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Ethical Tensions and Methodologies – Online Cultures

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ABSTRACT

This paper, birthed out of private, method and moral tension, examines the study of cultures online. Reflective on my previous analysis on fans of the video game series Fallout, anyone studying interaction online and making cultural claims supported these studies, should be conscious of 2 tensions. First, the study of cultures online demands we decide whether we frame online interaction as 'place' or as 'text'. The study of cultures online demands we decide whether we construct our role as 'participant' or 'observer'. These tensions have method and moral dimensions. Ultimately, scholars of cultures online should create these decisions reflexively. Their analysis questions should work in concert with their methods, and their claims should be applicable for the method and moral positions they take.

KeyWords

culture, methods, online, ethnography, discourse.

INTRODUCTION

This paper is birthed out of a personal method tension that the paper is trying to address before it grows into a crisis. It has, whenever pressed, essentialized the analysis as the study of cultures on-line. Here it is fascinated by the ways in which digitally-mediated interactions create and replicate cultures, subcultures, and social collectives. Returning from the Communication discipline, this project has bent toward the discursive: the study of social texts. In particular, closely followed the tenets of discourse analysis (e.g., Fairclough 2003, Mautner 2005, actor 2001) during this analysis. The only given bottom attention is to how a detached observation of texts online can be inadequate for understanding cultures online.

The goal here is to correct, problematize what has been accepted unproblematically in research. This could be referred to as this a private reflection because there is no aim to make your mind up for anyone else how to conduct research. Any project demands independent contextual sensitivity, especially concerning ways and ethics. Rather, aim to reflect on broader methodological and moral issues and critically apply them to own ways. Hoping it's that this reflection, in addition to a clear define of some of the tensions inherent to the study of cultures on line, are going to be useful to other students grappling with identical questions. This define would possibly imply some discerning questions, if harsh answers.

The discussion joined is more and more vital one. It's not a brand new one. Methods textbooks for qualitative knowledge online are around for years (e.g., Jones 1999, Hine 2005b, Markham and Baym 2009), and digitally-mediated interaction is gaining prevalence in qualitative analysis across disciplines. As Hine (2005a, 1) argues, 'there are a unit few researchers in the social sciences or humanities UN agency could not notice some side of their research interest manifested on the internet'. This can be true whether your study culture discursively (Herring 2001, Mautner 2005) or ethnographically (Hine 2000, Markham 1998).

In this paper, it focuses on the two method tensions most salient to research. So address two dyads: one addressing the nature of the object studied and the other with the role of the research worker therein study. In regards to the object of study, there's a tension between whether or not cultures online should be considered place or text. Regarding the role of the research worker in analysis of cultures online, there's a tension between whether or not the research worker should be a participant or associate observer. These two dyads will be the source of this reflection, while it is admitted that they're associate oversimplification of a myriad of method issues and views.

The method tensions highlighted here are riddled with ethical tensions because: in a very real sense, each method decision is associate degree ethics decision, in this these decisions have consequences for not just analysis style but conjointly the identity of participants, the outcomes of our studies, and the character of data that inevitably grows out of fortification (Markham 2008, 251).

In each dyad, the main focus is on the ethical also because the methodological. it's asked what makes for sufficiently honest or accurate illustration once studying cultures online; to what extent should we treat discourse as public and published; and to what extent are we liable for revealing ourselves and our analysis functions to those we study. First, however, here it provides background to analysis, the methodological assumptions that underpin it, and therefore the methodological questions that birthed this budding crisis.

STUDY OF FANS IN FALLOUTS

In some ways, the sphere of 'online ethnography' spawned this reflection (Hine 2000, 2005b; Markham 1998, 2008; Miller 2000). The engagement with this field 1st caused surprise if the methods matched the claims. When browse Markham's (2008) discussion of methods, politics, and ethics in descriptive anthropology on-line, it haunting for days. For a communication scholar who was content with keeping analysis at the amount of discourse, Markham's warning concerning 'interpreting the other as text' (251), rather than absolutely sentient subjects, resonated. Was it essentialist or theory to assume that wordlessly analyzing 'discourse' from a forum, comments section, blog, chatroom, or Twitter feed was good enough to urge to 'culture'? methodological work on on-line descriptive anthropology provided steering was began to problematize own notions of what 'culture' and 'discourse' would possibly mean to a investigator of interaction on-line.

It is recognized 'culture' and 'discourse' are not easy terms, even less so once tied to interaction on-line. 'Culture' has meant many things to many totally different students over the years, and 'discourse' is simply as omnipresent and amorphous. However, each of these ideas is important as the problematized ways and ethics of own research. it's recognized that culture is a few things of a chimera: instructive 'god-term' for broad practices and views that can't simply work into one word. It's typically even useful to put in writing it within the plural, acknowledging that it exists in a social world of many various, contradictory, and overlapping 'cultures'.

It is useful chimera, in that it gives a way to know social processes as elaborately tied together, as socially-constructed. When say some goal has been the study of 'cultures online', which means that operating toward a far better understanding of practices that exist in the mediate interplay of micro-level interactions and macro-level social processes. in this sense, they consider Geertz' (1973) foundational definition: that the study of culture is that the study of 'representations'. Sensitivity to representations means the foreground 'discourses' as a method tool to know culture. It sees discourses because the means of cultural production and copy. Discourses square measure the social practices that mirror and reproduce culture. This position is common in discourse analysis (see Fairclough 1989, 2003, van Dijk 1997, 2009).

Before reading Markham's (2008) work, It took with no consideration that discursive observation was a comfortable methodology for studying cultures on-line. During this analysis on the game series Fallout (Milner 2009, 2010, 2011), the employment of discursive observation to check however fans and producers of the series engaged with one another on the series' official website. Fallout one and a couple of were computer games discharged in 1997 and 1998 to a lot of crucial

acclaim, if not wide industrial success. The fans they did garner developed a name for intense devotion, however. They inhabited several thriving fan sites, on-line spaces of interaction and engagement. On these sites, fans denote recommendation, data, screenshots, art, modifications to the sport, etc. These collectives continued to produce and interact, whilst Fallout's developers, interaction Studios, two-faced financial hassle and Fallout three became a fleeting hope.

The point is not that these results are invalid, or even that my strategies were dubious. Instead, It brings them up as a result of they need to be questioned, along with what It argued from that analysis. It created several claims about culture and discourses online in those studies, and did so while not enough vital reflection on my strategies. It scan the forum as a text, but reportable it sort of a place.

ETHICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL TENSIONS

The dyad. This pertains to however we tend to create by mental act the cultures we tend to study. In Hine's (2000) terms, can we see 'the internet' as culture or cultural artifact? In Markham's (1998) terms, can we see 'the internet' as a tool or an area or some way of being? In my terms, is the interaction that happens online to been seen as an area or as a text? Which mean here that we would first frame cultures online as being a finite 'place': a community or web {site} much like associate degreey traditional site an anthropologist would study. This is true albeit 'place' here is figurative (i.e., in entirely-digital online environments). Second, we would frame a given online physical object as being 'text', that's communicative representations that area unit part of a bigger cultural system. This is the position it's been most at home with in my experience with discourse analysis (e.g., Mautner 2005, Schneider and Foot 2005). it's chosen 'text' and 'place' over other labels as a result of this classification resonates with own tensions. On one facet, it resonates with tendencies to envision cultures online as stable, public, and representative of broader societal discourses. On the other facet, it resonates with notions of interaction online being dynamic, communal, and relatively-bounded to a nonliteral 'space'. However we tend to interpret this distich has method and ethical implications.

ETHICAL

The ethical dimensions of this question are primarily associated with however involved researchers ought to be within the community studied, and the way transparent they should be regarding their analysis. Those skeptical regarding mere observation appear to be concerned with the inauthenticity of doing nothing but observant a culture. Garcia et al. (2009, 60) are direct in their criticism. Lurking, first, if allowed by the site and also the IRB, is suitable if that's how participants in this setting habitually participate. If not, ethnographers can get a lot of authentic experience of a web setting if they jump straight into participation.

This worry of inauthenticity illustrates that questions of participation area unit often seen as ethical questions. The worry is that ‘mere observation’, written up as holistic observations of cultures online, equates to deception. ‘Covert researchers’- to use Murty’s (2008) term- could be basically lying about any conclusions they create because they are in impact unqualified to make them. The ethical drawback with ‘merely observing’ isn’t the maximum amount that representations will be wrong while not participating; it is additional that these representations will be less authentic. The research worker can claim to grasp a culture while not interacting therein culture and appreciating the significance and even fracture beneath the seemingly-stable surface. this is often why discourse analysis has generally studied ‘talk’ and ‘text’, while ethnography has traditionally described ‘participants’ or ‘informants’. These classes become woolly online, resulting in unique ethical issues.

If the goal of a project is observation, then the scientist should be sensitive to the public/private tension in on-line interaction, checking and rechecking knowledge against notions of what’s public and what’s revealed. Again, claims made of that knowledge should be restricted to only what’s evident in that public discourse. Conversely, a scientist coming from a participant point of view may foreground the interpretive and interactional methodes of the scientist within the research process. This position could be ideal for researchers curious about taking part in discourses, in drawing those discourses out as they themselves move through a culture. This position would be appealing to people who need to figure with participants to elicit the often-unstated assumptions of practicing a culture. However, this perspective carries with it ethical burdens in addition. If the goal is participation, then the scientist should be sensitive to just what quantity of the research project is foregrounding the frames of the scientist, instead of the views of participants. How shut is ‘drawing out’ to ‘writing in’? of course, we might raise whether or not this can be this any more of a danger when taking part than when perceptive. this can be why the primary answer to the question of how we have a tendency to interact with the cultures we have a tendency to study is most essentially reflexivity.

THE CONCLUSIVE EVALUATION

Thinking back to what birthed this budding crisis, It appreciates Markham’s (2008, 272) reflections on the power and responsibility that comes with cultural research: ‘the capacity to represent cultural data is a nice responsibility, with many traps and difficulties. But it is additionally a gift, well earned through education, well honed through expertise, and well intended through moral reflexivity’. The cardinal sin has been a lack of reflexivity about what it means that to study cultures online. regardless of the position a investigator takes on the dyads on top of, what’s important is vital thought on personal positions. once questions of methodology and ethics can be argued from opposite ends, sensitivity to our own personal positions is crucial. even if easy answers about methods and ethics elude, the reflective process has price as a result of it gets asking questions. Markham (1998, 8) reminds that in analysis their must always raise however it is all known being substantive and honourable in the methods. It says that don’t do it to induce any definitive answers, ‘but as a result of the honest pursuit of these questions leads to a fairly honest conclusion- It is able to be never get to the lowest of it, the ability to never have enough, it is never be aware of it all’. Reflexive methods acknowledge each skills and limitations.

The positions at this moment of tension, maybe it's not a drag that it treats what it finds online as text and prefer to observe it at a distance. 'Discourse' is definitely an element of the many ethnographical projects- often a pre-eminent one (see Farnell and Graham 1998). However, discourse-analytic approaches to online interaction don't approach discourse within the same way. They often see a corpus of 'texts' over a 'place'. They often 'observe' speak and text rather than 'participate' in it. this suggests the questions I ask once doing a 'discourse analysis'- and therefore the answers found- can have to be compelled to vary than ethnographical questions and answers. If questions emphasize the situated understandings of 'participants' within cultures, or ask for to extend implicit or unuttered understandings, then it'd add up to approach them ethnographically. If the questions emphasize public issues, or are concerned with public representations self-addressed to public audiences, then it'd be ethically studied as public discourse.

All this doesn't mean there won't be properly learning cultures online; simply that it should not be ethnographically learning cultures online. Markham (2008, 255) comments that anthropology 'seems to be a term that is applied by students those do not apprehend what else to call their work'. maybe the thoughtful declaration that 'the study discourse online' is additional methodologically and ethically sound than creating claims to ethnographic strategies or conclusions, once it haven't conducted anthropology. As Hine (2000, 53-54) argues, 'discourse analytic approaches to net texts may usefully coexist with ethnographic approaches to net interaction. This mixture may help to take care of analytic ambivalence concerning what the phenomena being studied extremely are'.

It reflects now that the problem with analysis that's created claims regarding culture that was troublesome, given my methods. The crisis was birthed once was claimed to interpret 'text' while treating what was explored as a 'place'. This analysis is sort of an 'observer' however according like a 'participant'. Hine (2005a, 8) says 'when we tend to discuss the methodology we tend to square measure implicitly talking about our identity and therefore the standards by that we tend to would like our work to be judged'. The sightlessness to the term 'ethnography' might need well been an attempt to frame however the work was judged, while producing the type of findings that may only fit with AN anthropology encounter of culture. However, after this moment of tension, it's not prepared to dismiss discourse analytic methods once learning cultures online. They fit the interests as a man of science well. What their are amendment within the questions as asked and therefore the claims to form. it's understood that the study of cultures online- like the study of cultures in any context- has many dimensions. Any man of science partaking with cultures should remember of the methodological and moral selections they are creating within the process.

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