture of romantic choices, which conceptualize intimacy as governed by expectations of efficiency, control, and emotional safety. More recent scholarship argues that we are witnessing a "new romance" era in which relationships are increasingly formed, managed, and dissolved within digital environments designed to minimize interpersonal risk and maximize convenience (Hobbs et al., 2017; Rus et al. and Tiemensma, 2017). These tendencies are especially visible in contemporary romantic rituals—above all weddings—now orchestrated through social media platforms that guide inspiration seeking, vendor selection, and decision-making, while simultaneously functioning as stages for performative displays of individuality and participation in collective spectacles (Kay et al., 2019).

Yet, despite substantial scholarly attention to the production and performance of this new romance, the afterlives of contemporary romantic rituals remain underexamined. Little is known about how individuals experience the post-ritual phase within this new romantic turn, how couples articulate intimacy once the rites end, and how these affective residues reverberate across relationships and marketplace encounters. Examining this phase is crucial to observe the consumption and coping practices through which emotional bonding is sustained—and at times reconfigured—within the new romance.

As such, this study presents a netnography (Kozinets, 2020) examining the post-ritual phase of weddings, the most emblematic romantic ceremony currently undergoing a cultural

resurgence. Specifically, we investigate which emotions arise once the ritual concludes, how they stimulate new consumption practices, and what role social media plays in shaping the aftermath.

Preliminary findings indicate that the social media commemoration of weddings intensifies social and psychological pressures. These pressures lead couples to turn to social platforms after the ceremony to express a pronounced sense of emptiness, akin to postpartum affect, or anxiety tied to perceived insufficiency—an apprehension that they failed to make the event sufficiently

memorable—which can foster identity dissonance rooted in unmet performative expectations. These affective responses propel couples toward market-mediated forms of remediation, including psychological counselling by wedding planners or therapists and post-wedding photography intended to symbolically reframe the ceremony.

Methodologically, this study advances netnographic inquiry by showing how it can illuminate not only the performative unfolding of a ritual but also its affective, relational, and techno-mediated afterlives.

Keywords: new romance, wedding, post-ritual, netnography

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Help-Seeking and Expertise in Online Substance-Use Communities: Findings from a Scoping Review

Abstract

Informal digital environments have become vital spaces where individuals affected by substance use disorders seek information, share experiences, and access peer support beyond formal treatment systems (Eichenberg & Auersperg, 2021; Greiner et al., 2017). Across social media platforms, discussion forums, and online communities, people exchange practical advice, emotional support, and harm-reduction strategies that shape everyday health practices (Andersson & Kjellgren, 2019; Bunting et al., 2023). Yet, these user-led and experience-based interactions remain scattered across platforms and are rarely synthesized systematically.

As part of the PhD project, this scoping review contributes to filling this gap by comprehensively mapping informal digital platforms and user-generated help- and information-seeking behaviors related to substance misuse. Following the PRISMA-ScR guidelines, a systematic search was conducted in MEDLINE, Embase, PsycINFO, Web of Science, and relevant gray-literature sources. Studies were included if they examined non-institutional, user-driven digital environments addressing substance use, harm reduction, or recovery. Data were extracted and coded using the R-AIDE framework, allowing for structured comparison across multiple dimensions: e.g., platform type, substance focus, user practices, and interaction modalities. A total of 235 studies met the inclusion criteria, spanning diverse methodological approaches and digital contexts.

For the presentation at NETNOCON26, a subset of eleven netnographic studies is examined in depth to illustrate how online substance-use communities reveal the transformation of help-seeking and expertise in the digital era. These analyses show that help-seeking unfolds as a decentralized, iterative, and relational process rather than a linear pathway into formal care. Within forums, subreddits, and peer networks, individuals disclose struggles, negotiate identities of addiction and recovery, and collectively generate experiential knowledge that bridges emotional support with practical harm-reduction advice. Platform affordances such as anonymity, pseudonymity, and asynchronous communication lower stigma barriers and facilitate early engagement, enabling participants to test strategies, seek reassurance, and build confidence prior to engaging with professional services.

At the same time, the examined netnographies demonstrate that digital spaces constitute dynamic ecosystems of distributed expertise in which authority is negotiated rather than prescribed. Experienced users, self-identified professionals, and so-called “e-psychonauts” occupy hybrid roles as both learners and teachers, sharing experiential and technical insights about substances, withdrawal, and recovery. These peer-to-peer exchanges democratize access to knowledge, challenge traditional hierarchies between experts and patients, and often anticipate emerging risks or novel psychoactive trends before they appear in formal surveillance data. However, they also highlight tensions between empowerment and precarity: the accuracy of shared information varies, community norms can amplify risk-taking or stigmatizing discourses, and moderation policies shape the boundaries of what kinds of help and expertise are permissible.

Collectively, the synthesis of these eleven netnographic studies underscores that digital peer spaces are not peripheral but integral to contemporary help-seeking landscapes. They function as informal infrastructures of care and expertise, complementing, challenging, and increasingly informing formal health systems. Recognizing and ethically engaging with these user-driven environments offers critical opportunities for more participatory, context-sensitive, and health-literate approaches to digital harm reduction and recovery support.

Keywords: scoping review, substance abuse, digital self-help

Incel Identity in Italy: A Netnography of a Forum and a Discursive Typology Across “Pill Theories”

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Abstract

The phenomenon of incels (involuntary celibates) has been widely studied in Anglophone contexts as part of the broader online “manosphere” (Aiolfi et al., 2024), but the Italian space remains relatively underexplored. This gap is particularly relevant given that, unlike in other contexts characterized by fragmented platforms, in Italy a large and relatively centralized incel community has emerged around a major online forum. This proposal presents the results of a qualitative study conducted within this Italian incel community.

Through a process of digital ethnography and participant observation (Kozinets, Gretzel, 2024) – involving registration on the forum and systematic monitoring of discussions over a six-month period (May–October 2025) – we collected a corpus of approximately 700 threads and 8,000 comments, providing access to the group’s discursive practices and identity-construction processes (De Vettor et al., 2025). The analysis is based on thematic analysis of the textual material.

Rather than imposing analytical categories a priori, the study takes as its starting point the ways in which users themselves mobilize and negotiate the main “pill theories” of the incel subculture (Aiolfi et al., 2024). This process made it possible to identify four ideal-typical positions. Black pills represent the most extreme and nihilistic stance, interpreting relational dynamics through a deterministic lens (aesthetic value, status hierarchies) and often legitimizing hostility toward women and “normies”. Red pills share a strongly anti-feminist and hierarchical view of gender relations, but allow for some degree of individual agency (self-improvement, seduction strategies), partially attenuating black-pill fatalism. Blue pills occupy a less radical position: while identifying with the incel label, they show greater openness to dialogue and sometimes question the community’s more aggressive rhetoric. Finally, white pills—sometimes described as “enlightened”—emerge as an internal critical voice, challenging generalized victimhood and aesthetic determinism, and introducing narratives

centered on personal responsibility, psychological well-being, and the possibility of affective relationships (De Vettor et al., 2025).

The proposed typology highlights the non-homogeneous nature of the Italian incel community under study and suggests that this forum should be understood as an ambivalent social space, where dynamics of misogynistic closure coexist with more fragile and minority attempts to critically rework incel identity and gender relations (Aiolfi et al., 2024; Lindsay, 2022). The presentation discusses the implications of these findings for understanding the internal differentiation of incel communities and the conditions under which less radical positions may emerge in digital environments.

Keywords: *Incel, Black Pill, White Pill, Netnography, Forum Observation*

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Session 12

Consumer collectives and cultural objects

Session chair: Michael Mulvey

Parenting, Resourcing, and Inclusion in Social Media (PRISM): Mapping LGBTQ+ Parenting Communities at the Cultural Crossroads

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Abstract

Digital platforms have become vital social infrastructures through which contemporary parenting identities are negotiated, performed, and supported (Bridges et al., 2018). The experience of LGBTQ+ parents is unique (Leal et al., 2021), and online spaces often serve as crucial sites of connection, validation, and advocacy—spaces where traditional cultural scripts of family, gender, and care intersect with algorithmic and platformed technocultures. The Parenting, Resourcing, and Inclusion in Social Media (PRISM) project explores how digital environments shape the lived experiences of LGBTQ+ parents navigating early parenthood in Australia. Conceptualised as a four-stage, multi-method program, PRISM draws on the principles of netnography (Kozinets, 2015) to illuminate the complex interplay between community belonging, cultural representation, and digital inclusion.

Stage 1 of the project, supported by internal funding from Western Sydney University and conducted in partnership with Australian community organisation Rainbow Families, employs a pilot netnographic mapping of LGBTQ+ parenting networks across multiple social media platforms. This stage integrates literature review, digital ethnographic observation, and participatory consultation via a discovery workshop. Together, these approaches reveal the breadth and diversity of online parenting cultures that exist at the intersection of family, identity, and technoculture (Alang & Fomotar, 2015). Preliminary findings indicate that LGBTQ+ parents mobilise digital affordances to co-create alternative narratives of care that challenge heteronormative models of parenting, yet they also encounter tensions arising from algorithmic visibility, datafication, and platform governance (Blackwell et al., 2016). Methodologically, the PRISM project contributes to ongoing debates about how netnography can ethically and effectively capture plural and intersectional experiences within sensitive digital contexts. This multi-layered approach seeks to advance netnographic praxis by integrating community partnership models and reflexive ethical protocols that respond to emerging challenges in researching marginalised groups, with unique relatedness needs (Jia et al., 2021) online.

Situated within the NETNOCON 2026 theme of Cultural Crossroads, this presentation will discuss the early insights and methodological lessons learned from PRISM's first stage, and invites discussion on how netnography can contribute to more inclusive understandings of family, belonging, and digital participation in contemporary technocultural environments (McLevey et al., 2024). Feedback from conference participants will inform the subsequent stages of PRISM, which will extend to survey and interview research exploring how digital platforms shape parental identity, social support, and resource access.

By foregrounding both the ethical and methodological innovation of its pilot phase, PRISM offers a reflexive model for netnographic inquiry within complex cultural intersections. It demonstrates how netnography can illuminate—and potentially transform—the digital ecologies through which community, care, and cultural meaning are continually remade.

Keywords: netnography; LGBTQ+ parenting; digital inclusion; technoculture; community Mapping

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Constructing Cultural Object Biographies Through Symbolic Nethnography: A Study Of Nvidia Gtx 1080 Ti And Intel Core I5-2500k Computer Components Within The Pc-Building Subculture

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Abstract

This research employs a symbolic nethnographic approach to study the two highly revered products of the digitally mediated global consumer subculture (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995) of PC builders in the context of planned obsolescence. Data were collected from the r/PCMasterRace subreddit, which serves as the largest hub for the community's discourse. In total, 443 threads with the most engagement all-time, centred around the Intel Core i5-2500K processor and the NVIDIA GeForce GTX 1080 Ti graphics card, were examined in order to construct the cultural biographies of these products (Kopytoff, 1986). The findings are later discussed to answer the question: how do they remain relevant despite becoming outdated from a technical standpoint?

Within the PC-building community, specialised technical knowledge regarding product specifications and troubleshooting skills function as the subcultural capital (Thornton, 1996). The ethos of this community promotes economically prudent consumption, expressed by purchasing components with the best price-for-performance ratio and constructing a system that defies planned obsolescence for as long as possible. Members identify as active prosumers who assemble their custom, personalised systems, sharply distinguishing themselves from passive buyers of pre-built devices (Przepiórkowski, 2021), though the community is not actively gatekept due to the educational nature of its forums. PC builders share numerous rituals, most notably benchmarking, where empirical data is used to evaluate products and actively contest narratives pushed by marketers, between whom and consumer subcultures, Schouten and McAlexander suggested the possibility of only a symbiotic relationship. That remains accurate to a certain extent, as proven by the introduction of mainstream products that appropriate the subculture's distinct PC aesthetic (see Figure 1), similarly to Harley-Davidson's mass-produced motorcycle models that imitate bikers' customisations.

The Intel Core i5-2500K and the NVIDIA GTX 1080 Ti have achieved their singular status due to their significantly longer lifespan compared to other products in their respective categories. They remained competitive choices in light of the underwhelming performance improvement of subsequent generations. Years after the release, both products became the gold standards for value, continuously serving as a significant symbolic critique of modern pricing strategies and dishonest marketing campaigns. They serve as a nostalgic reminder of an era where consumers had a better relationship with the manufacturers.

This study contributes to the understanding of the lifecycle of technological products past their presence on the market and “end-of-life” technical support termination. It is also the first nethnographic study on the digital community of PC-builders, which before was only investigated through traditional qualitative methods.

Figure 1 – PC-building community’s aesthetics



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Crafting Connection: A Netnographic Exploration of Consumer Culture and Consumer Behavior in Online Needlepoint Communities

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Abstract

This study explores how engagement in online needlepoint communities fosters offline participation and consumer behavior, revealing how creativity, mentorship, and shared identity are collectively constructed across digital and physical spaces. While research on consumer tribes and social identity has examined brand communities and fan cultures, little attention has been paid to craft-based digital collectives where leisure, artistry and commerce intertwine. Grounded in consumer culture theory (Arnould & Thompson, 2005; Arnould et al., 2019; Schau et al., 2009) and the literature on consumer tribes (Cova & Cova, 2002; Kozinets, 2020), this research investigates how digital engagement within needlepoint groups translates into real-world behaviors such as event participation, collective learning, and enhanced consumption practices.

This inquiry is important because it reveals how digital communities shape engagement and IRL event participation. This matters because online communities preserve, modernize, and revitalize creative traditions that connect generations. Understanding how these groups sustain cultural identity and mentorship has implications for consumer culture in how digital spaces keep analog practices alive. These insights are valuable to both marketers and consumer researchers such that by uncovering the mechanisms that animate these tightly bonded online groups, the study sheds light on how communities influence marketplace behaviors in ways that extend far beyond the screen.

Methodologically, the project employs an analytic-inductive qualitative design (Tracy, 2024), combining a netnography of online needlepoint communities with in-depth interviews with active participants. The netnography documents online discussions, posts, and visual narratives that illustrate how meaning and identity are co-created through digital exchange. Immersive journaling will capture the researcher's reflexive engagement and evolving theoretical sensitivity (Kozinets, 2020). The subsequent interview phase deepens

understanding of how these digital interactions translate into offline engagement manifested in “stitch-alongs,” meetups, trunk shows, retreats, and other community rituals.

Preliminary analysis suggests that online participation functions as both creative apprenticeship and social belonging, reinforcing participants’ sense of expertise and legitimacy within the craft community. The findings are expected to extend conceptualizations of digital collectivism by demonstrating how needlepoint practices are revitalized through digital sociability. This dual-space engagement provides fertile ground for exploring how netnographic immersion reveals the connective tissue between affect, identity, and consumption practices.

By bridging digital and analog participation, this study contributes to discussions of transformative netnography, highlighting how creative expression and community formation can yield both cultural and commercial outcomes. For marketers, the research offers insights into how online group dynamics influence consumer learning, purchase behavior, and community-led brand engagement within niche markets. For scholars, it positions netnography as a vital method for examining hybrid cultural fields where digital creativity sustains traditional practices.

Keywords: consumer tribes, digital collectivism, consumer culture theory, immersion journaling, netnography

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Understanding “Sultans of Dubai” through Netnography

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Abstract

Dubai is also one of the Gulf Region's most complex cultural crossroads. Dubai has almost four million residents, 92% of whom are expats (https://www.globalmediainsight.com/blog/dubai-population-statistics/#Dubai_Population_2025_Key_Statistics, Reached Nov. 25th, 2025). The city's demographics have changed dramatically since the early 2000s. Dubai has multicultural cohabitation due to its large foreign workforce. (Connell & Burgess, 2011) These interactions present distinct opportunities and challenges, particularly for expatriate women, whose experiences are simultaneously influenced by migration, gender and society.

Around 15,000 Turks live in the UAE, mostly in Dubai. (<https://abudhabi-be.mfa.gov.tr/>, Reached Nov. 25th, 2025) Turkish expatriate women constitute a distinct social group. Sultans of Dubai network founded in 2004 by Turkish female expatriate Yonca Tokbaş. The community, which began as a support group for Turkish women living abroad, has over 2,000 email subscribers, 4,000 Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/674441549266331>) and around 5,000 Instagram followers (<https://www.instagram.com/sultansofdubai>).

This online platform shares knowledge and experiences to help Turkish women living abroad in a different culture. In particular, the platform appears to be designed to provide a support network for modern Western women, one of their most important markers of identity, to live their cultural identities in an Eastern society that is often seen as more traditional or culturally backward. This study examines the online posts of women who utilise this platform and analyses how they survive in a new cultural context to keep their identities and routines. (Duplan, 2021; Wurtz, 2022)The research asks, “How has being part of the Sultans of Dubai community transformed its members’ experience of Dubai, and how has Dubai, in turn, shaped the women’s experience?”

Netnography, as framework for examining online community culture and communication (Kozinets et al. 2010), is utilised because the community's digital platforms (email group, Facebook page, and Instagram account) provide visible spaces for social interaction. Turkish expatriate women share their stories, offer advice and find answers to expatriate life challenges in these online communities.

Since the researchers are not community members, the founder and administrator will facilitate data access. The Ethics Board of Izmir University of Economics has approved the research. NVivo will anonymize and thematically and discursively analyze data. Adaptation strategies, support networks, motherhood-abroad, professional barriers, cultural negotiation, and belonging are expected to be the main themes. This study aims to contribute to gendered migration, transnational networks, and digital ethnography.

Keywords: *Culture, community, women, expatriates, identity*

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Session 13

Decoding contemporary aesthetics

Session chair: Fernanda Scussel

The Broken Self: Exploring How Social Media Narrative Influences Body Image

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Abstract

Self-objectification is described as a pervasive psychological and societal trend with profound impacts on individual identity, consumer behaviors, and general well-being (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). Social media accelerates this process (Vaterlaus et al., 2015), providing individuals with a platform where they idealise themselves, which is continuously evaluated, ranked, socially validated or not. Extant literature has stated that exposure to idealised images of self and their narratives presented in social media correlates with increased body dissatisfaction, anxiety, and adoption of appearance-correction behaviours (Kleemans et al., 2018; Sobol & Darke, 2014; Smeesters & Mandel, 2006).

There is a major issue: the division of the person. The dilemma in seeing the real selves in the digital age. Furthermore, Instagram have normalised the digital beauty standard as it is more acceptable and desirable (Rodner et.al.,2021). Social media use has been linked to increased body dissatisfaction, cosmetic procedures, and even eating disorders (Papasavva et al., 2022). While some people find spaces of support and self-acceptance online (e.g., Scaraboto & Fischer, 2013), others describe feeling even more fractured—more discouraged, isolated, and overwhelmed—as they confront a stream of unrealistic, constantly shifting body-image

messages they feel unable to keep up with. Prior studies have also focused on the positive effects of body positive contents (Jiménez-García et al.2025), idealised images in digital advertising and their effect on self-objectification among adolescents (Dai et al. 2025) and objectification in younger adults' social media usage (Shihadeh et al. 2025). However, focused on self-objectification, ideal selves and how individuals are influenced by social media narratives, is still under-researched.

Research Question

How and why social media narratives influence the fragmentation or reconstruction of the 'self' among digital natives, especially adults in the age group 20-55?

Methodology

This study uses a qualitative narrative inquiry approach (Clandinin & Caine, 2008) consisting of two phases: netnographic observation and in-depth interviews. The sample will be between the ages of 20–55 years (20–29: Young Adults, 30–39: Early Middle Adulthood and 40–55: Middle-Aged Adults) among both males and females. For analysis, we used narrative and discourse analysis (Younas et al., 2023) to understand the lived experiences and emotional state of mind to construct their identities.

Preliminary findings

We found that in the age group of 20-30, there is cognitive-perceptual distortion leading to fragmentation of self through comparison with influencers and social media beauty standards, in 30-40, fragmentation shifts to transitional identity tensions of facing aging issues, whereas in 40-55, there is again fragmentation of self by comparing own self with their younger self which is temporal and existential. However, insights also found that among the middle-aged and 40-55 age group, there is a self-reconstruction phase where they reject and neglect the idealised beauty standards. Therefore, social media acts as a platform where individuals psychologically negotiate with their self and beauty standards across different stages of life for validation and social inclusion.

Conclusion

This study will shed light on the subjective experiences of consumers on self-objectification, which complements prior knowledge on the objective experience.

Keywords: Self, Social Media, Body Image

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Beautiful Risks: A Netnography Of Skincare Routines

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Abstract

Across social media, beauty and skincare practices - ranging from taping one’s mouth during sleep, to pouring castor oil into the navel, to simmering veal bones overnight to swallow collagen-rich globes of broths, to introducing three-year-olds to elaborate skincare routines - circulate as everyday rituals promising glow and rejuvenation. While these practices may appear extreme or eccentric, their growing cultural traction illustrates how digitally-mediated beauty cultures encourage increasingly complex forms of bodily care, often involving unregulated or potentially risky ingredients, technologies, and routines. This paper presents a netnographic investigation (Kozinets, 2019) into how risk and its perception are interpreted, negotiated, embodied, and collectively reconstructed within emerging beauty practices, focusing on three high-risk contexts: (i) *morning and night shed routines*, where users document structured AM/PM beauty rituals; (ii) *dopamine menus*, which organizes everyday beauty activities into “menus” to boost mood and motivation; (iii) *children’s skincare*, content in which tweens, school kids, or even toddlers adopt advanced skincare practices.

Consumer research conceptualizes *perceived risk* as the subjective assessment of uncertain and potentially negative consumption outcomes (Dowling and Staelin, 1994). Prior studies have examined how consumers interpret, manage (Celsi et al., 1993; Thompson, 2005; Wong and King, 2008; Luhmann, 2017), or strategically ignore risk (Pellandini-Simanyi and Barnhart, 2024) across material and digital contexts. Yet social media environments, where influencers, dermatologists, and beauty gurus circulate competing claims, remain theoretically undertheorized as *risk-making* spaces. Existing research has, in fact, mainly looked at the outcomes (e.g., scam in online purchases, fraud, privacy concerns) (Rehman et al., 2020), overlooking how risk itself becomes dynamically and collectively constructed within platforms.

Our study addresses this gap with a netnographic project that treats perceived risk as relational, socially constructed, embodied (Thompson et al., 2021; Lupton, 2023), and

continuously reshaped through routinized social media practices. Data collection includes: (1) *archival analysis* of beauty discourses and associated risks; (2) *immersion in* social media interactions, tutorials, commentary threads, and affective performances surrounding risky beauty practices; and (3) *interviews with* consumers, creators, and viewers of beauty content. Preliminary findings indicate that consumers voluntarily engage with practices they recognize as potentially risky, but these risks become *normalized* and reframed as steps in an ongoing project of aesthetic self-cultivation. We observe the emergence of a “do-it-yourself risk-management culture”, wherein individuals draw on crowdsourced expertise, pseudo-medical narratives, influencer endorsements, and especially on personal experimentation to legitimize their choices. Rather than deterring participation, risk frequently becomes a desirable ingredient of beauty experimentation, signifying dedication and a willingness to sacrifice for self-improvement and aesthetic transformation.

Beauty routines operate through culturally symbolic binaries such as *natural/artificial*, *healthy/dangerous*, *clean/dirty*, which anchor moral judgments about bodies and risks. These symbolic distinctions structure how consumers evaluate hazardous additives, semi-invasive procedures, biohacking supplements, often privileging sensory pleasure, aesthetic outcomes, and peer narratives over scientific and medical advice. Methodologically, this project contributes to netnography by demonstrating how risk perception can be studied not only as an individual cognitive state but as a *collectively and performatively enacted cultural process* unfolding across digital platforms.

Keywords: risk perception, risk management, beauty routines, netnography

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Dematerialized Taste? About Aesthetics Of Practice In Multiplayer Video Games

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Abstract

Since their inception in the dark and secluded laboratories at MIT in the 1960s (Triclot, 2017), video games have become the dominant contemporary form of entertainment, one larger than cinema and music reunited (Gaudiaut, 2021). Within this broader transformation, live-service multiplayer videogames have made the purchase of skins—in-game goods that inflect avatars' appearance without altering gameplay—a central feature of their economies. This article asks how taste can be conceptualised and empirically traced when its objects are code-based artefacts and displayed on avatars within large-scale multiplayer videogame environments. Focusing on *Fortnite*, one of the most prominent and commercially successful contemporary videogames, we reconstitute skins as fashion artefacts and foreground the neglected aesthetic dimension of digital virtual consumption in game environments (Denegri-Knott & Molesworth, 2010; Denegri-Knott, Watkins & Wood, 2012). Taking the subreddit *r/FortniteFashion*—dedicated to “creative and high-quality *Fortnite* cosmetic combinations”—as a privileged vantage point, the paper examines how *Fortnite*'s ever-expanding catalogue of cosmetic items is collectively rendered intelligible as a wardrobe and as an appearance-based economy.

Theoretically, the argument extends practice-oriented accounts of taste by articulating them with debates on digital materiality. Building on the re-specification of taste as a practice-based accomplishment rather than a mere classificatory disposition, as induced by taste regime (Arsel & Bean, 2013) and taste engineering (Maciel & Wallendorf, 2017; Dolbec & Maciel, 2018), we approach taste as an emergent configuration of objects, doings and meanings through which individuals learn to evaluate and combine artefacts in specific consumption fields. In dialogue with research on digital and technological materiality (Manovich, 2001, 2012; Bollmer, 2015; Bolter & Grusin, 1999; Mardon & Belk, 2018; Kedzior, 2014; Denegri-Knott, Watkins & Wood, 2012), we further argue that so-called “dematerialised” digital virtual goods remain firmly embedded in material culture, even as their intangibility, fluidity and reproducibility disturb customary tactile criteria. This conceptualisation enables us to transpose the taste regime framework to a videogame setting and to examine how *Fortnite*'s skins act as fashion objects within a multiplayer ecosystem.

To do so, the study deploys a netnographic research design (Kozinets, 2020; Kozinets & Gambetti, 2021) centred on the subreddit *r/FortniteFashion*. The corpus combines archival collection of salient threads, sustained observation of ongoing exchanges, and reflexive journaling of the researcher's own engagement as a *Fortnite* player, in order to attend to both the platform's formal affordances and the community's cultural codes (Van der Nagel, 2013).

The analysis shows how a consumer-driven taste regime takes shape around Epic Games' institutional proposition^[1]: far from emerging ex nihilo, *Fortnite*'s players continually replays and reconfigures an exogenous iconographic repertoire of licensed properties (such as Marvel, Star Wars or pop-music celebrities) together with an endogenous universe of lore and characters authored by Epic Games. The community's propensity to assemble and reassemble these heterogeneous elements into aesthetically coherent looks underpins a novel schema that orchestrates the joint emergence of a distinctive grammar of taste and of a specific consumption field organised around *Fortnite*'s appearance-based economy.

[1] Epic Games is responsible for both the development and the publication of *Fortnite*.

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Session 14

Netnography For A Better Academia

Session chair: Magda Marchowska Raza

Netnography As A Community Practice: How Online Writing And Data Collection Retreats Reconfigure Academic Solitude

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Abstract

Recent research shows that how people think about being alone fundamentally shapes their emotional experience of solitude and loneliness (Rodriguez et al., 2025). In academic life, this distinction between being alone and feeling lonely is particularly salient, as writing and research often require solitude while also depending on collaboration and community. As Jandrić (2022) argues, the “art of being alone together” (p. 633) captures this paradox: academia thrives on alone-time for creative production yet risks isolation without structures of shared engagement.

In netnographic research, the risk of isolation is particularly pronounced, as researchers may experience solitude across all six procedural movements of netnography. For instance, the investigative phase can produce “a very large amount of potentially significant data” (Gambetti & Kozinets, 2022, p. 6), placing the researcher alone before an overwhelming volume of data.

Immersion can elicit powerful emotional responses – such as “ambivalence, hope, fear, and longing” (Kozinets, 2019, p. 74) – and can expose researchers to “excruciatingly sad” (Kozinets, 2019, p. 74) online discourse. Moreover, Kozinets and Gretzel (2024) caution that immersive engagement necessitates introspection, yet “extreme introspection [...] can lead to solipsism” (p. 9). While this warning is primarily epistemic, it also underscores the inherently solitary nature of netnographic work and the attendant risks of researcher isolation.

Although solitude and loneliness are central to academic life, “we do not speak enough of academics loneliness” (Jandrić, 2022, p. 637) and that this absence requires systematic engagement to explore new forms of “being alone together” (p. 633) that remains undertheorized (Jandrić, 2022). Research literature presents evidence that in-person writing retreats can improve researchers' wellbeing and overcome loneliness (Eardley et al., 2021; Murray & Newton, 2009). Rodriguez et al. (2025) explicitly state that future work should develop and test “interventions that reshape how we think about being alone” (p. 6), yet interventions targeting beliefs about being alone remain largely conceptual at this stage (Rodriguez et al., 2025). Our study directly answers these gaps by examining online writing and netnographic data collection retreats as interventions to operationalize “being alone together” and potentially reshape experiences of academic solitude and provide new forms of collective support.

Building on these gaps, we more specifically ask: how do writing and data collection retreats reconfigure experiences of solitude and togetherness in academic research? And, focusing on netnographic practice, how researchers experience these retreats, and in what ways do they influence their wellbeing and productivity

We adopt a qualitative design combining the organization and observation of online writing and data collection retreats, complemented with ongoing semi-structured interviews with participants who attended these retreats, with researchers who did not to participate, and with experts familiar with academic writing and netnography.

Constructive Demoralization: How Newcomers Cultivate a Sense of Security in Loss-Ridden Fields

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Abstract

In fields such as academia, legal practice, and investing, loss is a routine rather than an exceptional occurrence. While these fields differ substantially in content, they share a high degree of outcome uncertainty. Consequently, those entering these fields must learn not only their technical tasks but also how to withstand repeated setbacks, whether rejected manuscripts, failed cases, or poor financial returns. However, we know little about how

newcomers develop stability under such conditions. Thus, we ask: how do newcomers cultivate a sense of security in fields where loss is ubiquitous?

This project investigates this question through a netnographic study (Kozinets, 2020) of the academic digital ecosystem, examining online PhD communities, including Reddit forums and academic meme pages, to better understand the strategies these newcomers employ. We conceptualise these digital spaces as meaning-making communities, characterized by the co-production of symbolic assets used to navigate uncertainty. From this perspective, the analytical focus shifts from the newcomers' technical execution of the pursuits to the cultural coping infrastructures that emerge to sustain them. This approach draws on Consumer Culture Theory research on the mobilization of communal cultural resources (Belk and Costa, 1998; Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001), particularly Moisio and Beruchashvili's (2010) conceptualization of support groups as "disciplinary guardians" and therapeutic spaces that render difficult pursuits more manageable (p. 872).

In this study, we adopt a social-symbolic work perspective, specifically that of *identity work*, as an enabling lens to examine the efforts through which newcomers anchor themselves within structurally uncertain fields. Identity work refers to "the efforts of individuals, collective actors, networks of actors to shape how individuals are understood in relation to group memberships and related roles" (Lawrence and Phillips, 2019, p. 93). This perspective is crucial because in fields characterized by unpredictability, security stems not from controlling these outcomes, but from stabilizing identity relative to the community. Therefore, we centre the symbolic practices and resources individuals utilize to accomplish this work.

Our analysis reveals a mechanism we term *constructive demoralization*, a set of communal practices that transmute feelings of discouragement into socially generative, identity-stabilizing resources. Specifically, constructive demoralization is enacted through three distinct strategies: employing self-deprecating humour, disclosing rejections, and providing reassurance. Taken together, we find that these strategies enable newcomers to cultivate a sense of security by reframing loss as a shared, structural feature of the field rather than a personal failure, ultimately mitigating its threat.

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Turtles All The Way Down: Making Sense Of International Students And Recruitment Agents Through Netnography

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Abstract

The importance of international students in sustaining universities around the world has been established by researchers, government and universities alike (Omoruyi & Rembielak, 2019). Their importance exceeds financial contribution to the host university, city and country. They contribute significantly to the classroom experience, curriculum development, cultural diversity and workforce of their host communities. Whilst this is the case, there have been several other arguments around the quality of international students being recruited and concerns around immigration. The principal agent theory underpins the study. It is the situation where there is a relationship and potentially conflict of interest between parties. This is relevant when considering the relationship between university, international students and international recruitment agents where each are looking for an alignment of sometimes competing aims.

Several issues have been identified in recent times that tend to impact the push and pull factors of international students to UK universities. These are not limited to the current legislations around study visa conditions, with some proposed set of new rules coming into effect in coming months. Other issues have been linked with the overall student experience, where some of these issues are linked to set expectations built from formal and informal conversations with intermediaries between the international student and the university. Acculturation was another issue found from our study. Studying abroad has been widely recognised as a life-altering learning experience with expected meaningful intercultural gains (e.g., language proficiency, global mindedness, intercultural communicative skills) from acculturation experiences (He et al., 2025).

International recruitment Agents (agents) are a key stakeholder within the international student journey, as they are responsible for 45-55% recruitment of international students (ICEF Monitor 2022). Exploring existing literature on acculturation and trust, the role agents play in the early international student journey cannot be over emphasised. In this light, this study is focusing on of the perception of international students about agents in forming opinions, promises and trust.

Using Netnography (Kozinets 2019), the study will utilise social media and online platforms with huge international students' presence to investigate the phenomena. Reddit is a key platform

where international students are expressing their views and discussing the topic. We employ a team netnography approach, investigating and immersing ourselves in relevant discussions and reflecting on this through an immersion journal. In Pratchet's Discworld and Kozinets (2019), the concept of 'turtles on turtles' and the concept of turtling between netnographic data and literature is a philosophical concept that we employ as we delve further down the rabbit hole.

The findings will help key stakeholders identify the key aspects of the international students' journey and the role of agents and how best to enhance the agent's role in co-creating the overall international student experience.

Keywords: International student, Agents, Acculturation, Trust. Principal-agent theory

Session 15

Auto-Netnographic Journeys & Transformations

Session chair: Rachel Ashman

Spectral Consumption: A Photographic Auto-netnography into the Ghosts of Consumer Culture

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Abstract

Mark Fisher's (2014) reconceptualization of hauntology provides a critical lens for understanding contemporary consumer culture's relationship with time and change. Fisher argues that late capitalism is characterized by a lost future, a condition where society can no longer imagine or produce genuinely new cultural forms, instead endlessly recycling aesthetics and ideologies from the past. This hauntological condition manifests as a temporal crisis where the present is hollowed out, haunted by futures that never arrived and pasts that never truly existed (Fisher, 2014). In consumer culture, this haunting operates through nostalgia (Brown et al., 2003), which functions not as innocent longing but as a desire production that puts consumers in recursive loops of pastness. While brands and products constantly invoke themes of innovation, disruption, and transformation, they remain fundamentally unable to envision genuine change beyond the aesthetic appropriation of previous eras (Ahlberg et al., 2022). The literature on hauntology thus reveals how consumer culture's obsessive backward gaze forecloses possibilities for meaningful futures, creating what Fisher describes as the slow cancellation of the future (Fisher, 2014, p. 6).

This two year and ongoing photo essay series in the form of an auto-netnography employs analog photography to evoke the sense of spectral lost futures that characterize contemporary

consumer culture. Rather than directly documenting retail spaces of retro products, the photographs use analog processes, grains, light leaks, imperfect aesthetics, to symbolically create the temporalities of lost futures. The project operates as a photographic essay but provides a new lens for studies of auto-netnography, where my rigorous photographic practice as a consumer researcher and its circulation through online spaces become the site of investigation. This approach positions my practice both as researcher and subject, examining how my own production and dissemination of analog photographs participate in and reveal the hauntological patterns of consumer culture I inhabit.

Through this investigation that started two years ago and is still ongoing, I conceptualize spectral consumption as the phenomenon where consumer culture perpetually invokes past aesthetics while preventing genuine transformation. Spectral consumption represents the paradox of a marketplace saturated with revolutionary rhetoric, from futuristic tech such as artificial intelligence, to ethical consumption movements that remains incapable of producing actual change beyond recycling familiar forms of the past. Consumers are positioned as active agents choosing retro products and services, yet these choices circulate within a closed system of pre-existing references and exhausted aesthetics of the past. By making these hauntings visible through art, this project opens critical space for recognizing how spectral consumption operates in the everyday lived experiences of consumer lives.

This ongoing photographic essay and auto-netnography can be accessed online here : <https://spectral-consumption.myportfolio.com/>

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From Plastic Perfection to Algorithmic Empathy: A Reflexive Auto-Netnographic Account of the Process of Creating a “Real Life Action Figure” Image Series

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Abstract

This paper presents a reflexive auto-netnographic account of creating a four-part “Real Life Action Figure” image series in dialogue with a viral Instagram trend. Rather than broadly mapping the trend, the article focuses on an auto-netnographic research at the intersection of visual anthropology, digital ethnography and generative AI. It asks how co-creating images with

AI, within platform vernaculars, can become a site of reflection on digital identity, commodification and algorithmic culture.

Created during Instagram's April 2025 trend peak, the first three figures emerged through real-time auto-netnography, while the final image - marking a transformation of digital identity - was developed months later following sustained research and analytical reflection.

Grounded in digital ethnography (Pink et al., 2015) and immersion-based netnography (Kozinets, 2022), the project uses a multimodal auto-netnographic journal to document the researcher's embodied participation. The "field" is Instagram's interface and the evolving prompt-image-reflection loop, in which AI is treated as a co-creator. The study also reflects on the multimodal and cognitive nature of prompting itself, suggesting that the human-platform-AI loop mirrors a broader mental process, in which visual feeds, memories, and affective responses act as internal prompts shaping digital self-representation.

The analysis unfolds across four phases, each materialised in one action-figure image and its description.

The first phase, immersion, covers the spontaneous adoption of the trend's aesthetic and the construction of an idealised "plastic" self. This toy-like figure, with bright packaging and aspirational accessories, reflects the pleasures of aligning with platform vernaculars and the algorithmic rewards of hyperaesthetic self-images. The researcher observes how easily playful self-commodification fits Instagram's visual economy.

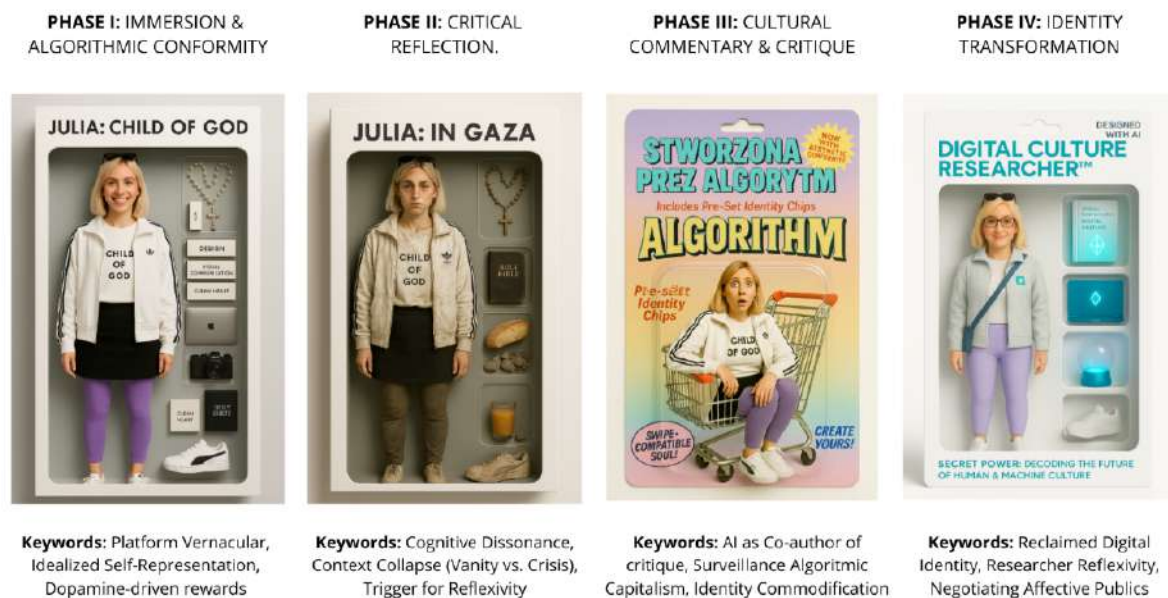
The second phase, a critical and self-reflective turn, emerges when this glossy self-presentation clashes with testimonies from acquaintances engaged in humanitarian work in the Gaza Strip. The stark contrast between the "toy self" and images of war produces affective dissonance. This reconfigures the prompting process: the action figure is placed near representations of crisis. What began as vanity becomes a medium for digital empathy and an uneasy confrontation with the ethics of spectatorship.

In the third phase—cultural commentary and critique—the AI-generated figures evolve into visual essays on surveillance capitalism (Zuboff, 2019) and platform capture. Labels such as "Trend Hostage" or "Manufactured for the Feed" foreground the user's position as both producer and product. These images dramatize how algorithmic infrastructures script visibility, value and affect, and were produced by asking the AI to propose its own cultural commentary after engaging with the preliminary analysis.

The final phase traces a shift in digital identity. The concluding figure frames the author not as a passive object but as a "Digital Culture Researcher," situating the practice within inquiry into the affective publics of the AI era (Papacharissi, 2014). By showing how the series navigates plastic perfection, algorithmic empathy and critique, the study demonstrates how auto-netnography helps users negotiate and sometimes subvert platform trends. Such visual

experiments reveal how generative AI and social media co-shape identity and agency, turning viral aesthetics into tools for reflection and ethical positioning within digital culture.

Figure 1 – From Plastic Perfection to Algorithmic Empathy: A Reflexive Auto-Netnographic Account



All illustrations are the author's own work. Co-created with AI.

Keywords: Auto-netnography; Visual anthropology; Generative AI; Digital identity; Algorithmic culture; Digital culture

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Epistemic Trespassing: an Account

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Abstract

This Netnography explores how digital platforms enabled me to navigate fragmented medical systems and participate with doctors in diagnosing my daughter's life-threatening illness. With no formal training in medicine but driven by desperation and informed by my background as a theatre professor, I turned to the immersive and investigative methodologies of Netnography to seek answers from online medical communities.

The immersion movement of this Netnography centered on my lived experience as both a caregiver and researcher, reflecting deeply on the barriers, misdiagnoses, and siloed approaches within our healthcare system. This reflexive engagement provided critical insights into the emotional, physical, and logistical toll of navigating a broken system. At the same time, the investigation movement emphasized systematic data collection and research across a wide range of online platforms, including peer-reviewed medical articles, patient forums, and interdisciplinary digital spaces that enabled connection of seemingly unrelated pieces of knowledge. Immersing myself in a family member's healthcare journey while rigorously investigating digital data allowed me to develop theories that solved pieces of a diagnostic puzzle.

Findings highlight the strengths and limitations of both in-person and digital medical communities. Online platforms allowed unprecedented access to cutting-edge knowledge and interdisciplinary insights, making the inaccessibility and rigidity of ego-driven, in-person encounters all too apparent. In-person collaboration across medical specialties proved impossible much of the time, despite the availability of scientific tools, theories and personnel to enable holistic care. Through the processes of piecing together solutions from online scientific texts, community immersion led to helpful discoveries; however, I was an interloper—an outsider trained as an academic but in a far different field.

Reflecting upon those events now, I frame the past using Reader Response Theory—namely Wolfgang Iser's "Implied Reader" and Stanley Fish's "Interpretive Community" notions. The scientific community's dense jargon, complex sentence structures, and abstract, specialized concepts, imply a particular reader with long-practiced close-reading skills in their code sets. Not a member of any scientific community, I relied on my background in literature, theatre and music scholarship. That I could enter these interpretive communities and use their scholarly endeavor successfully proves that, although texts may imply a readership's specific identity, homogeneity does not exist. The vastness of the digital commons' readership causes irreducibility of interpretive possibility, even if the text's author intentionally implied a particular reader to have a precise interpretation. Invoking Mikhail Bakhtin's idea of heteroglossia, which I see as akin to Reader Response Theory, the plethora of voices inside of a text exponentially expands when joined with the readership's profusion of intertextual histories, making the notion of community infinitely expandable.

The presentation consists of three interconnected parts: my personal narrative; the Netnography's immersion and investigation movements, here explaining how reflective engagement and systematic research provided critical insights and actionable knowledge; and a critically reflective conclusion, utilizing Reader Response Theory as framework and

suggesting that the digital age offers immense potential for interdisciplinary collaboration, yet the entrenched silos of modern medicine hinder such integration in practice. By emphasizing Netnography's immersive and investigative movements, this study calls for reimagining healthcare systems as collaborative, interdisciplinary collectives, drawing inspiration from creative and scientific practices alike to foster holistic care and shared solutions.

Session 16

Worlds of Fandom

Session chair: Laura Hoeger

Unboxing Blind Boxes: A Netnographic Study of Labubu Fandom and the Culture of Chance

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Jane Clemo, Pacific University, Forest Grove, USA

Yadira Martinez, Pacific University, Forest Grove, USA

Abstract

Across generations, the appeal of collectibles has been fueled by scarcity and the thrill of the hunt for something rare or limited edition (Marin-Lopez, 2025). Generation X collected Cabbage Patch Kids and baseball cards; Millennials collected Beanie Babies and Yu-Gi-Oh! cards. Today, Generation Z channels that excitement into blind boxes, which are collectible toys sold in sealed packaging where buyers do not know which figure they will receive until opening. For Gen Z, the hunt centers on POP MART's Labubu, a mischievous creature with sharp teeth, oversized ears, and furry appearance (Abad-Santos, 2025; Dudarenok, 2025). The first author is a Labubu collector with figures from five series, offering auto-netnographic insight into the phenomenon.

As Labubu develops a passionate global following, we employ netnography to explore consumer interactions and on-going conversations, cultural meanings through fan-generated content, shared online experiences around blindbox toy culture using Labubu fandom as our context. Preliminary data were collected over three weeks from systematic observation of five sources: POP MART's website, Instagram, TikTok, Reddit, and YouTube. These platforms were selected for their active Labubu collector communities and rich visual and narrative content. Observation focused on hashtags such as #labubu, #POPMART, #theMonsters, and #blindboxes.

During the immersion movement, each platform was observed twice daily. Consumer conversations (textual data), visual artifacts (screenshots of images and videos), and researcher reflections were saved in our immersion journals. The subsequent interaction

movement (planned to be finalized until the conference) will involve semi-structured in-depth interviews with Labubu collectors and enthusiasts to contextualize the netnographic insights. Preliminary findings revealed three core dynamics. First, limited releases do more than drive demand, they create an online community. Collectors share stories, trade duplicates, and celebrate rare pulls. Through these online exchanges, an exclusive product turns into a shared cultural experience. As one TikTok user states, “i fear i was a labubu hater but now i want one.”

Second, Labubu serves as a microcosm of fashion and self-expression. Collectors and influencers, like Blackpink’s Lalisa, feature Labubu into outfit grids, selfies, and lifestyle posts, presenting it as a symbol of taste, style and identity. A TODAY article calls Labubu the “it-girl accessory of 2025” (Shigo, 2025). One collector remarked, “OMG my Labubu needs an LV bag, I want it on my LV bag!”

Finally, uncertainty itself becomes the product. The blind box format commercializes the suspense before the reveal, the joy of a rare pull, and the fear of missing out. One user notes, “I would die if I got the mystery.” Marketplaces monetize risk and reward and transform chance into a repeatable and shareable cultural practice.

Together, these dynamics show what begins as a simple act of unboxing a toy evolves into a shared social and cultural experience that mirrors broader patterns of global consumerism. For NETNOCON 2026’s theme of *Cultural Crossroads*, Labubu represents exactly that intersection of digital networks, global consumer culture and fandom. Our study reveals the broader story of how blindbox culture is co-created through fans, becoming an identity project in a hyperconnected, platform-mediated world.

Keywords: Blind box culture, auto-netnography, Labubu fandom, collectible toys, identity

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Reverse Course: From Migratory Audiences to Platform-Native Fandoms in Netnographic Research

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Abstract

This paper interrogates the shifting ontological status of fan community and its methodological implications for contemporary netnographic research. Historically, foundational fan netnographies such as Kozinets' (1997) investigation of The X-Files "X-Philes" fandom employed a site triangulation strategy in which an established mass media audience migrated from physical conventions and fan clubs to the then-nascent internet. In these studies, netnography observed how pre-existing social structures adapted and developed digital sociality. However, the emergence of influencers and influencer fandoms demand a course reversal in methodological development. Unlike traditional fandoms, influencer fandom is platform-native. It is born, structured, and enculturated entirely within algorithmic environments before it ever manifests in physical space.

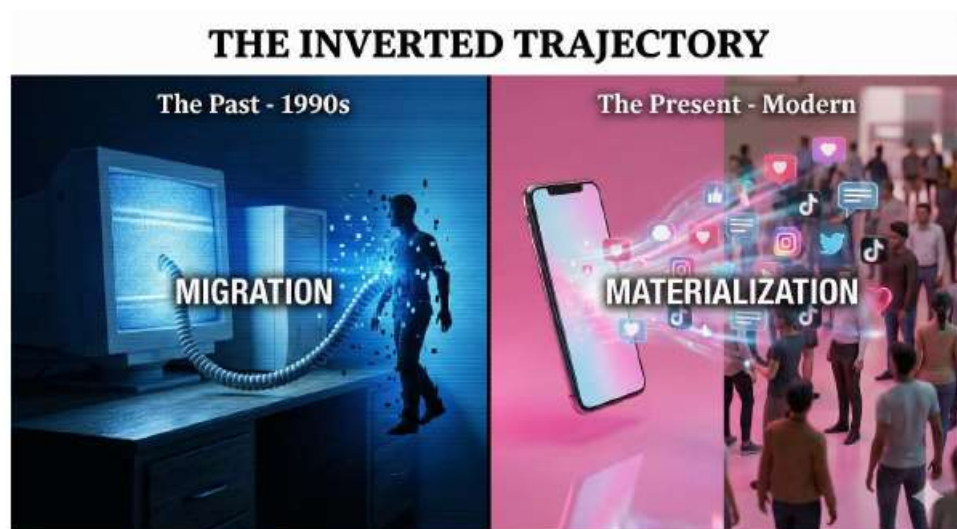
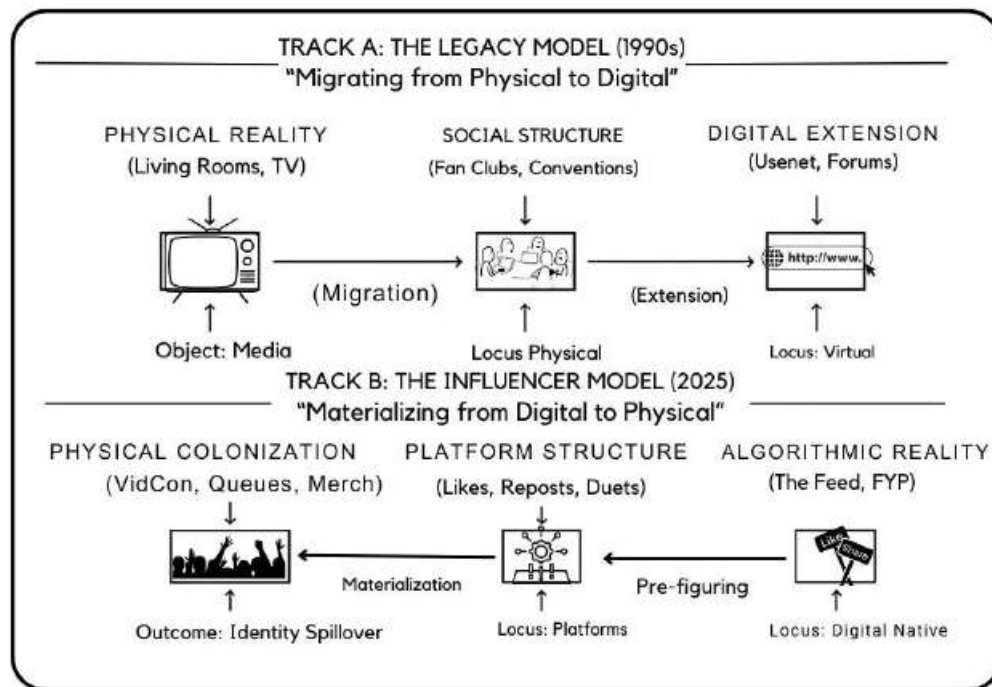
We conceptualize influencer fandom as a distinct type of consumer collective (Jenkins & Kozinets, 2025) uniquely shaped by permeability—the idea that anyone can become an influencer—and a mobility that enables shifts between fan and micro-celebrity identities. To capture this platform-native genesis and its subsequent physical colonization, we conducted a dual-site ethnographic study. We performed a netnography (Kozinets, 2020) grounded in multiple immersive engagements (Kozinets & Gretzel, 2024) across the digital realms of 55 purposively selected influencers. Data were collected from blogs, X, TikTok, YouTube, and fanfiction archives, and were triangulated with subsequent focused ethnographic immersion at VidCon 2025 in Anaheim, the largest U.S. convention dedicated to influencers and digital creators, by both authors. Our dataset, including posts, comments, fan art and cosplay, edits, fan fictions, wikis, videos, memes and feeds, was curated in an 800-page immersion journal, blending deep cultural analysis with the documentation of meet & greets, creator round tables, and the merchandising of multiplicitous fan objects at the convention.

Our findings reveal a technologically-mediated fandom grammar composed of diverse practices such as reposting, reinterpretation, customized language, creative visual productions, mimicry behaviors, and reciprocal appreciation that is intended to amplify visibility. Importantly, this grammar is both a prefiguration and reconfiguration of fan and fandom identities. At VidCon, we observed how the digital logic of platforms materialized in physical space, creating an identity spillover effect produced by material and discursive interplays among multiple fandoms. The identity spillover manifested in hybrid aesthetic and narrative expressions, for instance, when fans queueing to meet Minecraft's Aphmau were styling themselves like Hatsune Miku or carrying Blackpink phone cases. Through these multiple and overlapping fandom allegiances, the scrolling logic of the feed was enacted in physical forms and times.

A key finding of the study is that whereas legacy fandoms brought offline connoisseurship to the internet, influencer fandoms export algorithmic performativity into the physical world. This study identifies a novel type of fandom mobility where consumers fluidly transition between fan and influencer statuses, a gray zone of fan-micro-celebrity fully supported by platform

affordances and influencer economic and institutional infrastructures. By contrasting the migratory trajectory of 1990s media fandom with the platform-native materialization of embodied influencer collectivity, this paper reframes netnography as an essential method for tracing how digital-born cultures materialize in and colonize contemporary physical and social realities.

Figure 1 – The Inverted Trajectory Model



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Cultural Entanglements in a Consumption Web: A Netnography of the Labubu Phenomenon

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Abstract

The Labubu phenomenon, which involves collectible monster-like figures, is a modern reprise of toy-based cultural trends that have captivated previous generations. Like Monchhichis in the 80s and Trolls in the 90s, Labubus are culturally charged figurines that blend storytelling, aesthetics, and symbolic meanings. Unlike their predecessors, Labubus exist in a digitally networked consumer landscape where online communities, algorithmic visibility, and global resale markets intensify and reshape the cultural life of collectibles. The Labubu phenomenon is, thus, an opportunity to explore how consumers co-create meaning around scarce and symbolically loaded objects in digitally mediated environments that draw them into complex consumption webs (Kozinets, 2002).

Informed by consumer culture theory and its emphasis on consumption as a cultural process deeply tied to meaning and identity (Arnould & Thompson, 2005), we investigate how consumers co-construct Labubu-focused cultural meanings and consumption practices through online participation, ritual behaviors, and marketplace interactions. Building on Kozinets (2002)'s notion of consumption webs, we explore how cultural entanglements fuel multiple layers of consumption. Specifically, the study seeks to: a) identify the symbolic meanings, emotional associations and narratives created around Labubus; b) understand the ritualized and relational practices that contribute to consumers' engagement with Labubus and Labubu communities; c) explore how marketplace strategies impact consumer meanings and practices; and ultimately, d) map the consumption web that emerges around Labubus through marketplace offerings and community interactions.

Netnography involves a systematic and immersive use of digital observations to study cultural understandings, symbols, and shared meanings (Kozinets, & Gretzel, 2024). It is therefore uniquely suitable for investigating the Labubu phenomenon. Following the netnographic research process outlined by Kozinets (2019), we are conducting a team netnography involving deep immersion in Labubu communities and content. This will be complemented by an investigation phase. Investigative data will be collected from TikTok, Instagram, Facebook, Reddit groups, YouTube reviews, resale platforms, and other online sources to illustrate the complexity and pervasiveness of Labubu meaning-making and consumption.

Our preliminary findings show Labubu collectors adding meanings to their doll consumption activities by proudly displaying them on shelves, celebrating new additions, and integrating them into cultural rituals. They add Labubus to Christmas trees and dress them for holidays and special occasions, enhancing the symbolic and emotional value of the dolls. They consume accessories for their dolls and for themselves (Figure 1. Etsy data illustrating aspects of the Labubu consumption web) and defend their consumption web against external threats (e.g., counterfeits referred to as "*lafufus*" and Labubu consumption stigma).

Figure 1 - Etsy data illustrating aspects of the Labubu consumption web



Keywords: Consumption Web, Rituals, Cultural meanings, Collectibles, Labubu phenomenon

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How Fans Reframe a Crisis: A Netnographic Study of VTuber Communities

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Abstract

The recent phenomenon of virtual YouTubers (VTubers) emerged as a subculture and has transformed into a fully commercial, lucrative business model. The growing interest is evident in the global VTuber market, realizing the value of USD 6.28 billion in 2023,

and estimated to reach USD 117.16 billion by 2032 (Zion Market Research, 2024), driven by rapid growth in virtual/physical merchandising, and influencer-based branding of VTubers. VTubers are real people using motion capture technology to operate behind virtual avatars to stream original content in digital environments (Ferreira et al., 2022) where talents and fans co-exist and engage. Viewers in the Vtuber ecosystem watch these talents that mimic actual social relationships and consequently form parasocial bonds (Lee et al., 2025). VTubers are preferred for entertainment and information, companionship, comfort, real-time chat-based interaction and community belonging (Wang, 2023).

Despite this perceived genuine connection between fans and VTubers, these personalities are managed by talent companies. VTubers bound with contracts hand over the control of intellectual properties, therefore might have limitations on creating certain content, avatars, and technologies (Ferreira et al., 2022).

VTuber agencies have a corporate-focused stance, which may create tension between audience expectations and managerial decisions. Fans actively interpret, negotiate, and even challenge company statements, particularly during a crisis. Such a dynamic can be observed in the Selen Tatsuki case where she claimed disrespect to her creative freedom and well-being, while the company is accused of non-transparent contract termination. This incident triggered controversy across community platforms, where fans were involved in disputes by cross-checking facts and contributed to reframing of the event. Due to growing cultural and economic significance, VTubers has become a relevant subject for studying parasocial engagement and fandom behavior. The role of fan communities in crisis, however, is an understudied area. Therefore, this study aims to explore how VTuber fan communities, not as mere spectators but active agents, are involved in the conversation surrounding a crisis by steering public perception and sentiment.

Crisis narratives of Selen Tatsuki case, from 2023 to present, will be examined with netnographic approach. Following Kozinets and Gretzel (2024)'s guideline, researchers will collect data through interaction and immersion at relevant Reddit threads and comments on related YouTube videos to discover fan involvement in crisis sense making.

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Session 17

Netnographies of Brands

Session chair: Sema Misci Kip

Unwrapping Real Magic AI: How a Holiday Campaign Turned into a Brand Hijack

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Abstract

This research aims to explore the non-collaborative co-creation of brand meaning through an AI-generated advertising context. In traditional marketplaces, brand meaning creation was a fully brand-driven process. However, with the increasing use of digital platforms, brands' autonomy has diminished through rising consumer power, making consumers the key players in this process. In this new ecosystem, consumers have to take actions collaboratively to transform the brand's meaning without directly engaging with the brand, which creates a paradoxical co-creation process. Kristal et al. (2018) define this process as 'non-collaborative co-creation', which is the practices made by multiple actors to alter the meaning via refusing the intended brand meaning. The emergence of AI in advertising further complicates this dynamic by impacting perceived authenticity. Focusing on Coca-Cola's AI-generated "Real Magic" Christmas 2024 campaign, this study employs netnography, which denotes an adaptation of ethnographic studies conducted through digital networks (Kozinets, 2012). The data of this research consist of approximately 2553 comments gathered from multiple digital platforms, including Reddit, YouTube, Facebook, TikTok, and Twitter. Research data analyzed using the Gioia method (Gioia et. al., 2013) reveal that consumers primarily perceive Coca-Cola's AI-generated Christmas advertising as a loss of authenticity, by arguing that the brand has departed from its original, authentic Christmas narrative. This perception prompts non-collaborative co-creation of the brand meaning process by engaging in a form of digital consumer activism. These reactions align with "brand hijack," which refers to the transformation of a brand's meaning made by other players via distorting the brand's communication into an incompetent form (Siano et al., 2022). Findings further indicate that consumers' hijacking behaviors unfold through three key processes, which are labelled as *attacking* (intentional attempts to damage brand meaning), *challenging* (aggressive parody,

trolling, or cynical humor to harm brand meaning), *and exploiting* (creative or humorous reinterpreting symbols for meaning transfer). Furthermore, these processes collectively reveal how AI-mediated advertising can accelerate non-collaborative co-creation and expose brands to new vulnerabilities. This study contributes to brand meaning research by highlighting the increasing risk of meaning transformation, alteration, and co-destruction through the inattentive use of AI-generated content. Moreover, by examining non-collaborative co-creation through a netnographic approach, it expands theoretical discussions by showing how Brand Hijack acquires new forms in AI-driven communication environments.

Keywords: AI-generated Advertising, Brand Meaning, Brand Hijack

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Brands as Facilitators of Communities of Practice: Amazon and #BookTokBrazil

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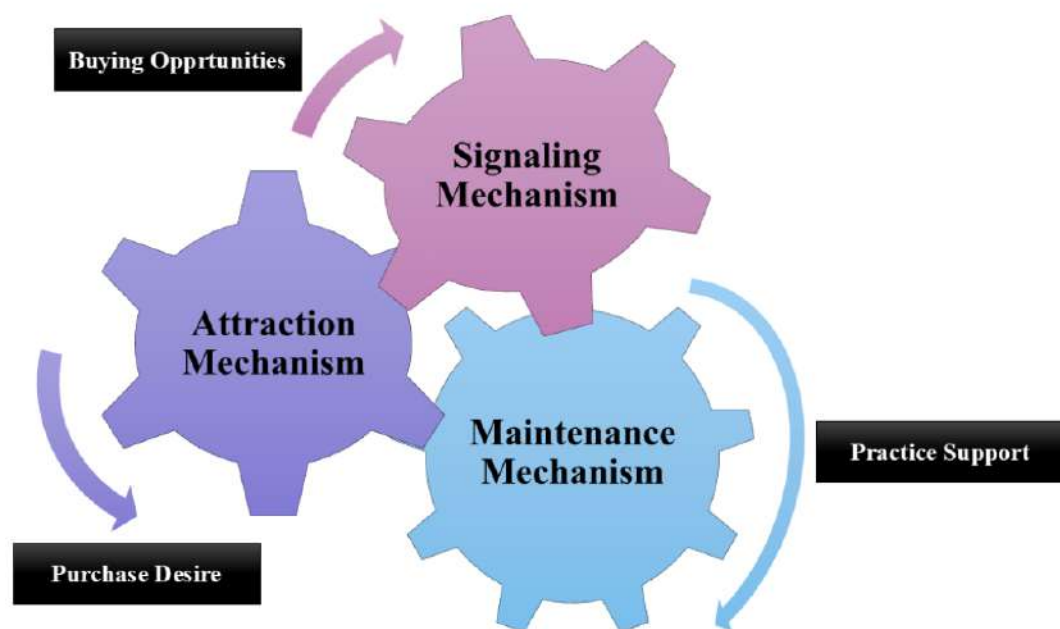
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Abstract

Studies on communities within the field of consumer behavior have extensively examined how consumer collectives form around brands (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). However, with the advancement of digital platforms, new configurations of consumer collectives have emerged, highlighting the need to rethink the role of brands in relation to these groups. An example is the #BookTok movement, which has brought together consumers worldwide to share experiences with book consumption on the TikTok platform. In Brazil, millions of views showcase reading practices and shopping experiences. Therefore, we consider #BookTokBrasil is a community of practice (Wenger, 1998) that gathers around learning the practice of reading, using the social network as a tool for support and belonging. Although recent studies have already pointed out how digital platforms have impacted communities of practice, mainly through the figure of digital influencers (Gannon & Prothero, 2018), little is known about how brands can act in this scenario, especially in communities that are not shaped around them. Understanding this new

nuance brought about by digital advancement allows for a deeper understanding of the role of brands within online collectives. Therefore, this research seeks to analyze how brands can act by strengthening digital communities of practice, focusing on the relationship between Amazon, the largest bookseller in Brazil today, and the #BookTokBrasil community. A netnography (Kozinets, 2019) was conducted (August 2023 - August 2025) concentrated on Amazon's TikTok page and content published on the platform with the hashtags #BookToBrasil and #Amazon, in addition to in-depth interviews with influencers and consumers. Our findings, summarized in Figure 1, highlight how Amazon develops integrated signaling, attraction, and maintenance mechanisms to keep the community increasingly attentive to the practice, developing a parasocial relationship and increasing awareness within this collective. In the case of the signaling mechanism, Amazon promotes actions aimed at signaling opportunities to the community to acquire new items for their collection, as in the paid partnerships with influencers to promote dates such as Book Friday. In the attraction mechanism, Amazon aims to attract community members by generating purchase desire during non-promotional periods. Many members participate in Amazon's affiliate program and promote discount coupons in Telegram groups. Finally, the maintenance mechanism helps Amazon maintain its central role as a source of sustenance for the community, mainly through actions supporting reading, such as sponsoring the Bienal do Livro, the largest literary event in Brazil. Our research, therefore, aims to contribute to the advancement of understanding consumer digital collectives, presenting a new form of strategic brand action.

Figure 1 - Strategic Brand Mechanisms to Facilitate Communities of Practice



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Memes as Cultural Infrastructure: A Netnographic Study of Jaguar Rebrand Backlash

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Abstract

Jaguar's 2024 rebrand, featuring the slogan "Copy Nothing" and an advertisement that celebrated modernity while omitting the car entirely, provoked immediate online responses, with memes emerging as a primary medium for collective interpretation. This research employs an immersive, multiplatform netnographic approach based on naturally occurring online conversations and interactions from platforms such as YouTube and Reddit. The study traces the evolution of memes regarding Jaguar's rebrand to examine how online communities negotiate meaning, perform identity, and engage in symbolic activism. The findings reveal temporal and platform-specific dynamics, highlighting memes' central role in shaping contemporary brand discourse and demonstrating the value of immersive, reflexive methods for understanding digital cultural negotiations.

Keywords: Brand activism, memes, backlash, rebranding, netnography

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Consumer and Brand Responses at the Cultural Crossroads of Celebrity Scandals: An AI-Assisted Netnography of the Dior–Johnny Depp Case

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Abstract

When legal culture, celebrity culture, and consumer culture collide in digital spaces, how do publics make meaning? Drawing on the investigative and immersive procedures outlined by Kozinets (2020), this netnography examines over 16,000 comments from TikTok, YouTube, and X regarding Dior, Sauvage, and actor Johnny Depp amid his legal controversies. These scraped data are complemented by fieldnotes recorded in an immersion journal. Manual sentiment analysis is cross-checked using Python and R scripts developed with ChatGPT's assistance. Inspired by recent work on AI-assisted netnography (Kozinets & Seraj-Aksit, 2024), this research

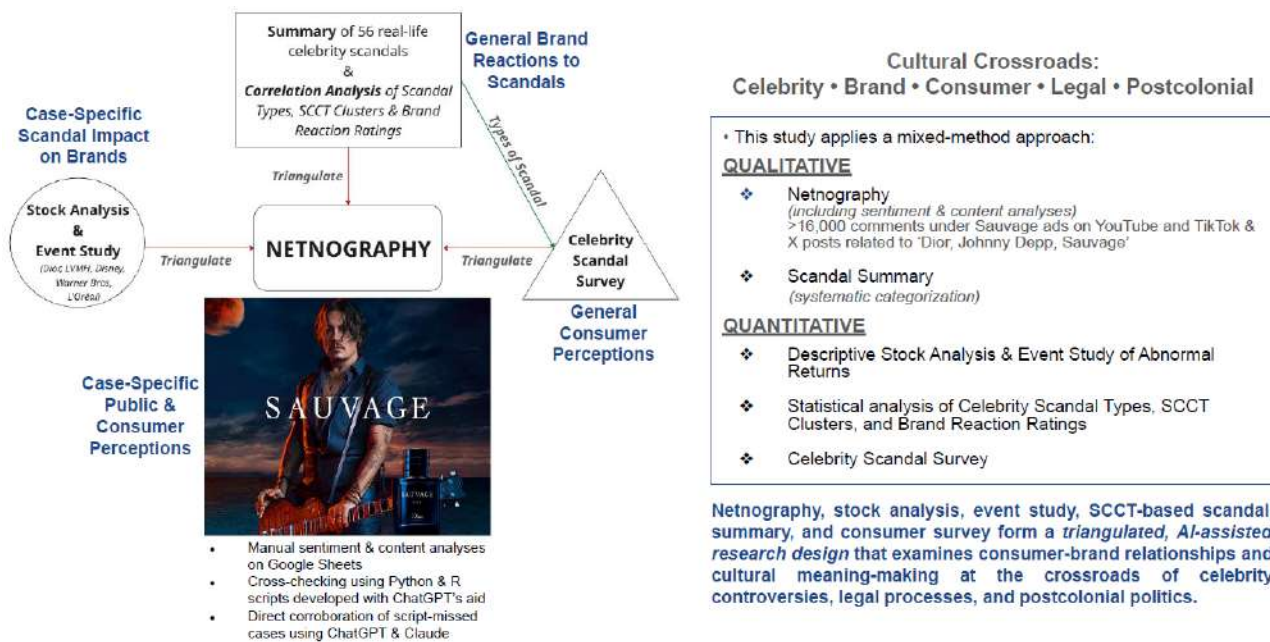
employs ChatGPT and Claude to corroborate interpretations of challenging cases containing sarcasm, pragmatic cues, and other nuanced discourse that the scripts did not classify correctly. For content analysis, the comments are manually categorized into recurring themes, then topic modeling via Python extracts key terms, which are converted into content categories for heuristic labeling and rule-based classification.

Although quantitative aggregation reveals predominantly positive sentiment (~75%) toward Dior, Depp, the Sauvage product line and commercials, netnographic immersion uncovers cultural dynamics invisible to computational metrics. While YouTube commenters debate fragrance gender norms (whether cologne is only for men), female users across platforms declare their Sauvage consumption and satisfaction. Additionally, some criticize Dior and Depp for cultural appropriation, citing 'Sauvage' as a colonial slur, yet others defend the imagery or invoke Depp's reported ancestry. Though numerically minor, these exchanges underscore how Sauvage advertising campaigns become a flashpoint where symbolism, language, colonialism, and identity politics converge.

In line with netnographic findings, a stock-price analysis and an event study indicate a short-run advantage for Dior, which maintained its partnership with Johnny Depp, compared with firms that severed ties. The SCCT-based statistical analyses of 56 real-life celebrity scandals show that brand behavior generally aligns with SCCT's responsibility logic (Coombs, 2007): more severe incidents elicit harsher brand reactions. Depp's controversies fall under the interpersonal scandal subcategory, and observed brand responses align with the average rating (~3.7/5). To triangulate consumer perceptions, a survey is conducted using the scandal subtypes from the SCCT-based summary. The divergence between the netnography's largely positive sentiment and the survey's harshest rating toward interpersonal scandals suggests perceived victim status might reverse public reactions, reflecting case-specific cultural assessment rather than scandal subtype alone.

By revealing both majority sentiment and minority discourse at the crossroads of celebrity, brand, consumer, legal, and postcolonial cultures, this AI-assisted netnography demonstrates the method's power to capture interpretive complexity beyond what quantitative analyses can provide. When managing celebrity controversies, brands should weigh scandal severity, culpability likelihood, public reactions, and emerging cultural tensions.

Figure 1 – Research Design



Keywords: Netnography; Celebrity Scandals; Consumer Perceptions; Brand Reactions; SCCT

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Session 18

Evolving Generative AI culture

Session chair: Romas Malevicius

From Brushes to Pixels: Understanding the Meanings of Virtual Artistic Experience through AI-augmented Netnography

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Abstract

Netnography has emerged as a qualitative method for studying social and cultural practices in digital environments (Kozinets, 2013). Grounded in the observation and interpretation of users' digital traces, it extends the principles of traditional ethnography while adapting them for virtual environments. With the evolution of online platforms and the rise of new symbolic environments such as the metaverse, netnography has evolved into a method capable of exploring complex phenomena (Kozinets, 2021). More recently, artificial intelligence (AI) has contributed to the development of AI-augmented netnography (Cheah, 2025), increasing researchers' capacity to analyze large-scale digital data while maintaining interpretive depth. Building on emerging work in AI-assisted qualitative analysis (Lee et al, 2021 ; Christou 2023), this approach combines computational tools with human reflexive interpretation.

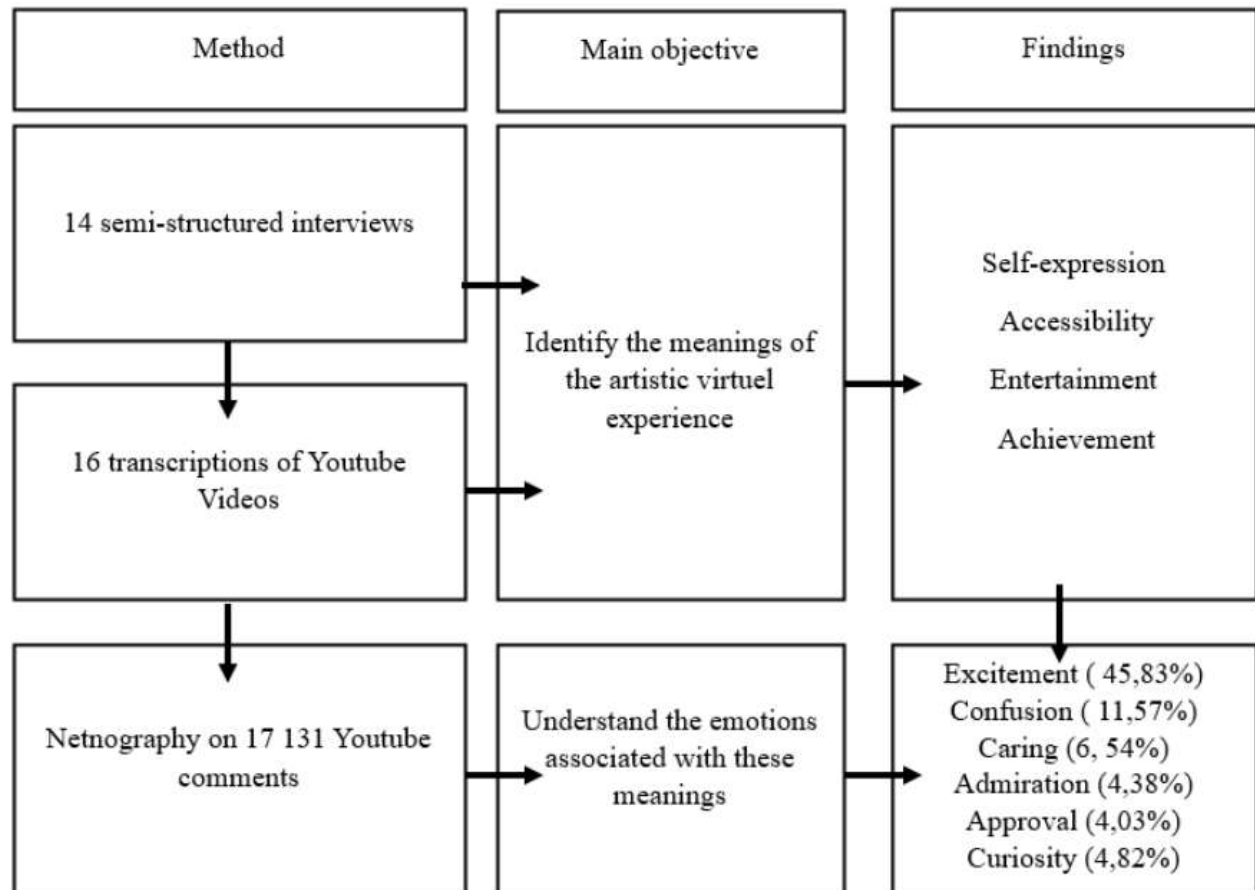
Within this methodological context, our research explores user experiences embedded in the consumption of digital art in video game metaverses. As digital art reshapes modes of creation and reception (Diouf et al., 2013), the artwork is no longer an end product but a lived experience (Heinich, 2022). In these immersive environments, computers can actively participate in the creative process (Lee et al., 2021). The user is no longer a spectator but a co-creator of their own artistic experience, for instance by interacting with a favorite singer in a virtual concert or by crafting a personal virtual art gallery. However, the literature on artistic consumption remains limited (Choi & Burnes, 2013; Nguyen et al., 2023), and the intersection between art and virtual experience is still insufficiently examined, leaving unresolved what this emerging form of artistic experience represents for consumers, particularly regarding its emotional foundations. To address this gap, our study pursues two complementary objectives: (1) to identify and interpret the meanings of virtual artistic experiences, and (2) to examine how AI-augmented netnography contributes to understanding their emotional dimensions.

To analyse this experience, an AI-augmented netnographic study was conducted in the Roblox metaverse. We began with 14 semi-structured interviews with players and the transcription of 16 YouTube gameplay videos, enabling the identification of core experiential meanings. Subsequently, we analyzed 17,131 YouTube comments using the DistilBERT-GoEmotions model to classify expressed emotions. AI was used primarily for large-scale emotion detection, while the association between emotions and experiential meanings was conducted through human qualitative interpretation, ensuring theoretical coherence and methodological transparency.

Our findings highlight four central meanings of virtual artistic experiences: self-expression, accessibility, entertainment, and achievement. Emotional analysis identifies six dominant emotions admiration, caring, approval, curiosity, confusion, and excitement. These emotions transcend and enrich all four meanings, revealing the emotional structuring of virtual artistic consumption. Our results contribute to theories of art consumption by demonstrating how virtual artistic experiences are shaped by emotionally mediated processes of participation and co-creation. We further illustrate that AI-augmented netnography enables scalable yet interpretively grounded analysis for examining emerging artistic experiences in virtual environments. The incorporation of emotion analysis facilitates a more precise and nuanced

interpretation of the meanings derived from our findings. Such insights open avenues for exploring how creativity, technology, and culture converge.

Figure 1 – Methodological Design



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Cultural Nuances of AI Adoption: Hybrid Intelligence, Netnography, and Epistemic Asymmetries in the Global South

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Abstract

Global debates on Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) in academia have largely centered on responsible use, research integrity, and regulatory frameworks developed in the Global North (Epp & Humphreys, 2025). These discussions implicitly assume the widespread availability of institutional infrastructures, formal research training, stable digital access, and robust cultures of academic governance. Such assumptions obscure a critical structural asymmetry: the cognitive, cultural, and institutional resources required for productive artificial intelligence adoption are unevenly distributed across the global scientific field. This asymmetry risks transforming GenAI from a potential equalizer of knowledge production into an amplifier of epistemic inequality.

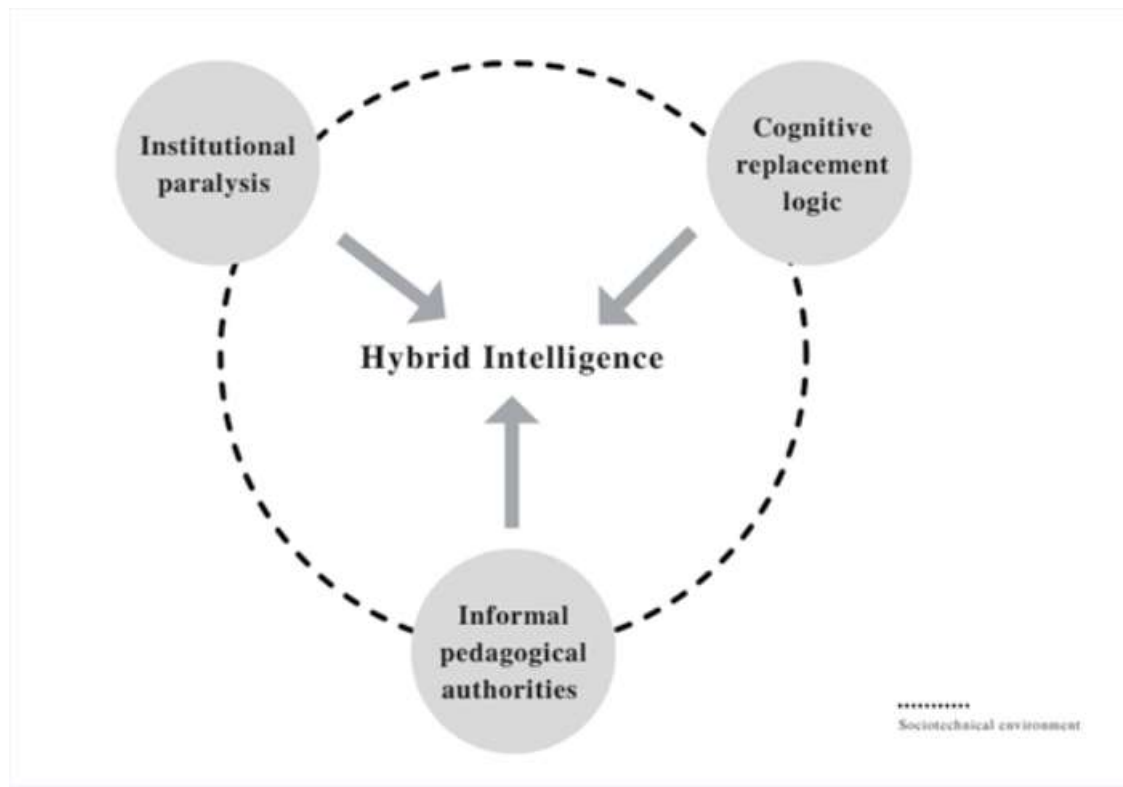
This study examines the adoption of GenAI within Brazilian academic communities to understand how localized technocultural logics shape research practices in the Global South. Drawing on the Epistemologies of the South (Santos & Meneses, 2014) and the concept of hybrid intelligence – the synergistic extension of human cognition through human–AI collaboration (Zhang et al., 2023), we argue that hybrid intelligence is not an automatic outcome of access to AI tools. Rather, it depends on specific human-side resources: research literacy, epistemic reflexivity, institutional support, and pedagogical mediation. Without these foundations, GenAI use tends toward cognitive outsourcing rather than cognitive augmentation.

We combine long-term netnography and participant observation conducted between 2022 and 2025 across Brazilian academic online communities on platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, Telegram, and WhatsApp. These spaces function simultaneously as arenas of informal training, moral negotiation, and peer regulation of GenAI use. Findings reveals three interrelated dynamics that systematically undermine productive hybridization. *Institutional paralysis* generates a climate of surveillance and moral panic: universities respond defensively through prohibition and punishment, suppressing experimentation while failing to offer structured AI literacy. The *logic of cognitive replacement* intertwines with the Brazilian cultural practice of *jeitinho* (the art of improvisational workaround), reframing GenAI as a shortcut for accelerating outputs and evading detection rather than as a partner in analytical reasoning. The rise of *informal pedagogical authorities* — influencers and digital creators — fills the governance vacuum, democratizing access to GenAI knowledge while simultaneously reshaping research norms and ethical boundaries outside formal academic oversight.

We show that GenAI diffusion in the Global South follows a culturally localized pathway marked by precarity, improvisation, and platform-based learning regimes. Hybrid intelligence emerges not as a default condition but as a fragile achievement, accessible primarily to those possessing both material access to premium tools and the cultural capital to integrate AI reflexively into knowledge production. For the majority, GenAI becomes a survival technology rather than a vehicle for epistemic empowerment.

By foregrounding netnographic evidence and situating GenAI within technocultural and epistemological debates, this study shifts the focus from abstract universal ethics to context-sensitive epistemic justice. We argue that policies and pedagogies for AI in research must be grounded in the social, linguistic, and institutional realities of the Global South. Only through such localized, culturally informed approaches can hybrid intelligence fulfill its promise of genuine democratization rather than reproducing new forms of knowledge colonization.

Figure 1 - An Illustration of the Findings



Keywords: Hybrid intelligence; Netnography; Epistemic inequality

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Mapping Programmer Cultures in the Age of Generative AI

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Abstract

Generative AI is transforming software development, but how do developers interpret and negotiate this shift? Our netnographic study dives into the everyday online conversations where these negotiations unfold, extending the methodological framework we introduced at Netnocon 2025. Following Kozinets' (2020) approach, we conceptualize digital platforms as technocultural arenas in which realities are continuously shaped, contested, and redefined. While programming-specific subreddits are used for informal knowledge exchange among developers, they also include normative discussions and negotiations about programming

practice (Liu & Anwar 2022). These discussions constitute a form of boundary work through which developers draw, defend, and challenge distinctions between legitimate and illegitimate expertise, tasks, and professional identities (Langley et al. 2019).

Our analysis is based on a targeted search of Reddit discussions in which developers reflect on working with AI. From these, we selected eight exemplary threads, each ranging from 16 to 973 contributions. We then analyzed these within their communicative structure to exploratively capture the developers' subjective perspectives. The material clusters into three central dimensions: (1) statements about transformations in work activities, (2) statements about shifts in professional identity, and (3) statements about the role assigned to AI.

Within each dimension, we clustered the coded material into distinct, internally coherent types that illustrate the diversity of perspectives circulating in developer communities. In the Work dimension, we identify two divergent types: one that anticipates efficiency gains and another that perceives AI as increasing complexity by introducing new layers of coordination, oversight, and responsibility. The Identity dimension comprises four distinct types: a competence-gain type that interprets AI as a catalyst for expanding professional repertoires; a deprofessionalization type expressing fears of deskilling and diminished professional integrity; a status-quo maintenance type that performatively defends established professional identity boundaries; and a type that points out adaptive pressure in the industry. In the Role Assignment dimension, we identify three types: developers who frame AI as a tool, those who engage with it as a collaborative assistant, and those who attribute to AI a form of proxy management that shapes their own workflow.

Together these types offer an empirically grounded map of how developers articulate, contest, and negotiate the meaning of AI within their occupational culture. In line with Netnocon 2026's theme Cultural Crossroads, the study illustrates how AI becomes a focal point at which different professional cultures within IT are reworked. In our presentation, we take the audience directly into these discussions: we share vivid original quotes, unpack the cultural logics behind them, and show how developers themselves are actively rewriting what software developing means in the age of AI.

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More Than Code: How Software Developers Culturally Process the Generative AI Disruption

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Marlene Kulla, Weizenbaum Institut Berlin, Berlin, Germany

Jonas Jacobi, Erminas, Oldenburg, Germany

Abstract

The introduction of generative AI tools is transforming work practices, skill requirements, and professional self-understandings in software development (Schmitt, Gajos & Mokryn 2024). While existing research predominantly conceptualizes work with AI through a productivity-driven lens, this study foregrounds the symbolic and cultural shifts within the developer community. Drawing on Berger and Luckmann's framework of social reality construction (Berger & Luckmann 2016), we investigate, from a broader labor-sociological perspective, how developer communities collectively produce, negotiate, and stabilize meanings around generative AI within their shared digital environments.

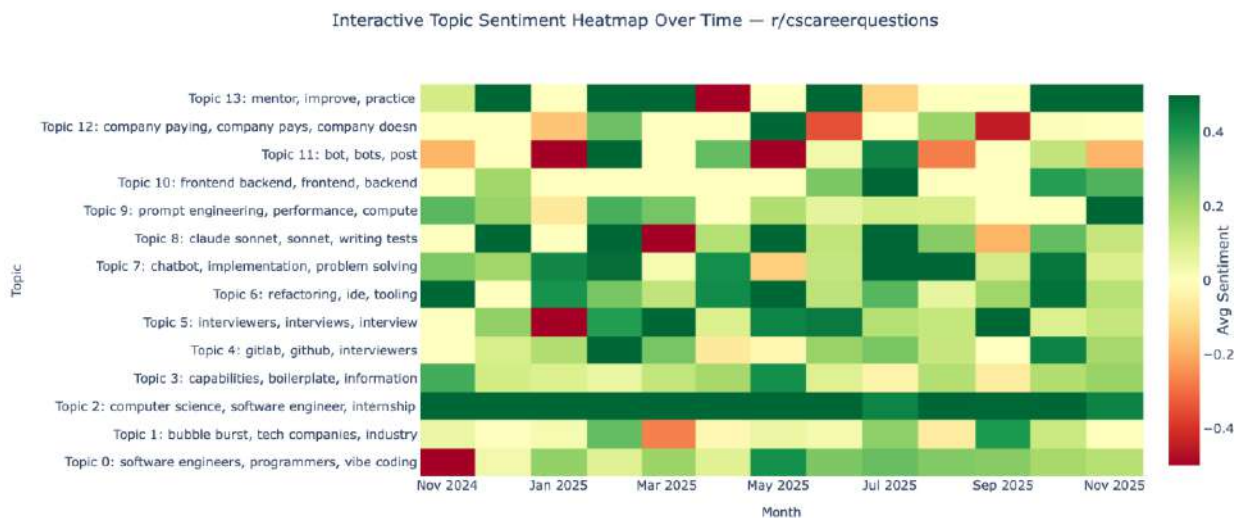
Methodologically this netnographic study follows a two-step approach (Kozinets 2020: 65, 74-75). First, we conduct an exploratory quantitative phase using automated topic modeling and sentiment analysis across four key subreddits (r/learnprogramming, r/webdev, r/programming, r/cscareerquestions) to identify thematic clusters and temporal shifts in discourse and sentiments (see heatmap). The data is collected starting from early 2022 before the public release of ChatGPT, the subsequent boom period of heightened visibility and expectation, and the following phase of disenchantment. Across this period, distinct community profiles become visible: learners and web developers tend to articulate more positive views, while career-oriented forums are markedly more skeptical.

These insights then guide the main qualitative analysis of cultural and identity-related dimensions. The preliminary results indicate a moderately positive overall picture (average sentiment 0.23, 62 percent positive entries). Topics are especially positively evaluated when AI appears as a productive tool: automation of repetitive tasks, accelerated development, learning support, and creative inspiration. A deeper qualitative examination, grounded in a culturally informed netnographic perspective reveals that these use cases are collectively interpreted not as threats but as meaningful enhancements to everyday work, aligned with shared norms, values, and community-specific constructivist practices. In contrast, several topics display strong ambivalence or negative sentiment: concerns about skill erosion, uncertainty about labor market developments, increasing performance pressure, and questions surrounding the future relevance of traditional developer expertise. The most negatively rated topics additionally reveal pronounced identity conflicts.

The study demonstrates that programmers' involvement with AI is driven not only by technical functionality but by social, emotional, and identity-related dimensions. It contributes to netnographic research on technology adoption, professional identity, and the social

consequences of automation and enables a multidimensional understanding of how communities collectively process disruptive technological change.

Figure 1 – Interactive Topic Sentiment Heatmap Over Time



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Session 19

Digital sense-making

Session chair: Vanessa Campbell

Beyond the Archives: Reimagining History through Netnography

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Abstract

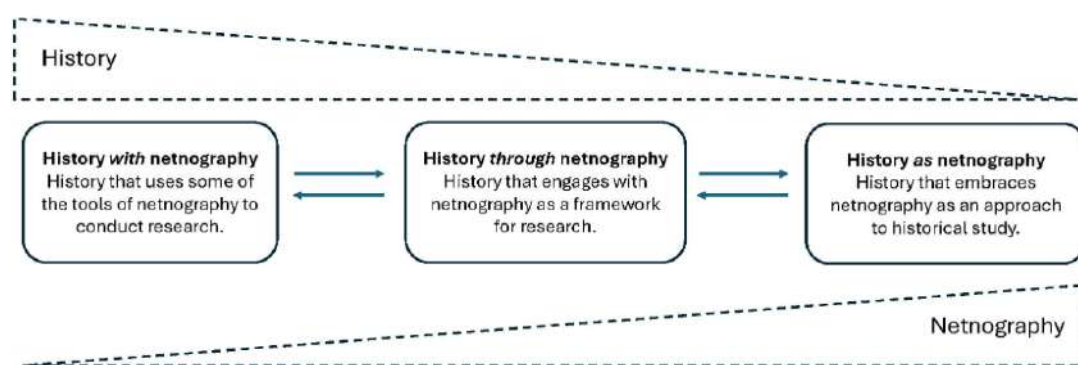
This paper examines the potential of netnographic methods and analytical techniques in the study of business history. Netnography continues to evolve as researchers explore new sites, diverse communities, and interdisciplinary topics (Kozinets & Gretzel, 2024). We argue that netnography is particularly suited to investigating the globalised context of contemporary business history. Building on the ‘digital turn’ in business history (Decker et al., 2015; Nix & Decker, 2021), netnography offers opportunities to move beyond single case studies and uncover transnational connections (van Dam, 2019).

We argue that netnography is more than a research tool and has the potential to reshape disciplines and fields of study (Discetti & Anderson, 2023; Wu, 2022). To support this claim, we propose an exploratory framework for integrating netnography into historical research (see Figure 1) and outline three perspectives: (1) History *with* Netnography, (2) History *through* Netnography, and (3) History *as* Netnography.

We present two illustrative studies that demonstrate both the potential and challenges of this approach. The first examines the evolution of online communities and Fair Trade networks in India, analysing 22,257 tweets from 15 organisations (2009–2022) and triangulating findings with interviews and oral histories. The second explores memes and the Black Twitter community through critical discourse theory and netnography, highlighting tensions between brands and communities rooted in historical distrust of corporations. We provide a historical overview to contextualise this discourse.

By aligning history and netnography, we aim to advance methodological discussions on source criticism (Heller, 2023) and born-digital archives (Nix et al., 2025), offering new pathways for historically contextualised studies of organisations, communities, and their digital traces.

Figure 1 – Towards a Framework of Historical and Netnographic Research



Keywords: Business History, Netnography Methods, Digital Archives

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Tracing Moral Worlds: A Multi-Site Netnography of Citizen-Consumers in Book-Ban Debates

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Abstract

Consumer research has documented how neoliberal governance shifts responsibility from state institutions onto individuals, producing “responsible” citizen-consumer subjectivities (Coskuner-Balli, 2020; Giesler & Veresiu, 2014). This research expands existing scholarship by analyzing the convergence of moral, religious, political, and neoliberal discourses in shaping citizen-consumer subjectivities, as explored through book bans in the United States.

Book bans have surged rapidly, rising from 730 documented cases in 2021 to 1,269 in 2022 (American Library Association [ALA], 2023). While state legislation plays a critical role, everyday citizen-consumers, including parents, librarians, advocacy groups, and readers, participate in defining which books are deemed harmful, which identities are protected, and which moral futures are sanctioned. We therefore ask: (1) How are caring citizen-consumer subjectivities produced through debates about book bans? (2) What forms of “care” emerge as responsibility shifts from the state to citizens? (3) What ideological logics are mobilized alongside neoliberalism in these enactments of care?

To address these questions, we conducted a multi-site netnographic study (Kozinets, 2020) across three interconnected digital and informational environments between November 2019 and May 2023. Our data include: (1) New media corpus: *New York Times* articles (n=67), (2) reader comments posted on NYT digital platforms, (3) conservative advocacy websites (e.g.,

Moms for Liberty, No Left Turn in Education). These sources reveal journalistic framing, public interpretations, and activist messaging. Following netnographic best practices (Kozinets, 2020), we conducted iterative cycles of immersion and abductive interpretation, tracing how moral ideologies circulate across publics and shape caring subjectivities.

Our analysis reveals two ideological formations, American conservatism and American liberalism, that structure opposing moral narratives of care. Conservative ideology draws from Christian traditionalism and concerns about moral decline, emphasizing the protection of children from perceived threats such as LGBTQ+ content or “secular indoctrination” (Heineman, 2018). Liberal ideology emphasizes equality, dignity, and protection of marginalized youth, grounded in human rights and progressive religious ethics (Hedstrom, 2018).

We make three contributions. First, we demonstrate how neoliberal responsabilization is intertwined with religious and political ideologies to produce caring citizen-consumers. Second, we extend responsabilization research by showing that citizens experience responsabilization differently depending on ideological commitments. Third, we illustrate how book bans shape racialized and gendered subjectivities by regulating access to cultural goods, echoing Cohen’s (2004) analysis of postwar consumer subjectivities.

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Sensemaking online: a netnographic analysis of Wirecard scandal repercussions in German Facebook Communities (2020-2025)

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Abstract

Wirecard, once a celebrated German DAX-listed fintech company, defied whistleblowers and regulators before its collapse in June 2020. Wirecard admitted to missing 1.9 billion EUR from its balance sheets. For 5 years the investigative articles by the Financial Times, based on whistleblower accounts, were dismissed as “fake news,”. German regulators even targeted the journalists and whistleblowers rather than investigating Wirecard itself.

This netnographic study examines the long-term social media repercussions of the Wirecard fraud scandal through a systematic analysis of Facebook posts from 2020 to 2025. It explores how German Facebook users processed, discussed, and made sense of the scandal following Wirecard’s collapse.

The central research question is how Wirecard’s business practices influenced media coverage - both traditional and social media - highlighting undue editorial influence in media work. While previous studies have examined the scandal (Chen, 2022; Dierks & Tiggebeck, 2021), the social media angle remains underexplored.

Using Kozinets’ (2020) netnographic methodology, the study analyses Facebook groups focused on finance, investing, and business news in Germany and the UK. At the time of writing, the research is in the investigation phase. Preliminary findings indicate that Facebook communities serve as spaces for collective sensemaking, with a strong focus on developing critical thinking among investors. The scandal has fostered skepticism toward German financial institutions and regulatory bodies, leading to increased demand for transparency and alternative information sources. Notably, grassroots investor education networks and content have emerged within Facebook groups, challenging traditional financial authority structures. This research contributes to digital sociology literature on crisis communication and financial scandal discourse, while also offering practical insights for corporate communication and the general public on identifying and responding to “fake news.”

Keywords: Wirecard financial scandal, Netnography of Facebook in Germany, corporate fraud

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Reverse Netnography of the Cimbrian Folklore of the Altopiano dei Sette Comuni, a Cultural and Social Crossroad

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Abstract

The primary focus of this research is geocultural. Even though there are different opinions and beliefs, it is widely accepted that the contemplated region was populated by people coming to the Venetian and Trentino Prealps from the Bavarian-Tyrolean linguistic area between the 11th and the 14th century. The sharp isolation of some of these mountain areas – e.g. the Altopiano dei Sette Comuni, the so called Tredici Comuni Veronesi, and the municipality of Luserna in the province of Trento – has contributed to the preservation of folkloric and linguistic features attributable to ancient Bavarian traditions, despite a context of almost daily contact with the Romance traditions of the Veneto plain.

During the Middle Ages and the early modern period, these people and their language were identified with the word “Cimbro” (Cimbrian), terms that are still prevalent today both in scientific literature and in the resident and non-resident populations’ daily lives. The spoken language as a mother tongue is virtually extinct in Veneto, although local institutions and associations are trying to revive it through language courses and written production, recovering part of the intangible folk heritage, and written production extends to social media and websites. At the same time, a corpus of folk music has been produced by rock/metal bands that not only recover traditional songs – such as "Tin Tan Nona", a melody still played by village bells with strong intangible cultural value as a "time signal" – but also create new language material: traditional themes and current affairs are both topics that go along with environmental issues and the relationship of people with their land. Cimbrian, at least for the Altopiano dei Sette Comuni, is not part of the everyday language, except for special occasions or in micro-toponymy, where the Germanic origin of most words is clearly visible.

Our research focuses on social media hashtags and digital ethnography in order to collect data by browsing websites and analysing academic texts regarding turning points in folk tradition. It should be kept into consideration that the geographical areas in question are governed by distinct administrations with very different dissemination policies: Veneto has limited policies for the protection of linguistic minorities, while Trentino-Alto Adige enjoys greater incentives. Furthermore, the areas where the cultural-linguistic recovery is taking place fell within the territories of the former Austro-Hungarian Empire until the second half of the 19th century, which were later divided into different nations as a consequence of the geopolitical variations caused by World War I and World War II, also causing familiar groups to part as their household belonged to one or the other newly established country.

We used hashtags as topic gatherers, although engagement on social media in terms of content production has resulted problematic: the topic "Cimbrian culture" is present, but engagement remains very low: comments are rare, unless the events are fan-favourite, such as those of bands. However, for other events and initiatives such as language courses, users only interact through reactions. This happens because social networks are used to promote events and not for active, participatory sharing, which instead occurs in person. It is important to note, however, that promotional activities revitalize the language and its recovery as well as folk heritage, through bibliographic research that can be shared with the public.

Literature Review

The main challenge of this research has been detecting users interaction regarding Cimbrian culture. Contents related to Cimbrian culture exists, but are sporadic, and where feedback can be found it comes from other groups of users, such as folk-metal enthusiasts or groups that practice of witchcraft and neo-paganism. Local people social interaction doesn't occur through social media. An essay published in the proceedings of a conference on the human aspects of IT for the aging population (Volkmann, Miller, Jochem: 2020) reports social media as a tool for promoting active and independent aging and that social interactions and connections are very important for improving and increasing quality of life. This paper point out the issue of addressing older people's fear of and knowledge of social media, since technology is ageist because it is conceived and designed for younger people. With regards to our research, however, the lack of engagement on the topic affects both old and young people, who, from ethnographic evidence, often admit to use social networks just occasionally because they consider them toxic and contentious or because they are full with fake news and inaccuracies, and therefore, they prefer in-person social interaction. This represents a challenge for researchers, not just ethnographers, to access cultural production – both editorial and intangible – that is thorough and consistent, despite being present and rooted in the local area.

This discrepancy between popular non-scientific content and what is actually eligible to be taken into account is defined by ethnobotanist Renata Söukand as “dark local knowledge”, borrowing the astrophysics concept that even in what we cannot see there is matter (Söukand, 2024): in her essay she states that in local ecological knowledge, LEK, there are aspects of reality that science cannot yet explain because local knowledge is a system with its own complexity, linked to practices interwoven with the environment and context within which communities live, and that if the boundaries of this LEK were crystallized, knowledge would be museumized and would not be real life. She continues by saying that not all the components of a practice can be captured in words or on video and that homogeneous knowledge can only exist in a closed society that has no external contacts, such as closed borders, physical limits such as forests, mountains or deserts, or informational limits such as illiteracy or lack of internet access. Tacit knowledge cannot be easily documented because it is taught and learned from person to person and can be present in one context and absent in another. It develops in a specific environment that shapes how we perceive it in that specific context.

Thus, just as Söukand's essay states, LEK is made of features that are part of known but unrecognized categories (know but unknowledge), not considered important by people who, however, experience them in their daily routines, so we could say that the Cimbrian self-representation is lacking on social networks because, although it is a known cultural feature, it is considered useless and ineffective to discuss about it on social media and the internet is not considered an adequate environment to share experiences related to the Cimbrian culture. Another important difference with other linguistic minorities lies, again, in the lack of engagement on social media with regards to Cimbrian culture. A reference to a thesis on Maghreb minorities in Italy, who use social media actively to maintain vertical and horizontal ties within their communities, as the author defines them poised between two worlds (Biasin, 2025) to create and maintain what Fabio Dei calls cyber folklore and cultural intimacy, with specific reference to countries and cultures that are being lost (Dei, 2015), might be appropriate here, along with Dei's essay. But in both cases we are talking about lively social activities that bridges the gap of physical presence since social networks keep at least part of the intangible culture alive. We could define this research as a *reverse netnography* as it started with data that collected “naturally” to verify their presence online, hypothesizing what Kozinets and Gretzel define in the tourism sector as a techno-culture: tourism is a culture shaped by and

dependent on the use we all make of social networks, both passively and actively, that is, both for consulting and publishing content (Kozinets, Gretzel, 2023).

Kozinets and Gretzel emphasize how social networks and other online platforms, such as the most used ones, but also Discord or new social networks like Thread or Mastodon and, I would add, Reddit or Twitch, are an essential and fundamental resource of data for building cultural understanding. In the case of Cimbrian culture, data are present but it is not possible to recall the way they are experienced among users, shared, not diffused but experienced together, and therefore it is not possible to understand how many people actually have a direct connection with Cimbrian language and culture, which habits have actually been lost and which have been maintained. The main part of the research was therefore not online: what usually happens online happened inversely in time and circumstances so we could talk about a reverse embedding experience: from offline to online. Thus, a gap of dark cultural knowledge is created between online and offline, precisely in the cultural creation, recreation, and preservation refers to what Bausinger defines as the most well-founded: according to him, every traditionalism conceives its mission to be that of denying what has passed in favor of the existing and the historically grounded, and the role of the human being is that of what he defines as a "time-binding animal" within a process of expanding the temporal horizon (Bausinger, 2005: p. 161). In this study, therefore, digital data were used as traces and documentation of offline anthropological practices: the digital data can be compared with local literature.

Researchers wishing to delve deeper into Cimbrian culture could use these data as if they were footprints on a trail and then delve deeper into the subject, as reported, for example, in the proceedings of the Netnocon 2024 conference by Vanessa Campbell, in which she talks about building authentic relationships starting from Facebook, as the social network has worked as a relational multiplier on the part of users who then moved on to personal relationships within non-profit associations. (Campbell, 2024)

As mentioned above, it must first be noted that this research necessarily begins with bibliographic sources before moving on to actual netnographic research. Most of the information regarding the Cimbrian popular and folkloric tradition is, in fact, the result of academic museumifications of oral tales and memories, which allow the modern reader to access traditional knowledge that would otherwise have been lost. Over time, the risk that the traditional nature of oral culture could be lost has become an increasingly concrete reality: since traditional cultures were challenged by the emergence of a third culture born of the media, their content has been progressively absorbed by the latter and transformed to be accessible to all and easily understood. There are, in fact, two possible fates for popular culture: "On the one hand, its production [of content] almost entirely ceases, because traditional social references are disappearing [...] Furthermore, its preservation is in grave danger, as it relies on oral sources and customs that have rapidly become obsolete and difficult to pass on due to the fascination that the products [...] exert, especially on the new generations. On the other hand, the heritage of dialects, songs, mythical and fairytale narratives, festivals, and material culture [...] is collected, archived, and systematized [...] by intellectuals and scholars. Thus, with great theoretical attention [...] the crystallization and cultured "museumification" of a resource inevitably condemned to disappear in its traditional guise is determined." (Stella, 2012).

It is therefore necessary, in order to better understand the extent to which the Altopiano dei Sette Comuni was a land of Germanic/Romance cultural intersection and blending, to define who were the Cimbrian people who settled there. The Cimbrian are a population of Germanic

origin who settled in the Veneto-Trentino Prealps during the Middle Ages, in the mountainous areas between the Adige and Brenta rivers. Their origins, long debated, have been fully defined by the cultural sources that certify their origin. First and foremost, the Cimbrian language itself reveals its Germanic origins, traced by linguists to the last phase of Old High German: "Our country [...] boasts the presence, in its mountainous territory, of the most archaic dialectal varieties of the German language [...] These treasures are mainly constituted [...] by the Cimbrian dialects of the Northeast." (Panieri, 2022) and again: "Without a doubt, the vernacular, so-called Cimbric, of the Sette Comuni [...] is the oldest German dialect to have survived, and this is explained by the immigration to the Altopiano [...] which occurred before the year 1100" (Hornung, 1996).

But the contents of material and immaterial culture also allow a reconstruction of the past as a "crossroads" territory: the imagination is born and nurtured by the encounter between the faculties of the imagination and the heritage of cultural symbols, and is connected both to the subjective dimension of man and that of the surrounding environment (Bonato, Zola, 2019). Cimbrian folklore is closely tied to its territory, where various creatures interact with humans and with the surrounding environment at the same time: a true environment, experienced, known, and real, even today, for the inhabitants of the Altopiano dei Sette Comuni.

In fact it is not rare to continuously and coherently find precise toponyms as the place of residence of fantastic beings, confirming what has been reported above: the Altaburg (also found as Alteburg or in one case Altoburk) is defined by several sources as the place of residence of tutelary Genii (Dal Pozzo, 2007 posthumously), ancient divinities such as Ostera (Zanocco, 1973) or of demons and devils (Frescura, 1898 and Schweizer, 1984). Imaginary places can themselves be magical and the Tanzerloch represents a clear example: "The dead make their processions in the woods, the fairies, the Anguane, the Seileghen Baiblen dance around the Tanzerloch [...]" (Frescura, 1898); or the Altar Knotto, a large boulder overlooking the Val D'Astico: "it is therefore likely that [...] the Dwarves dwelt in that stone called the Altar. [...] the inhabitants of San Pietro di Valdastico commonly call it the Devil's stone" (Dal Pozzo, 2007 posthumously). So much so that the elements of discontinuity present in a given area (caves, caverns, mountains, waterways, etc.) are perceived in popular tradition as liminal zones and watersheds between different worlds: nature/culture, life/death, and so on.

This is attested by folk tales, which connect these borderlands to fantastic figures and bring them together thanks to their dual origins: "The Germanic and Romance elements have long since merged." (Rubini, 1983). The fantastic beings of the Altopiano that populate these places form a whole with the reality of the territory and its cultural duplicity and its material and immaterial memory: "The collective imagination creates symbolic figures of reference to which beliefs give the apparent support of real life" (Maffei, 1995). Indeed, the Orco, the Seeligen Baiblen (found in sources under various spellings), the Billar Man or Wild Man, and the Jigerjäger are, on the Altopiano, creatures born from a mixture of diverse origins that still manage, however, to allow us to perceive their origin and the intrinsic truths they conceal. Referring to the Wild Hunt (here defined by the figure of the Jigerjäger or Wild Man): "The myth of the tregenda embraces the entire Cimbrian territory [...] The name dates back without exception to Jagd, Gejaide, Jäger, etc. [...] in Roana, Albaredo, and Castelletto [...] the Jigerjäger are known [...] the appearance of the tregenda in the past diffusion of the legend in the southern German area [...] joins in the south." (Schweizer, 1988). And again another example, the Seeligen Baiblen (also known as "Wild Women"): small women, dressed in white and with white hair, devoted to spinning and hanging their washed clothes on long lines hung on the

mountainsides, which yield endless skeins of thread that disappear if the recipient stops spinning. These women are intertwined in the popular imagination of the area of Vicenza, with the figure of the Anguana, a nymph or temptress with deformed legs who presides over watercourses and is frequently found in northern Italy (Perco, 1997).

And in fact: “There are similarities between the Seileghen Baiblen and the Anguane: the Seileghen Baiblen stop in the meadows, in the woods, near the fountains to bake bread and do the laundry [...] as with the Anguane. [...] a further testimony collected in Mezzaselva brings the Seileghen Baiblen even closer to the Anguane, describing the former intent on spinning and putting the canevo [hemp seeds] to bathe in the puddles.” (Rubini, 1983). Their characteristics have also led several scholars to link the Seeligen Baiblen and the Anguane to the mythical figure of Frau Perchta, who was also part of the Wild Hunt legend. On the Altopiano, only one hypothesis remains, by the German glottologist Bruno Schweizer, famous in the Cimbrian area, linking the Seeligen Baiblen to Perchta, although this hypothesis was never confirmed by other sources: “The wild woman is the correlation of the Wild [Man] [...] here are the individual apparitions, or denominations, that must be discussed here: [...] Graustana [...] Perchta [...] Women of the woods. [...] the form [...] of the “woman of the woods” [...] I found it in a legend of Roana-Castelletto [...] and it could be related to the behavior of Perchta” (Schweizer, 1988). And as for the Anguane, “The Anguane exercise control over the times and operations of spinning, punishing those who transgress. [...] This function of enforcing the prohibitions related to spinning times [...] harks back to mythical figures such as Herodias or Perchta” (Perco, 1997).

Netnography

Online netnographic production is sparse and sporadic, and has very little engagement. Posts are often devoid of comments and limited to reactions. Netnographically produced data tell us that the cultural object exists, but it doesn't tell us how it's experienced online. This is because, when speaking with people, and thus in-person ethnographic data, many of them reject social networks and don't feel the need to share their opinions online on this topic, except in specific cases, such as when it concerns local issues. Some topics are more relatable to generic ones for a specific cultural context, such as paganism/heathenism, Wicca, or Germanic folk culture. An interesting finding comes from the band Balt Hüttar, where some posts include comments from foreign users asking what language they sing in, or other general comments of appreciation. This isn't because there are foreign users interested in Cimbrian culture, rather because the band plays folk metal, a genre that has a global international following regardless the used language. The investigation (Kozinets, 2020) was conducted through a non-intrusive observation. The environments investigated were primarily Facebook and Instagram. Facebook groups have more engagement. In some groups dedicated to the history or traditions of Altopiano dei Sette Comuni there's engagement just as it happens when someone follows a local reference person, because they have a neighborhood and direct acquaintances who follow them to stay informed and discuss local issues related to politics and local policies. Searching for certain hashtags on TikTok, such as #cimbri, mainly reveals videos about nature-related hiking tourism.

To find information about places linked to folklore or folk characters, it's necessary to search for specific hashtags, which, however, may yield results that have nothing to do with the investigated context. As for tales and legends, a short folk horror film in Cimbro is worth mentioning. It tells the story of a dying sick child in a rural setting, probably in the 18th century.

Posted 2 years ago, it has over 10,000 views, 930 likes, and 48 comments, including in other languages, which draw comparisons with other horror films. This is probably due to the horror genre having a large audience. Regarding this short, the algorithm suggests a video posted by the dubbing director interviewing the actors, in which he says he directed the dubbing in an unknown language, Cimbri, that he defines as a dead language. The dubbing actor has almost a million and a half subscribers, the video has more than 5,000 likes and 70 comments. The linguistic production is untranslatable because cimbri is a kind of dialect and automatic translation is not possible since the language is not detected.

FOLKLORE PLACES

Music remains an active element in the production of folk content. The environment is linked to folklore and ethnic groups: themes of communication and songs are linked to the representation of the environmental bond between humans and the land, mediated by folklore. Online research into local literature is essential. Netnography on these topics cannot be done without reading local literature with a guide, so ethnography and netnography must be conducted in simbiosi. On TikTok, the little you find relates to the landscape, reconstructed paths and villages, and something about food, but not the Altopiano: Belluno, Trentino, Recoaro.

Self-representation and self-referential content remains quite rare, and in any case, it garners very little engagement in terms of likes (unquantifiable on Instagram) and often without comments.

Tanzerloch

Tanzerloch is an inverted funnel-shaped cave located in Camporovere, near Roana, and is the setting of numerous legends concerning dances of witches or souls in purgatory. It's also the name of the new album by the local folk metal band Balt Hüttar and of the album's eponymous song: 10 comments also in other languages, one asks what language it is because it sounds like Romansh. 128 likes and more than 48,000 views in 4 months since its release in July 2025. The new production by Balt Hüttar talks about the territory and how climate change has affected the changes in the territory and probably also the culture because it is linked to landmarks: the example of the tempest Vaia, occurred in 2018, but also Tanzerloch relating to a specific place.

About Tanzerloch on Instagram one can also find a post about a Wiccan ritual: A post over 500 weeks old featuring a cauldron for a Wiccan ritual with the caption "sister blessing" and a dedicated hashtag, but no reference to the Cimbri and no comments.

Cimbrian culture, tied to specific places, especially the land as a place of origin, is described in an ethnographic magazine dedicated to ethnic groups, which discusses the Cimbrian lands in Veneto and Trentino with specific references to the places. This post was published in January 2024.

The Seeligen Baiblen and their places.

The Seeligen Baiblen, le *beate donnette*, are characters of the cimbrian folklore and which in Cimbrian are defined and transcribed in different ways by area. On Facebook, a search for "seleghen beiblen" reveals a group post discussing excursions and the redevelopment of wild

areas and caves supposedly home to the blessed women. Specific references include places like Cesuna and Mezzaselva. The group's name is a play on words, combining a saying with a specific place: Il Costo (a road on the side of the mountain that connects the plain with the plateau).

A search for the characters of the *zelighen beiblen*, spelled this way, reveals another place: Cesuna, and a summer family festival, Hoga Zait, meaning "the high time," or "the happy time." This festival, however, is held in Roana and focuses on performances of Cimbrian fables and legends. As the photos demonstrate, the festival is actively attended and it's very interesting to see how, in this research, Cimbrian culture from Veneto doesn't show any engagement results, yet the photos of this festival demonstrate a large crowd.

Again, searching for "*seelighen baiblen*" reveals a blog post from the Veneto Segreto cultural tourism association, dated May 30, 2021, which highlights three places in the municipality of Roana dedicated to three characters as those not to be missed: the house of the Seeligen Baiblen in Mezzaselva, in an area of caves in the woods; the Tanzerloch, the hole of the dance, a large cave in Camprovere di Roana; and the Stonhaus, the house of the Orco, a suspended stone bridge in Mezzaselva. The post is accompanied by photos of the locations.

Looking for information about another location, the Altenburg, we find a PDF of a story, "*La vera storia di Peldricc e di Regine dell'Altenburg*" by Giancarlo Bortoli, with specific references to places and characters from the Cimbrian culture of the Altopiano dei Sette Comuni and where reference is made to a nordic goddess, Ostera, protector of Saxons, whose festivals were celebrated in April, hence Ostern, the Easter celebrations. The term Altaburg also includes a video of a homonymous stage show dated 2023, with 246 views, 6 likes, and zero comments. There are more than one place with rock formations that are perceived by popular tradition as altars, and among these, Altarknotto is mentioned in a post by a heathenism association that held a blot, a sacrificial ceremony. The post was 20 weeks old at the time of writing this essay.

A blog dedicated to the places of famous writer Mario Rigoni Stern from Asiago also mentions the Altarknotto in Castelletto di Rotzo as a place traditionally related to sacrifices. Yet another post on the official portal of the municipality of Asiago talks about Altarknotto and Altaburg in Rotzo, considered a place associated with pagan cults, dwarves, and other folkloric figures. It can therefore be noted that there is also a production of content that accredits these places as Cimbrian folkloric and even pre-Christian pagan traditions. Another hiking site proposes an itinerary in the Rotzo area, mentioning Altarknotto, Altaburg, and Altakugela as "magical" places. A 2020 article in the Vicenza-based *twiweb* magazine discusses the Cesuna Forest and its legends, whose characters are represented by wooden sculptures.

FOLKLORE CHARACTERS

Many of them are also found in Germanic geographical areas: trying to distinguish folklore characters from places has been difficult since the research revealed that places and characters are closely related: while searching for the place, the characters emerge, and for the characters, the search can lead back to the places. Some content should be searched for with prior knowledge, as if it were dark knowledge. Those unfamiliar with certain aspects and specificities will have a hard time finding them connected to Cimbrian culture, as some folkloric characters are very common in Germanic areas. Without specific knowledge or the ability to verify the sources, it is possible to create misunderstandings. The character of the

Orco, in cimbro #orko, one finds posts from the Istituto di Cultura Cimbra, two, related to events of presentations of fairytales and legend book but mostly, a character from the comic and cartoon He Man. Often mistaken for the character of the wild man, also known as Omo Salbego, the hashtag #omosalbego features an illustration that, at the time of writing, is over 200 weeks old and has no comments

The case of Frau Perchta

It is interesting to note how this character is lost in the same linguistic area within a few kilometers. Not officially documented on the Altopiano dei Sette Comuni, except hypothesized in some texts, Perchta is present in all the neighbouring territories in the village of Luserna, a municipality of 267 inhabitants near the Altopiano dei Sette Comuni, in the province of Trento, under the name *Frau Pertega*, and in Tyrol (Austria) as *Frau Perchta*. Netnography and digital ethnography confirm this semicircular distribution of the character. The character is associated with the Christmas and Epiphany seasons, because Perchta supposedly means shining, while Frau Holda is said to make it snow. Perchta is also the name of a female-fronted Alpine black metal band from Tyrol. They also post in English on their homepage official website, explaining who Frau Perchta is in English and with a link to learn more about the myth. On YouTube, a video dedicated to sisterhood and the nature of the forest has 15 comments, 265 likes, and over 10,000 views. Posted on May 29th, 2024 it features comments of greetings in Spanish and from Argentina. On Facebook, their posts average 500 likes and a few dozen comments. Frau Perchta is therefore practically absent from the Cimbrian tradition in Veneto but is present in the adjacent Cimbrian tradition of Trentino as Frau Pertega, and in the Austrian tradition. On the site Atlas Obscura Frau Perchta is referred to as the Christmas witch or as an ancient Alpine goddess of winter.

Zeileghen baiblen, the blessed little white women who live in small caves and give an infinite ball of thread to anyone who gives them food or does them good, are reported with this term on the German Cimbrian website with specific reference to Roana and with the term *seleghen beiblen* generally to the entire Altopiano dei Sette Comuni. An article in the 2020 online magazine *7 comuni* talks about the *zéelighen baiblen*, reporting the proper names of the individual characters and the toponyms in Cimbrio. A blog dedicated to Folklore in Veneto talks about it as *zeelighen beiblen*. Also like *zeelighen beiblen*, on YouTube one can find a video posted in 2009, the trailer of a show staged in Asiago. The video has just over 3,000 views, 16 likes, and 0 comments. On Instagram, both versions of the names produce no results. On Tiktok, a single video from 2016, has 3 comments and almost 90 likes. The blog *Cimbernauti* talks about it, associating them with the Anguane. The Anguane are land sirens who exhibit behaviors associated with the Seeligen Baiblen, although they have different personalities.

Conclusions

The research on the remains of the Cimbrian culture and language and the attempts to preserve it starting from the area of northern Italy and Bavaria where it lived for centuries still find little space on social media and on the internet, even though the institutes aiming to revive Cimbrian take care of their websites, spreading news and building archives and digitalized materials that allow to get in touch with bibliographic resources. Especially in the considered area of the Altopiano dei Sette Comuni, language courses, linguistic and folkloric research but also with musical production try to restore the worth of the natural local production. Although only with a still small group of volunteers, this study tries to figure out how this linguistic minority is actually represented on social media and generally on blogs, videos and publishing.

Nevertheless, the mismatch between the offline work of volunteers preserving and enhancing linguistic and cultural recovery and its online engagement is huge and it represents a gap that concretizes in the netnographic idea of “local dark knowledge”, implementing the distance between what is actually produced and what is perceived online, where it seems to be absent. There are naturally a few exceptions, such as some connection among groups and people both from Italy and Bavaria or folk metal bands which gained international visibility as such in the music industry, but not for their bond with the Cimbrian culture. The small presence on social media can also be ascribed to them being perceived as abstract environments in which a superficial knowledge of the matter could develop in cultural appropriation and confusion, especially if online verified and historically accurate materials are not widely diffused as in the case of the Cimbrians of the Altopiano.

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Session 20

Netnographies of Online Word-Of-Mouth Phenomena

Session chair: Selin Türkel

The Wisdom of Crowds: eWOM as the Modern Herd Mentality, A Netnographic Approach

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Abstract

Electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) has evolved from simple peer recommendations into a structured system of mediated influence, in which collective judgement and social pressure frequently coexist. While classic formulations of the "wisdom of crowds" suggest that aggregated group judgements can outperform individual assessments, online environments also facilitate rapid information cascades and herd-like alignment. In these contexts, individuals often forgo private knowledge to follow majority opinions, creating dynamic agreement and conformity. This tension is particularly critical in high-stakes technology markets where financial risk is significant and emotional investment is high.

To explore these dynamics, this study employs a qualitative netnographic approach (Kozinets, 2020) within the United Kingdom’s premium smartphone review ecosystem. The dataset comprises ten high-engagement YouTube video reviews from widely viewed channels,

including *Mrwhosetheboss* and *SuperSaf*, focusing on flagship devices such as the iPhone 15 Pro Max and Samsung Galaxy S24 Ultra, alongside 1,945 associated user comments. Reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021) was applied to systematically map sequences of reviewer claims, audience replies, credibility signals, and corrective exchanges, allowing for a nuanced understanding of how consensus is constructed interactively.

The analysis demonstrates that eWOM simultaneously produces collective wisdom and herd behaviour. Reviewer credibility emerges as the primary mechanism catalysing herd formation. When reviewers exhibit deep technical expertise, transparently disclose sponsorships, and apply consistent evaluative criteria, their judgements generate observable “cascades of agreement.” These cascades align audience perceptions and significantly shape brand trust (Filieri et al., 2025), frequently overriding individual scepticism.

However, this authority is not absolute. Comment sections function as sites of “distributed peer expertise,” where audiences collaboratively troubleshoot technical issues, surface longitudinal usage evidence, and correct factual inaccuracies. This process supplements and occasionally contests the authority of the primary reviewer, producing a more robust form of collective sense-making. Furthermore, the study identifies persistent tribal loyalties, particularly the sharp divide between iOS and Android users. These loyalties give rise to defensive herd behaviours where group affiliation and identity performance often outweigh technical merit.

Positioned within Netnocon 2026’s focus on *Cultural Crossroads*, the research illustrates how YouTube comment spaces operate as contested meeting points where the global technoscape of corporate innovation intersects with ideoscapes of identity and digital belonging. Theoretically, the study reconceptualises eWOM as a dual process producing both wisdom and herding, highlighting reviewer credibility as the key driver of agreement cascades. Practically, the findings inform strategies for platforms and marketers to sustain the benefits of distributed peer expertise while mitigating uncritical conformity through clearer credibility signalling.

Keywords: distributed peer expertise, electronic word-of-mouth, herd mentality, netnography, reviewer credibility

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From Silence to Speculation: The Role of Streamers, Leakers and Fan Communities in Pre-Release Buzz Construction

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Abstract

The contemporary video game industry evolves within a culturally participatory ecosystem where pre-release consumer buzz (PRCB) plays a decisive role in shaping consumer expectations, emotional involvement, and purchase intent (Houston et al., 2018; Mandler et al., 2025; Schreiner et al., 2025). This study analyses Pokémon Legends Z-A through a netnographic approach to explore how corporate communication, systematic leaks, and community discourse interact and contribute to buzz generation prior to product release.

A netnographic design is adopted, rooted in immersive observation of online cultural dynamics. Specifically: (1) the analysis of live streaming sessions hosted by Cydonia, the most influential Pokémon-focused Italian Twitch content creator, approached as an intermediated (top-down) interactional space, where sentiment is shaped through real-time community engagement, and emotional framing (Auriemma & Iorio, 2026); and (2) the examination of relevant threads within international Pokémon-related subreddits, considered as disintermediated (bottom-up) environments, where discourse emerges organically without narrative structuring by a central figure and opinions circulate freely across a diverse user base (Gambetti & Kozinets, 2022; Kozinets, 2019; Kozinets et al., 2023, Wang, 2020). This configuration, combining participant observation, contextualized interpretation of interactions, cross-platform sentiment analysis, and comparative discourse mapping, enables a deeper understanding of how anticipation, emotional positioning, and meaning co-creation evolve differently in mediated versus unmediated digital spaces. Consistent with Kozinets (2010), the methodology focuses not only on what users say, but on how, when, and where they communicate, and how collective knowledge is continuously negotiated throughout the pre-release phase.

The research addresses the following questions:

1. What is the role of the cultural mediator (streamer/creator) compared to disintermediated communities in shaping sentiment during a pre-release campaign?
2. How do systematic leaks and unofficial communication replace, reinforce, or weaken institutional marketing in generating PRCB?
3. To what extent does brand loyalty protect a franchise from negative pre-release buzz?

Results show that streamer-mediated discourse contributes to emotional regulation, expectation calibration, and contextual interpretation, providing moment-to-moment guidance to the community. Conversely, Reddit discussions display higher levels of polarization, skepticism toward brand intentions, and frustration regarding declining product

quality. While brand loyalty offers short-term protection, long-term engagement dynamics indicate increasing disaffection among long-standing fans.

A core insight concerns the communication strategy adopted by The Pokémon Company, characterized by nearly one year without updates. In a PRCB environment, community discourse does not pause; corporate silence does not generate absence but creates a communicative vacuum immediately occupied by alternative actors (Salzer-Mörling & Strannegård, 2004). The Z-A case demonstrates how this space was colonized by leakers and data miners, who progressively became perceived as primary information sources. Users actively bypassed official channels, perceiving unverified or leaked content as more valuable than silence. Interestingly, once a leak was officially validated, sentiment improved, reinforcing the perceived credibility of these unauthorized sources.

Implications stress the necessity of sustaining a continuous communication flow to maintain narrative leadership and avoid discourse being shaped by uncontrolled external actors. Netnography proves effective for examining sociocultural dynamics of hype generation and is applicable to other industries with high anticipation and active fandom engagement.

Keywords

Pre-release buzz; Netnography; Cultural mediation; Consumer sentiment; Leak-driven marketing

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Consumer reactions to negative e-WOM disseminated by content creators

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Abstract

Introduction

Social media plays a central role in consumer dialogue, driven by the rise of electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) through positive, persuasive influencer marketing (Delbaere et al., 2021; Leite & Baptista, 2022; Weinlich & Semerádová, 2022). However, negative e-WOM, such as "anti-hauls" and "deinfluencing" (Allard et al., 2020; Filieri et al., 2023; Rouliez & al., 2019) has emerged in video formats promoting anti-consumption of products that have disappointed influencers (García-de-Frutos & Estrella-Ramón, 2021). A critical gap remains in articulating the consumer reactions to this influencer-driven negative e-WOM delivered in video format.

Methodology

This study examines the attitudes and reactions of internet users toward brands and influencers within the context of negative e-WOM videos provided by deinfluencers. A netnographic approach was adopted, analysing the content of the deinfluencer's posts and the audience's comments, including words, emotions, and emojis, to uncover thematic patterns of reaction.

Results

The findings reveal varied consumer reactions to negative e-WOM videos, which are associated with emotional attachment to brands and/or influencers. The study illuminates patterns corroborating theories of attachment, source credibility, and parasocial relationships. Consumer response themes connect closely with past experiences, existing brand/influencer attachment, perceived personality, and discourse characteristics. A positive emotional attachment is associated with comments that favour the brand or influencer. Discourse style shapes comment valence: assertive, explanatory, and an inspiring tone generate positive reaction patterns, while an entertaining, profane tone received predominantly negative responses. Platform differences (YouTube vs. TikTok) suggest variations in comments, representing more calculated or instantaneous forms of reaction, respectively. Overall, negative e-WOM videos elicited considerable viewer curiosity and revealed a rich diversity of public reactions.

Keywords: Anti-haul; Consumer reactions; Deinfluencing; Influencer marketing; Negative eWOM;

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Viral Narratives in Nigerian Digital Spaces: Exploring Conversations on Civic Issues

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Abstract

This study investigates how political information, misinformation, and deliberate disinformation shape democratic discourse in Nigerian digital spaces, focusing on Facebook and X. Using a team based netnographic method, we observed public conversations related to politics, governance, elections, and development over a seven month period. The findings reveal that Nigerian users navigate a dense and emotionally charged information ecosystem

where fact based reporting, rumours, sensational narratives, and strategic manipulation circulate simultaneously. Disinformation frequently operated through selective truth telling, misleading framing, deceptive visuals, and moralised appeals, rather than through outright fabrication. Political actors, partisan communities, and digital influencers played central roles in generating, amplifying, and legitimising these narratives. Users responded with a mix of critical awareness, motivated reasoning, and entrenched distrust of institutions.

Themes identified include political disinformation, electoral credibility, media manipulation, online hostility, civic activism, and the tension between government authority and citizen agency. The study also demonstrates how platform architecture and algorithmic visibility shape public engagement and intensify polarisation. These findings contribute to research on political communication in the Global South by showing how information disorders influence public trust, democratic participation, and perceptions of legitimacy. The study argues that safeguarding democratic discourse requires coordinated action involving platform governance, independent media, civic education, and institutional accountability. The paper highlights the value of netnography for analysing meaning making within complex information environments and calls for future research integrating ethnographic depth with computational and comparative approaches.

Keywords: *Netnography, Political communication, Disinformation, Civic discourse, Nigeria*

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Session 21

Consumption & ideologies

Ethical personal branding and trust: A Netnography of Armenian Instagram Nutritionists

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Abstract

Personal branding in healthcare has been widely examined in Western contexts, yet the South Caucasus remains largely absent from these debates. As Armenian nutritionists gain visibility on Instagram, questions arise about how they construct professional credibility, negotiate commercial pressures, and maintain ethical boundaries in a lightly regulated digital environment.

This study explored how Armenian nutritionists build personal brands on Instagram and how audiences ethically evaluate these practices and link them to trust and engagement. A qualitative two-stage design was adopted.

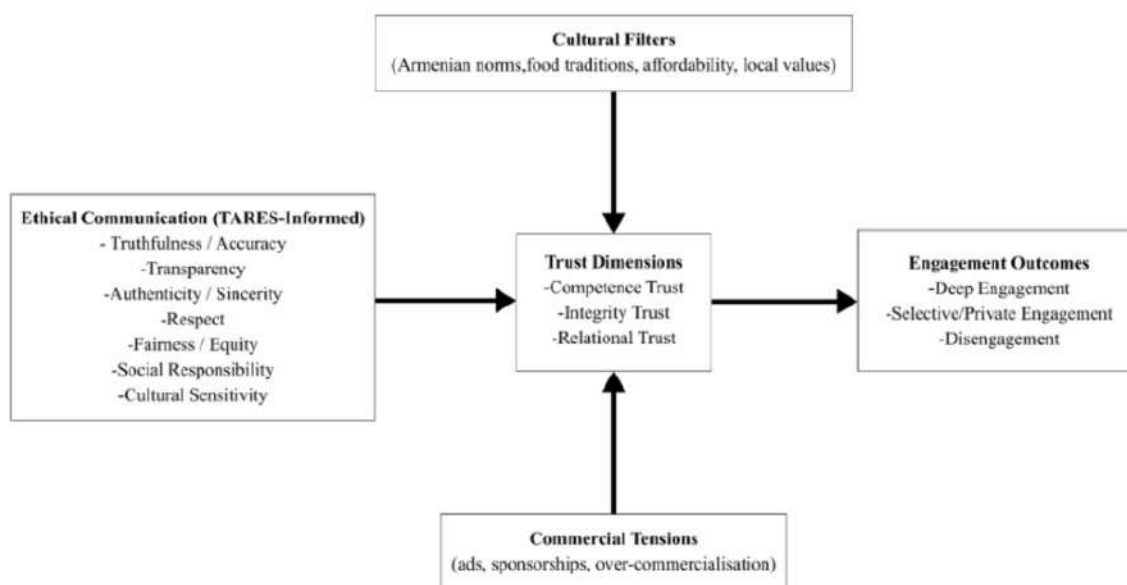
First, to identify branding configurations and engagement patterns a three month netnography was used to analyse the Instagram content of four Armenian nutritionist micro-influencers.

Second, 16 semi-structured interviews and 25 asynchronous email interviews from Armenian Instagram users (Generation Z and Millennials) were analysed through hybrid thematic analysis. This was informed by the TARES model of ethical persuasion and established frameworks on digital trust.

Findings show that Armenian nutritionists rely on four distinct but culturally embedded branding configurations—experiential–expert, medical–pedagogical, motivational–entrepreneurial and institutional–authoritative—that blend expertise cues, narrative self-presentation, aesthetic choices and varying degrees of commercialisation. Audiences interpret these strategies through a moral and cultural lens, rewarding evidence-based, transparent and culturally sensitive communication while penalising over-commercialisation, privacy breaches and weight-loss-centred messaging. Ethical communication emerges as the foundation of trust, which in turn determines whether engagement is deep, selective or absent.

The study contributes a TARES-informed Ethical Communication–Trust–Engagement framework tailored to a transitional digital health context. The research offers practical guidance for nutritionists, professional bodies and policymakers seeking to promote credible, ethical and culturally resonant digital health communication in Armenia.

Figure 1 – TARES-informed Ethical Communication–Trust–Engagement framework



Keywords: Netnography; personal branding; digital health communication; nutritionists, Instagram

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From Altar to Algorithm: A Netnography on Catholic Priest Influencers on Brazilian Instagram

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Abstract

This study explores Technospirituality among Brazilian Catholic priest influencers on Instagram, focusing on three accounts with over 100,000 followers: @pefabiodemelo (Father Fábio de Melo), @freigilson_somdomonte (Friar Gilson), and @padremarcelorossi (Father Marcelo Rossi). The central question is: How do these influencers manifest faith on Instagram? The justification lies in the context of renewed interest in Brazilian Catholicism, with reports of mega churches and a growing search for sacraments via accessible digital content, blending tradition and algorithms.

Keywords: Priest influencers; Digital religion; Consumption of the sacred; Catholicism in Brazil

In the contemporary digital landscape, religion and technology converge. This creates hybrid spaces where the consumption of the sacred (Belk et al., 1989) intersects with algorithmic mediation. Catholicism in Brazil, shaped by cultural mixing, adapts to Instagram engagement. Based on digital religion (Campbell, 2013), techno-animism (Jensen & Blok, 2013), and studies on Catholic influencers as evangelizing celebrities (Medeiros et al., 2022, 2024), this work positions these priests as key mediators of Technospirituality, change Instagram into virtual altars and places of modern pilgrimage.

The study adopts Kozinets' (2023) netnography for non-participatory observation of the Instagram feed posts of these influencers. The inclusion criteria are: Brazilian accounts, Catholic content, minimum 100,000 followers; Selection via hashtags (#BrazilianCatholicism, #digitalreligion, #InfluencerPriests) and filtering by relevance/influence. 90 public posts (30 per account) were analyzed, from December 2025 to February 2026, all public content.

Preliminary findings reveal algorithmic animation of sacred elements (technoanimism), transformation of faith into consumable content (consumption of the sacred), and fostering of Catholic communities in Brazil. These elements contribute to the upward movement of Catholicism in Brazil, with a return to Christian faith driven by accessible digital content, via community engagement through Instagram.

This research enriches the understanding of religious transformation in Latin America, expanding on how Instagram reshapes contemporary Catholic practices in Brazil.

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“Cats Don’t Have Owners, They Have Staff”: Feline Performances And The Construction Of Digital Identity On Brazilian Instagram

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Abstract

In many cultures, the cat symbolizes spirituality, power and mystery: divinity in Egypt, witchcraft in medieval Europe, luck in Japan. In current Brazil, far from losing its ancestral power, the cat learned to laugh at itself and at its owners. Brazilian humor turns mystery into collective affection. It traded the altar for the meme and took the throne of laughter. The saying

“cats don't have owners, they have staff” captures this: the feline reigns in homes with laziness and haughty looks, while humans surrender, content, to the role of servants.

The study explores how humor performances of animals mediated digitally reconfigure identities with narratives, relational and affective aspects, co-produced online. It focuses on the voices attributed to cat influencers on Brazilian Instagram, analyzing strategies of cute-aggression (intense affection mixed with playful aggressiveness) and hierarchical inversion in building affective digital identities. It examines how these cat voices, rooted in Brazilian pet culture, form an emerging pattern among pet influencers. Thus, it maps voice strategies (instructional, authority, existential humor); tracks the demotion of the human to supporting role; and investigates how humor and cute aggression regulate collective emotions, generate shared affects and strengthen community ties through laughter (Myrick, 2015; Souza & Costa, 2023).

The approach used sensory netnography (Kozinets & Gretzel, 2024; Gambetti, 2022), with multimodal and affective immersion. Brazilian real cat profiles of high visibility were selected: above 100K followers each, strong humorous engagement and consistent generation of affection; the most prominent on Brazilian Instagram for pet influencers. The chosen ones were @ravioliogato, @atena_tcat, @raimundinho, @canseidesergato and @gatomiu.

The 30 most recent posts per profile were collected (150 in total), from November 2025 to April 2026, chosen to capture seasonal peaks of humor (end of year and post-Carnival), expanding affective variety. The analysis used a reflective journal of comments, with thematic and multimodal coding (text, images, emojis, interactions) to identify cultural patterns.

Preliminary results reveal cat voices immersed in reflections with affection full of submission jokes and irony. The human becomes supporting role; the cat, protagonist. Cuteness-aggression regulates emotions, inverts hierarchies and generates post-human hybrid identities: cats as critical mirrors of the human condition, playful authorities and catalysts of collective affects via laughter. The ongoing netnography should confirm this pattern, enriching studies in media, human-animal relations and digital anthropology.

Keywords: cat influencers, sensory netnography, pet influencers, Brazilian Instagram, cute-aggression

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Exploring Ideologies of Manhood Across the Social Media Ecosystem

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Abstract

Scholars have noted that little research specifically focuses on the effects of social media use on gender norms and masculinity among adolescent boys (Koester and Marcus 2024). Research indicates boys are lacking meaningful social relationships, including friendships, suffer from loneliness and social isolation (NRG Hero Complex Report 2024) and that despite the rise of social media—built on the promise of enhancing “social” connections, two-thirds of young men 18-23 feel that “no one really knows me well” (State of American Men 2023). There are a multitude of intersecting reasons for the reduced health and well-being of boys and young men as they navigate a “complex mix of privilege and cost that manhood often means,” including the messages about manhood they receive from family, education, sports, peers and importantly to this research-- their digital lives where social media use is “nearly universal.” (State of America’s Boys 2023). Alarming enclaves of misogyny, rigid ideals of manhood, and the rise of “manosphere” influencers pose threats to the well-being of boys and men and thwart efforts to foster a thriving, gender equal society (Bates 2025).

This study uses a combination of methods in conjunction with netnography to examine how social media serves as a site for mobilization for particular notions of ‘manhood’ among teens and young men. Understanding that netnography is an evolving set of qualitative research practices and processes whereby a cultural understanding can be produced through immersion into online experiences and data collected from social media (Kozinets and Gretzel 2023), this research explores digital traces through textual, audio, and video content to understand the rich cultural context of gendered messages on video-based social media. As Kozinets and Gretzel (2023) note, individuals and online interactions are embedded within platforms and the broader technocultural context. Currently, in the immersion stage of netnography, this research examines discourses emerging in influencer content directed at teenage boys and young men with particular attention to gendered messaging. Specifically, this research explores content among top influencers on YouTube—the most used platform among boys and young men. Additionally, netnographic methods are complemented with qualitative interviews with a range of stakeholders, including content creators, non-profit and policy advocates, academics, youth advocates, and boys and young men about how gendered ideologies permeate across social media platforms, particularly video-based platforms. Lastly, field notes from media industry focused events examining related topics such as teen media consumption and critical digital media literacy add layers of understanding to the challenges and opportunities surrounding this issue.

Netnography has been used to advance positive social change (see for example Kozinets and colleagues efforts with advocacy group, Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids, Kozinets 2019.) In this spirit, the findings of the broader research will be leveraged and result in a number of tangible outcomes: toolkits, an educational documentary, and research articles to maximize the social impact. The goal is to gain a culturally rich and human centered understanding of the phenomenon and to reach intended audiences directly—young people, parents, educators, non-profits, and researchers.

References available upon request

Session 22

Enhancing management & entrepreneurial cultures

Session chair: Aleksej Heinze

Advancing Netnography for Management Research

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Abstract

Netnography is a powerful method for understanding how people work in digital environments. Yet despite shifts in how life unfolds online, netnography remains marginal within management research. Recent figures demonstrate this: Discetti and Anderson (2023) identify 17 netnographic studies published across 25 leading management journals compared with 346 organisational ethnographies. At the same time, digital labour and usage have expanded significantly, with 4.4 million people in the UK now earning income through online platforms (TUC, 2022; Fairwork, 2023). The management field is in a position where working life is increasingly digital, but the methods capable of capturing this have not been widely adopted.

Online spaces also host discussions of work; within social media communities, people discuss sensitive workplace issues again inaccessible through conventional methods. Gatrell's (2019) netnography of employed breastfeeding mothers demonstrates this, revealing hidden workplace tensions, and showing how rare such studies are in top management journals. Adjacent to netnography, a few management researchers have experimented with 'digital ethnography' (Shaw, 2025; Karhapää et al., 2025; Oechslen, 2025), but these studies are methodologically fragmented, exposing uncertainty over ethics, cultural immersion and platform influence. The absence of an authoritative netnographic framework for management research also contributes to misreadings of existing work (Fernandes and Mason, 2025) and inhibits its adoption. Standing at this methodological crossroads, netnography offers a response which has already been established within consumer research.

Drawing on a review of netnographic and digital ethnographic scholarship across management, this paper identifies existing practices and gaps around triangulation and data boundaries. It beings the development of an authoritative framework for netnography in management which clarifies consent procedures in pseudonymous environments, navigates platform-specific data structures, accounts for online/offline hybridity, and attends to sensitive data.

Management research cannot adequately understand organisational life without using digital methods capable of capturing naturalistic data about platform-mediated organizational life. By synthesising fragmented efforts and offering an authoritative direction, this paper aims to embed netnography within the management canon.

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At the Cultural Crossroads: A Netnographic Study of How SMEs Blend Local Culture with Global Instagram Trends

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Abstract

This study examines how SMEs communicate cultural identity on Instagram while also adopting global digital trends. Instagram acts as a global space shaped by shared visual norms, algorithmic preferences and platform templates that influence how businesses present themselves. Meanwhile, SMEs embed distinct cultural cues such as local language, symbols and traditions. This produces a cultural crossroads in which local identity intersects with global

platform aesthetics. The aim of the study is to explore how SMEs navigate this intersection and how cultural meaning is constructed and adapted in digital environments. The framework draws on global cultural flows (Appadurai, 1990), glocalization (Robertson, 1995) and cultural hybridity (Bhabha, 1994). These perspectives emphasise how cultures circulate, merge and shift in technologically mediated contexts. Previous studies have examined how influencers create visual identity and personal brands on Instagram (Abidin, 2016; Marwick, 2015), but far less attention has been given to small businesses. Research on SMEs and social media tends to focus on marketing performance, visibility and customer engagement rather than cultural expression (Tajudeen et al., 2018). Reviews of SME social media usage highlight this gap and call for deeper exploration of how businesses negotiate identity in digital spaces. This study responds to that need by examining how SMEs balance cultural authenticity with participation in global platform trends.

Netnography will be used as the primary method (Kozinets, 2010; 2019). The project will involve selecting four to six SMEs from different cultural settings and observing their public Instagram content. Businesses such as cafés, fashion boutiques, handmade craft sellers or beauty services will be included, as these rely heavily on visual storytelling. For each business, around 20-30 posts will be collected, including images, captions, hashtags, comments and bio. The Netnography analysis will focus on the cultural cues embedded in these posts, such as traditional objects, colours, language choices and references to local rituals or values. This will show how cultural identity appears in visuals and text.

A simple platform analysis will complement the Netnography. This will involve examining global Instagram conventions such as filters, editing styles, templates and trending formats to understand how the platform shapes the content businesses produce. Combining these approaches will offer insight into how SMEs negotiate cultural expression within an environment structured by global digital norms. The conceptual framework suggests that SMEs are likely to create hybrid expressions that merge local cultural elements with global aesthetics. Some may adopt very globalised styles, while others may intentionally emphasise local identity and selectively draw on platform trends.

The research contributes to understanding how cultural identity is constructed, negotiated and adapted in global digital settings. It aligns with the conference theme by showing how Netnography can reveal cultural intersections and tensions in everyday digital practice. By examining SMEs at the point where local culture meets global platform influence, the study offers insight into how cultural meaning is shaped in contemporary techno cultural environments.

Figure 1 - Cultural Crossroads Model for SME Instagram Identity



Keywords: Netnography, SMEs, Instagram, cultural identity, glocalization

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The Evolving Role of Middle Managers in the Digital Shift

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Abstract

Digitalisation is transforming the professional service sector, specifically financial, legal and accountancy services, which have witnessed significant technological advancements (Brock & von Wangenheim, 2019), placing middle managers at the frontline of change. As client expectations soar (AlNuaimi, et al., 2022) and competition intensifies, these managers are under increasing pressure to acquire new competencies at pace (Henderikx & Stoffers, 2023). Alarming, evidence reveals that 33% of managers lack the skills and competencies required to effectively support employees through digital change (Gfrerer, et al., 2021), underscoring a critical skills gap that threatens organisational resilience. Moreover, Generation X and Baby Boomers in leadership roles must now adapt their managerial practices and skillsets to better engage younger generations entering the workforce, who are often considered more technologically adept (Philip & Gavrilova Aguilar, 2022).

Despite their pivotal role in executing executive strategies for technology integration, many middle managers find themselves without adequate organisational support or structured development opportunities, making their adaptation to new demands even more challenging. Following the six-categories essential for structured netnography (Kozinets, 2020) the researcher used a "blended" approach (Fenton and Procter, 2019), combining a 12-month immersive online observation with 31 semi-structured interviews consisting of 5 Executives, 4 Senior Managers, 15 Middle Managers and 12 Direct Reports. Reflexive thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2021) was then employed to uncover how middle managers are truly adapting in digitally evolving workplaces.

Initial findings demonstrate that organisational transformation depends not merely on technical expertise, but vitally on relational skills and the active building of social capital. Trust, openness, and transparency create a sense of psychological safety, mutual understanding, and shared commitment. Demonstrating empathy and supporting wellbeing forges deeper interpersonal bonds, while participative leadership and effective role modelling nurture adaptability and a growth-oriented mindset. Cross-functional collaboration emerges as a linchpin for organisational agility, though the research also reveals a continuing need to strengthen strategic thinking.

However, the lack of systematic support and investment in organisational development leaves many middle managers facing gaps in the resources and guidance necessary for sustained growth. The evidence makes clear that sustaining human connection and investing in interpersonal skills are essential for resilience and successful collaboration amid technological upheaval. A supportive corporate culture, valuing openness, trust, and collaboration empowers managers, while a rigid culture can impede progress, resulting in a lack of talent retention. Ultimately, nurturing human connections and interpersonal skills is vital for resilience and effective collaboration during digital change.

Keywords: Digitalisation, Middle Managers, Skills Gap, Organisational Resilience, Interpersonal Skills

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Silence At Digital Crossroad: A Netnographic Study of Internal Communication Patterns in a Remote Content Agency

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Abstract

Remote work, affecting gig economy globally, is a defining feature of digital agencies. These agencies with their diverse workforce have potential to support meaningful exchange and act as cultural meeting grounds. Though rather than building collective understanding, these digital spaces are often characterized by physical and emotional fatigue arising from management constantly pushing for speed. However, cost of this treatment is rising. According to 2024 Mentally Healthy Survey, 70% of professionals in creative sectors reported experiencing burnout in last 12 months, citing relentless workloads and always-on expectations of digital economy (Never Not Creative, 2024).

Internal communication in these remote teams is a challenging (Hinds & Mortensen, 2005) and paradox-filled (Mazmanian et al., 2013) process for both agency admins and freelance writers, ideally aiming for psychological safety (Edmondson, 1999). However, our initial observation of a digital content agency's Telegram group highlights a departure from this ideal. Factors such as round clock nature of instant messaging (Mazmanian et al., 2013), lack of non-verbal cues

(Cheshin et al. 2011), and emerging pressure of "toxic positivity" (Goodman, 2022) negatively impact writers' ability to ask for help.

In Social Presence Theory, "socio-emotional communication" (Garrison et al., 2000:95) is crucial in shaping how team members feel about each other. For instance, high social presence leads to trust and cognitive clarity. Similarly, face-to-face teams often frame feedback as constructive due to richness of medium (Byron 2008). In contrast, text-based channels often foster silence or confusion due to mutual knowledge problem (Cramton, 2001). Our preliminary data shows that platform limitations impact behavior: while admins use direct commands to ensure speed, writers use excessive emojis like 'hearts' or 'muscle arms' to signal compliance, even when they do not understand task. Therefore, given critical role digital platforms play in shaping agency culture, we aim to answer how organizational silence is constructed and maintained in these high-pressure remote groups.

Following Kozinets (2020)'s steps of netnography, after identifying our research question, immersion is followed to collect chat logs, record self-reflections, and provide additional context for analysis. We will analyze interaction patterns of a remote content agency by focusing on their primary Telegram working group, ensuring access to daily operational exchanges. We will keep an immersion journal, collecting data from admin announcements and writer replies for four months and reflecting on our experiences. During immersion phase, pressure to perform happiness will be probed for rich emotional data. The most promising initial insight from journal is concept of *performative softness*. The researchers observe they use emojis to soften critiques, mirroring behavior of other writers who fear disrupting group harmony. Additionally, for interaction movement, we plan to interview active writers to ask why they choose silence over clarification.

Finally, in integration phase, data will be coded to understand link between platform limitations and employee stress, and results will be shared to help managers lessen cultural clash at this digital crossroad and design healthier communication protocols.

Keywords: Organizational Netnography, Remote Internal Communication, Social Presence Theory, Digital Crossroad, Content Agencies.

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