

## THE ETHNOGRAPHIC METHODOLOGY IN INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION SCIENCES: *ANALYTICAL READING*

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**Abstract:** The Ethnographic Method is considered as one of the important research Methods in the field of media and communication sciences, as it helps to understand social and cultural interactions and relationships between communities and individuals. It provides an opportunity to delve deeper into media cultures and social communication and to interpret them better. The Ethnographic Method requires high skills in communication and interaction with the studied individuals, as well as the ability to listen, observe, and effectively interact with the studied communities. This Method also requires the use of various tools and techniques for data collection and analysis, including interviews, observations, cultural documents, and statistics.

**Keywords:** Ethnography, communication phenomenon, epistemology, communication, Method, approach

### LA MÉTHODOLOGIE ETHNOGRAPHIQUE DANS LES SCIENCES DE L'INFORMATION ET DE LA COMMUNICATION : *LECTURE ANALYTIQUE*

**Résumé :** La méthode ethnographique est considérée comme l'une des méthodes de recherche importantes dans le domaine des sciences de la communication et des médias, car elle aide à comprendre les interactions sociales et culturelles entre les communautés et les individus. Elle offre une opportunité de plonger plus profondément dans les cultures médiatiques et la communication sociale et de les interpréter de manière plus efficace. La méthode ethnographique nécessite des compétences élevées en communication et en interaction avec les personnes étudiées, ainsi que la capacité d'écouter, d'observer et d'interagir efficacement avec les communautés étudiées. Cette méthode nécessite également l'utilisation de divers outils et techniques de collecte et d'analyse de données, y compris les entretiens, les observations, les documents culturels et les statistiques.

**Mots-clés :** Ethnographie, phénomène de communication, épistémologie, Communication, méthode, approche

## Introduction

The Ethnographic approach is a research Method used in the fields of anthropology, sociology, and media and communication studies, which involves the study of cultures and societies through the observation of everyday practices, beliefs, and interactions. This approach is aimed at providing a deep understanding of how individuals make meaning and navigate social relations within their cultural context through qualitative Methods such as participant observation and interviews. Scholars who follow the Ethnographic approach seek to expand their understanding of social and cultural interactions between individuals and communities and use this information to improve communication and promote mutual understanding. Additionally, this Method can be employed in media and communication studies to gain insight into how information and cultures are consumed in the media, and to analyze the impact of media on individuals and communities. The Ethnographic approach requires a significant investment of time, effort, material and human resources, and may not be appropriate for all research purposes. It is important to adhere to ethical guidelines and protect the privacy of study participants, ensuring that their consent has been obtained prior to their participation. Our research is focuses on understanding the cognitive basis of the Ethnographic approach used in media and communication studies. We will cover various points in this article, including: what are the procedural stages that the Ethnographic approach depends on while analyzing communication phenomena? How do we use the Ethnographic approach using qualitative research tools to decode communication patterns? What criticisms have been leveled at the Ethnographic approach in the study of media and communication sciences?

### 1. The Concept of the Ethnographic approach

The objective of the Ethnographic approach is to expand knowledge of social and cultural interactions between individuals and communities, and to use this information to improve communication and promote mutual understanding. In media and communication studies, this Method can provide insight into how information and cultures are consumed in the media and analyze the impact of media on individuals and communities (Couldry, 2013). However, the Ethnographic Approach requires a significant investment of time, effort, and resources, and may not be suitable for all research purposes. Ethical guidelines must be followed to protect the privacy of any potential study participants and ensure their informed consent prior to their participation.

### 2. The Ethnographic approach and the communication phenomenon

The Ethnographic approach can be applied to the study of communication phenomena, enabling the identification of concepts and models that shape the experiences of modern cities, and determining how communication, culture, and society mutually influence each other. Additionally, the Ethnographic approach can contribute to identifying effective Methods for promoting communication and enhancing mutual understanding between individuals and different communities. The use of this approach requires strict research ethics. The Ethnographic approach can be used to study various aspects of communication phenomena, such as popular culture, social and political practices related to

communication. (Lull, 2000). The Ethnographic Method can be used in studying various aspects of communication phenomena, such as popular culture, social and political practices related to communication and media. This Method can be used to explore social and cultural relationships among different groups, study the social roles associated with communication and media, and examine the impact of different media on culture and societies (Wang and Burris, 1997). In general, the Ethnographic Method is a comprehensive research approach that enables a deep understanding of culture, society, social relationships, communication, and media; It can be used in various fields of research and study.

### **3. Epistemology of the Ethnographic Method**

The Ethnographic Method is based on several foundational theories and concepts, such as symbolic Interactionism, Relativistic Rationalism, Contextualism, the social influence of media and technology, dialogue and collaboration between study participants, and other theories that focus on understanding human cultures and societies through social and linguistic interaction (Wang and Burris, 1997). One of the primary Epistemological foundations of the Ethnographic Method is the focus on understanding and interpreting cultures and societies through social interaction between individuals, interpreting their actions, meanings, and motivations, as well as recognizing that personal observations, experiences, and direct social interactions are crucial to understanding cultural and social phenomena. The Ethnographic Method is also considered as a detailed and theoretical analysis of cultures and societies, enabling researchers to understand cultural and social phenomena in a comprehensive and multidimensional manner. (Viveiros, 2002). Another crucial aspect of the Ethnographic Method is its reliance on fieldwork and participant observation. Researchers using this Method typically immerse themselves in the cultural and social contexts they are studying, engaging in firsthand observations, interviews, and interactions with study participants. This approach helps to generate rich and nuanced data that can provide a deep understanding of the cultural and social phenomena being studied (Geertz, 1973). The Ethnographic Method is also characterized by a collaborative and dialogic approach to research. Rather than imposing preconceived notions and theories on the study participants, researchers using this Method strive to engage in a dialogue with them, seeking to understand their perspectives and experiences. This approach emphasizes the importance of reflexivity, recognizing that researchers' biases and assumptions can influence their interpretations and analysis of the data collected. Overall, the Ethnographic Method offers a unique and powerful approach to study cultures and societies, and provide researchers with a detailed and multifaceted understanding of the social and cultural phenomena they are investigating.

Furthermore, the Ethnographic Method also emphasizes the importance of context in understanding cultural and social phenomena. Researchers using this Method recognize that cultures and societies are embedded in broader historical, political, and economic contexts, and that these factors can have a significant impact on the social and cultural practices and beliefs of a particular group of people. As such, the Ethnographic Method encourages researchers to explore the broader social and historical contexts in which their study participants are situated. (Augé, 1994). In terms of theoretical foundations, the Ethnographic

Method draws on various social science disciplines, including Anthropology, Sociology, and Cultural studies. These disciplines provide theoretical frameworks for understanding culture and society, as well as the Methods for conducting Ethnographic research. (Handa, 2018), the Ethnographic Method is a research approach that emphasizes understanding cultures and societies through social interaction and immersion, contextual analysis, collaboration and dialogue with study participants, and a reflexive and theoretical approach to data analysis. It draws on a range of theoretical foundations and interdisciplinary perspectives to provide a deep and nuanced understanding of the social and cultural phenomena being studied.

#### **4. The Ethnographic Methodology is based on different Philosophical and cognitive schools, which are as follows**

Cultural research and comprehension can be approached through various lenses and Methodologies, each offering its unique insights into a local culture. The Cultural Descriptive School prioritizes fieldwork and careful observation to accurately describe and interpret local culture (Kozinets, 2015). Conversely, the Cultural Functional School aims to understand the social function of cultural practices and beliefs, focusing on sustainability and societal needs. (Laplantine, 1996). The Humanistic School takes a more human-centered approach, striving to comprehend what it means to be a human in different cultural contexts. The Structural School examines the system governing cultural relationships to understand how it impacts cultural behavior (Kozinets, 2015). Meanwhile, the Semiotic School concentrates on comprehending how people use symbols and signals to communicate in cultures. The Scientific School employs the scientific Method to develop theories and tools to understand cultures. (Laplantine, 1996). The Action-oriented School aims to use cultural research to stimulate social change and transformation, with a focus on involving local communities in the research process. The previous School aims to uncover fixed and repeated patterns in different cultures to comprehend the cultural patterns that govern people's behaviors and beliefs (Le Breton, 2002). The Dialogical School emphasizes cultural dialogue as a means to understand and interpret different cultures, promoting communication between them. Lastly, the Creative School use creativity and the arts to understand and interpret cultures, and foster dialogue and communication between different cultures. (Horst and Miller, 2002). Each school of thought offers a unique perspective on cultural research, demonstrating that comprehending culture is a multi-faceted process requiring different approaches to gain a comprehensive understanding. (Le Breton, 2002). All of these philosophical and cognitive approaches help to better understand cultures and improve Ethnographic Methodology and its development. For example, philosophical schools provide clear philosophical concepts and foundations for thinking about cultures and societies, which researchers and students can use to prepare Ethnographic research and gain a better understanding of cultures. Furthermore, different intellectual and cognitive approaches help to broaden the horizons of researchers and students and give them new analytical tools to deal with cultures and societies. For instance, the culture general framework approach helps to understand the relationship between concepts, values, customs, traditions, and technology in culture, while

the open science approach helps to develop continuous interaction between Ethnographic research and studied cultures.

In general, these philosophical and cognitive schools work to improve Ethnographic Methodology and its development by developing the necessary tools, concepts, and analytical Methods to better understand cultures and societies. Thus, using these schools and approaches is essential for achieving better results in Ethnographic research and improving our understanding of different cultures. They also contribute to expanding the horizons of cultural research and cultural interaction between different communities. These schools provide different lenses through which Ethnographers can approach their research and analysis of cultural phenomena. By using these diverse perspectives, Ethnographers can gain a more comprehensive understanding of the complex and multifaceted nature of culture. In practice, Ethnographers may employ elements of multiple schools in their research, depending on the specific research questions and cultural contexts they are investigating. Overall, the diverse philosophical and cognitive approaches of these schools contribute to the richness and complexity of the Ethnographic Methodology (Fabian, 1983).

#### **5. The Philosophical and Epistemological Relationship between Ethnographic Methodology and the Field of Communication Sciences is Multifaceted. Here are some key points**

Ethnographic Methodology is centered on the study of cultures and societies, with a particular emphasis on understanding human behavior and communication in a cultural context. This approach is especially relevant in the field of communication and media studies since it allows for a more profound understanding of the social and cultural factors that shape communication processes (Gillespie and others, 2014). One of the essential principles of ethnography is participant observation and immersion in the culture being studied, which can be highly beneficial for communication researchers seeking to gain insights into the perspectives and experiences of their subjects. Ethnographic research Methods, including in-depth interviews and observation, can offer rich and detailed insights into communication practices and processes. Moreover, the Ethnographic Approach stresses the importance of reflexivity and critical self-reflection on the part of the researcher, which can facilitate a deeper understanding of the culture and society under study. Communication researchers can benefit from this perspective as it helps them to better comprehend their audiences and the communities they are researching (Bakardjieva, 2017). By employing Ethnographic Methodology, communication scholars can develop new research and analysis Methods and identify the factors that influence effective communication and media effects. The philosophical and epistemological relationship between Ethnographic Methodology and the field of communication sciences can result in a better understanding of human communication and different cultures and the development of new research Methods in the field.

#### **6. Implementing Ethnographic Method in Communication and Media Studies**

The Ethnographic Method involves several steps for conducting research and analysis. The first step is to identify the topic and focus on the cultural aspects related to it (Descola, 2005). For instance, one can study the impact of media on the local

community's culture. The second step is to conduct field observations, which heavily relies on direct observation of individuals and their behaviors and interactions. Interviews can also be conducted with related individuals and groups, and the data is recorded for later analysis. In the third stage, the collected data is analyzed using Ethnographic Research Methods, including analyzing cultural contexts, symbols, and social interactions. Then, the Ethnographic report is written to summarize the results and analysis derived from the observations and interviews, including recommendations to improve media and communication Methods. (Baym, 2015). The collected data is then analyzed in the data analysis stage, and statistical analyses are prepared if applicable. In the cultural analysis stage, cultural data and conclusions drawn from observations and interviews are analyzed, with a focus on cultural and social factors influenced by media and communication. In the writing of the final report stage, the final report is written, which includes a summary of the results and analyses drawn from the study and recommendations derived from it, supported by tangible data and evidence. Lastly, in the publication and awareness stage, the study is published, and the public is made aware of the results and analyses drawn from it through newspapers, scientific journals, conferences, and workshops. (Bakardjieva, 2017).

## 7. Tools of Ethnographic Methodology in Communication Sciences

Ethnographic Methodology is widely used in communication sciences to study media and communication practices in various contexts. It seeks to understand social phenomena and cultural practices through the perspectives of the people involved. By using a range of tools such as participant observation, interviews, focus groups, document analysis, analysis of media and communication artifacts, and secondary research, researchers gain a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of these practices. This approach provides researchers with a holistic understanding of the cultural and social contexts in which these practices occur, and how they are interpreted and understood by different individuals and groups. Using these tools, researchers can extract rich information and data about media and communication practices in different societies and understand how they affect individuals and communities in general. Ethnographic Methodology can be used in various fields in communication sciences such as media studies, international communication, digital media, organizational communication, alternative media, media theory, and others. To achieve their research objectives in the best possible way, researchers and scholars in communication sciences should continue to update and develop their tools to keep up with the continuous developments in media, communication, and technology fields. Using these tools, researchers and scholars in communication sciences can extract rich information and data about media and communication practices in different societies and understand how they affect individuals and communities in general. Through this analysis, they can uncover social, political, and cultural issues related to media and communication practices and discuss and find solutions to them. Ethnographic Methodology can be used in various fields in communication sciences such as media studies, international communication, digital media, organizational communication, alternative media, media theory, and others., researchers and scholars in communication sciences should continue to update and develop

their tools to keep up with the continuous developments in media, communication, and technology fields, and to achieve their research objectives in the best possible way.

### **8. The criticisms directed at the Ethnographic approach in media and communication sciences**

The Ethnographic Approach is widely used in media and communication sciences to study culture, communication, and media messages, but it has been criticized on several fronts. One critique is the over-reliance on linguistic and interpretive tools in data analysis, with insufficient use of quantitative and statistical tools. This can result in less precise analysis and interpretation of data. Another criticism is the potential for participants in the study not to be fully engaged in the research process, leading to misinterpretation and analysis of data. This can be especially problematic in Ethnographic research, where the researcher spends extended periods of time observing and interacting with participants. Furthermore, the use of small samples of participants in Ethnographic research can lead to non-representative analyses of reality, as these samples may not reflect the broader population. This can be a significant limitation, especially when making generalizations about a particular culture or community. Another criticism of the Ethnographic Approach is that it tends to rely heavily on cultural theories in interpretation and analysis, often at the expense of economic, political, and historical factors that can impact media and communication. The lack of clarity in concepts and definitions in research that uses the Ethnographic Approach can lead to unclear results and difficulties in practical application. This can be especially problematic when attempting to apply findings from an Ethnographic study to other contexts or populations. In addition, observation is often the primary Method for data collection in Ethnographic research, which can be time-consuming and resource-intensive. This can also limit the scope of the research and the depth of insights gained from the study. Some scholars argue that applying the Ethnographic Approach to the study of mass media can be challenging due to the complexity of media institutions and the wide range of audiences and users of media. As such, researchers need to carefully consider the appropriateness of the Ethnographic Approach for their research questions and the contexts in which they are studying. The Ethnographic approach may be expensive and time-consuming, requiring the researcher to be present in the community or group they wish to study for a long period of time. The Ethnographic Approach may not be applicable on a wide scale, as it requires the researcher to be familiar with the language and culture of the group being studied. The researcher may face risks or difficulties in accessing the group they want to study, either due to access problems or due to inability to adapt to the culture of the group. The strong intervention of the researcher in the group may lead to a change in the behavior of participants and the study's impact on them.

### **Conclusion**

Ethnography aims to understand cultures and societies by studying the customs, traditions, and practices that individuals follow in these societies. In the context of communication and media sciences, Ethnography focuses on studying how media affects cultures and societies and how these cultures and societies affect media. Thus, Ethnography

helps to understand the reciprocal relationship between media, cultures, and societies. These studies are very important for understanding cultural and social changes that occur in societies and how they impact media and how media impact these changes. In the end, it can be said that ethnography is a science that helps to understand cultural and social diversity, and how media affects this diversity and the changes that societies are experiencing. Thanks to this understanding, media can be improved and made more effective in communicating with societies and meeting their needs and aspirations.

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