Netnography and Digital Community of Facebook: an Empirical Study

Dr. Md. Mahfuzul Islam Shamim, Ph.D

In Project management, Project management professional and public policy practitioner in Bangladesh, Email: myshamim2006@gmail.com

Abstract: *Netnography, a field of ethnography is a qualitative research methodology based on specific techniques and pragmatic approaches. Experiences demonstrated through online communication and observation of participants are highlighted by this interpretive research method. This research will examine the effects of Facebook in developing the trust of consumers, movements of Netnography, and their use among the Facebook community. This research aims to explore the possibility of Facebook ethnography while considering the existing literature and its examination as both a research tool and an engaging platform. The research will also give the perspective of using online analytical tools like Facebook analytics or Google Analytics for integration.*

Keywords: *Netnography, Digital Community, Facebook, Social Media, Google Analytics, online analytical tool.*

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Introduction

The world is getting digital, and inventions of more and more technology have led the world towards globalization. The term refers to the new significant positive and negative changes in humans that have connected the whole world in various aspects. Now, it is essential to understand the whole digital community to connect with the whole world. Researchers of social sciences are following the activities of online communities through specific methods and technologically mediated communication. Netnography, a field of ethnography (Vannini, 2019), is a qualitative research methodology based on specific techniques and pragmatic approaches use for social media communities and help to understand the activities, behavior, and consumer relation of online tribes. This method helps researchers to access specific online consumers and to analyze in-depth behaviors. The person behind inventing this method Kozinets, (2002) has critically provided awareness about online community members and identified an online environment that provides rigor and ethics in the field of Market (Chao, 2015). Experiences demonstrated through online communication and observation of participants is highlighted by this interpretive research method.

Digital Communities, online communities, or virtual communities are increasing and becoming a vital source of sharing or spread, of information worldwide. A large amount of population becomes the member of the virtual community so that they don't leave behind in the advancement of society. This shows that the people of these communities highly depend on interactions and communication. These communities share their common interest, information, Thoughts, and perceptions about society. Even in

virtual communities, where physical presence is just a dream, they still highly rely on emotions and feelings as this is a part of human nature. (Jones and Rafaeli, 2019; Lee et al. 2021) explain virtual communities as computer-based areas where individuals make contact with each other in a relatively straightforward and transparent way by interacting or encouraging each other to communicate via the internet.

Facebook a popular social media tool, used by its consumers to promote their business or to engage/ communicate with people having similar interests can also be a source of developing trust among its consumers. This research will examine the effects of Facebook in developing the trust of consumers, movements of Netnography, and their use among the Facebook community. This research aims to explore the possibility of Facebook ethnography while considering the existing literature and its examination as both a research tool and an engaging platform (Kozinets, 1999). It will consider the trends in this social media community through Netnographic movements and dissemination methods exploring a research question. Several researchers have studied the online communities with Netnography that are purely observational, this research is also a pure study based on online research. The research will also give the perspective of using online analytical tools like Facebook analytics or Google Analytics for integration. The research also provides insight on consumer trust in an online community and further insight into the mediating effect by considering brand trust and community identification.

Research Question

Following is the research question that I am going to discuss and evaluate in this research:

"What effect Facebook can have in developing trust among its consumers and business benefit using Netnography?"

Purpose/ Significance of Research

With the exponential rate of growth in the online presence of the Facebook community, it is essential to analyze its true potential of it. The analysis of consumers is crucial to evaluate as consumers are not just people to sell out, they are a primary tool of digital market research and concept validation. According to a study, the center of a successful business is understanding the consumers as, because of this, a business can understand the tactics to market their services or products. According to (Lang, 2010) existence of this digital application has contributed to the online behavior change among its consumers, users now spent one-third of their total time engaging in social networking sites (SNS) and more than half of users spent their time on Facebook every day (Ho, 2014). Researchers find it important to analyze the presence of consumer engagement and brand trust on Facebook. For this purpose, Facebook analytics established the "Top fan badge" of the pages. A study on the Facebook consumer (Hsu, 2012) identifies that Facebook is one of the major digital platforms to engage consumers in marketing messages and expanding networks. The factor that matters most in the Netnography of the Facebook community is consumer participation (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010) because it influences participants' behavior. The primary purpose of this research is to analyze the online tribe of Facebook, its consumer participation and voluntary behaviors with Ethnographic techniques and movements. It will help to demonstrate the understanding to consumers towards brand trust and how it can benefit their business. Another purpose of this research research is to provide further insight into the mediating effect by considering brand trust and community identification.

Blending Netnography in Facebook Community

As discussed earlier, Netnography is adopted as a methodology for this pure online research-based qualitative research. This approach required the researcher to participate in the focused online community through any means like contact, collaboration, and interaction (Kozinets, 2015). In the online observation

of the online community of Facebook, the procedure of data collection and analysis are interrelated and can be accessed by six recommended criteria by Kozinets (Ardley & May 2019). The research community tribe should be relevant to the research, it should be active for regular engagements and can interact when required. The community should involve people with different interests and should have a critical way of communication and be data-rich. Online observation would be done to gain familiarity with consumers of Facebook and to understand how they work. For an online interview, the intentions of the research could be explained to the narrow down community member and ask their permission to be included. When the access is granted, the observation would be done for several weeks and the data will be collected in the form of texts, visuals, graphics, audio, or videos. Even for online research, all the ethical guidelines shouldbe taken into consideration.

Create

Share

Comment

Reaction

LIke
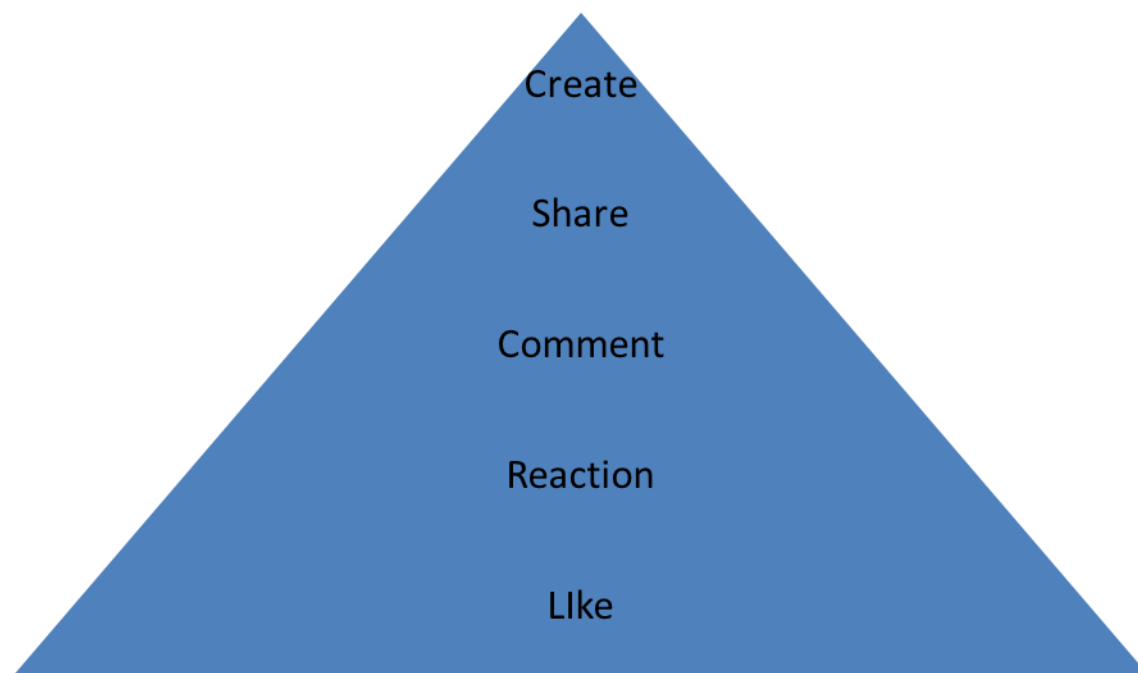
Figure 1: Facebook Engagement Tools

To engage with the consumer of a brand on Facebook, the brand should take care of above mentioned engaging criteria. The consumers of a brand are influenced by each other, so for a highly engaging post, the factor of attractiveness is the major key whether it is in the form of visual, audio, video text, or any promotion (Shamim, 2016).

There are multiple platforms of ethnography to understand the community setting of the brand one form of ethnography looks into organizational cultures and is known as organizational ethnography. It suggests that the cultures or communities whether it is in an online environment or physical keep evolving with time. It also contains dominant sub-culture or sub-communities which further become the focused group and is confined to their subject its own rules, rites, myths, and symbols.

The Facebook community can be majorly analyzed by interacting and cooperating with the elements of a focused community (Algesheimer et.al, 2005). According to M.C. Alexander et al. (2002), "a community is made up of its entities and the relationships among them" (p.38) (McAlexander, 2002). Blending Mix method study, the Facebook community is more focused on engagement of interactive conversations through like, share, comment, and the option of mention. This phenomenon is dynamic and requires customer engagement to understand meaningful information. Instead of a physical consumer, my place of research is an online Facebook community because of which Netnography is the best approach to use.

Several researchers identify that in theory data collected through Netnography is believed to be more accurate because the researcher does not influence the subject. The focused community is handled remotely, the community or subject is allowed his/her anonymity and no chance of bully is tolerated. As a much less intrusive research tool, this has a profound effect on the opinions that are expressed. The researcher also believes that people are more inclined toward providing truth and valid information in this type of comfortable environment (Shamim, 2017).

Brand Trust and Consumer Engagement

For many consumers, the brand is rooted in their lives and social norms. Even in the situation of uncertainty revolving around any brand, the brand trust by consumers can tackle the situation and reduce the factor of uncertainty (Chiu & Huang, 2010). To have a positive influence on the brand, effective communication, continuous interaction, and active engagement can play a vital role. To gain the trust of the digital consumer, a brand makes its buyers comfortable and strengthens its relationship with consumers as it positively influences brand trust (Ho, 2014). Brand trust can lead its consumer to feel like they are part of a brand and the consumer starts to relate with the brand. This is the highest level of brand trust (Wilson, 1998). These consumers also have access to other brands' community tribes and they can influence a variety of social activities. While interacting with other consumers online. They can mediate the flow of resources in the community.

For any brand, one of the most crucial objectives is to spread the brand engagement no matter if it is a large or small enterprise. To evaluate the brand engagement few most important factors are 1. Consumers' overall perception of the brand 2. Any consumer touchpoint brand endures 3. And the relationship between the brand and the consumer. If there exists a positive relationship between the brand and consumer and also the analysis of data through Netnography proves the relation to be positive the brand engagement can lead to brand trust. Therefore Customer Brand Engagement (CBE) is an important, timely concept, particularly for service brands using interactive social media channels (Solem, 2016).

Movements

Netnography follows six methods or movements to proceed with its analysis. The first step is the analysis of qualitative research means to focus on the research operation. The initiation of the research is to roll down the focused community of the research i.e. Consumers of Facebook, especially the business users (Anon., 2010). To evaluate the research question this research narrows down its focus to social networking on Facebook, impression management, community engagement, and brand trust. Interaction with the consumer is the crucial point of data collection operation. For the online method, the step of interaction is carried out in the form of online observation. Majorly research identifies their investigation methods by observing their community for a specific period, asking them, to respond to the research question, and proceeding systematically, some (Kozinets, 1999) carried out interviews with any of them. This approach of investigation, interaction, and immersion is closer to traditional ethnographic standards of participant observation, prolonged engagement, and deep immersion (Anon., 2010). After the data has been collected, the next movement to adopt is to explore the integration of the online community.

The data collected through online means will be analyzed and interpreted through Netnography analysis. It offers a strong forum for online community members, to build a relationship with them where they can learn from one another and can have an impact on society and culture (Anon., 2010). The presentation or incarnation of research is analyzed through its way of communication and clarity and categorization of the data. According to Kozinets (2014), there are some legal and ethical boundaries while resenting the data in Netnography (Kozinets, 2020). These concerns are feasible to address through anonym zing, cloaking, and fabrication. The purpose of the incarnation of the data is to provide evidence, rhetoric, and discursive purpose to the research (Shamim, 2022).

Dissemination Method

According to several researchers, there is very limited research about the practice of implementation tools and "development of effective methods of encouraging adoption, dissemination and implementation" (Green & Duan, 2015). The Mix method approach in dissemination provide evidence based intervention. The mode of dissemination expected to adopt is in the form of text, video or audio. The text can be in the form of storytelling or poetic text and performance text. The methods should go beyond the traditional ways of dissemination that has served academic institutions and results in qualitative research findings. Though these dissemination methods will not replace the basic criteria of qualitative research but can give an idea to best fit for the research purpose. In communicating qualitative data, researchers have an array of presentational styles and formats to choose from that best fit their research purposes (Sandelowski, 1998). This dissemination approach is more focused on the visual representation rather that contextual. The accuracy and credibility of data is more important to address than the way of dissemination but also, the accurate picture is still not necessary (Keen & Todres, 2007) for ethical boundaries.

Expected Results

The expected results of this research research are to contribute in the brand research of online focused tribe and to find out the existing relationship between consumer and brand. The research is expected to establish and develop a brand culture topology which contributes in accessing digital brand communities, brand benefits and their culture with respect to engagement and reproduction. The research will propose the consumer participation on focused digital community (Facebook) its direct and significant impacts on the brand trust and to find out the important purpose of online community. The proposed results can be achieved by adopting Netnographic methodology of brand cu ration and by its analysis.

The results will also reveal the effect of brand trust on consumer identification. Though, this relation has not been described by many writers in literature but the results can reveal the mediating effect of Facebook in building trust among online community and brand benefits. The findings can also lead. The results will reveal the accurate potential of a social medium site for understanding the consumers of big organizations and medium enterprises (Sharma & Alavi, 2017).

Google and Facebook Analytics

Like Netnography is used to analyze the online community, Google and Facebook analytics are the tools to provide the analysis of consumers in the form of coding. For Google Analytics, the consumer needs to establish his/her Google account to navigate the research and collect the data. The researcher will need an understanding of the coding method and has to collect the data in small codes known as "Tracking code" (Andrykovich & Wisniewski, 2014). The method can be easily implemented by any person as it is quite feasible and an impressive amount of data can be collected from the digital-focused community. In addition, with the increase in the consumption of database-driven websites, very minor skills will be required to set up the initial stages of data analysis in Google analytics. Similarly, when it comes to Facebook analytics it is an online tool just focused on the Facebook community. It does not require any set of skills to proceed, you just need a Facebook account to participate in the analysis. Both these forums have a different set of online consumers, which together form our focused online community of research (Shamim, 2022).

The idea is to relate the coding of goggle analytics, and data of Facebook analytics with Netnography. This relation will provide more accurate and workable results of understanding the community and can help the brand to establish its business for more beneficial purposes. The more credible the results would be, the more convenient it would be to gain the trust of consumers of the brand (McAlexander, 2002). The forum of Google analytics provides an editable dashboard in its reporting section and some other further

feature of analysis. The report section can separately provide the analysis of the audience (consumers), traffic source, and content.

Conclusion

The practical evidence and the literature proves that social media have an extensive population and is expected to grow more in the future. All social networking sites whether it's Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, or any other online community, have gained popularity in making brand progress and social marketing. Though many researchers have explored and analyzed social platforms many researchers also argue (Plunkett, 2013) that this is an area for further research.

As Netnography is an online tool of analysis, it heavily relies on the online involvement of participants and their level of engagement (Sandlin, 2006). It is still fairly a new method and expects further development and refinement. Not all things can be observed, such as attitudes, motives, or private behavior. The proposed use of Netnography has provided depth insight into an element of brand culture, observations can become very difficult to interpret so because of these limitations, the researcher often needs other methods to conduct their studies. Korzinets (2014) in their study argues that the more accurate and inspiring sense of Netnography comes from the anthology. The more you understand the human and its socializing behavior the more accurate results would be. This online method is very cost-effective and the main cost will be setting up online Netnographic tools. This research has provided the main benefits of Netnography, and its relation to the brand strategies (Kozinets, 2015). So, the use of Netnography in the form of an online research tool is limitless and ultimately is unobtrusive and also considered an accurate way of exploring the data of companies who are constantly looking for beneficial growth. As mentioned earlier, the growth of the population in digital platforms is continuously increasing because technological advancement becomes more effective and is expected to become more prevalent.

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