Ethnography of Virtual Phenomena and Processes on the Internet

Abstract

The paper presents the ethnography of virtual phenomena and processes, conducted in the social, educational and cultural spheres of the Internet. It describes the most important features of the global network and shows all its aspects which are the subject of ethnographic studies at the Faculty of Pedagogy and Psychology of the University of Silesia in Katowice, i.e. the communication process and its semiotic character, the process of creating social networks, education supported by social media, virtual self-help groups for stigmatised people, and cyberbullying.

Keywords: virtual ethnography, global network, communication process, social networks, distance learning, virtual support groups, cyberbullying

1. Ethnography of Virtual Space

First, we should try to define the term: ethnography of virtual space (in English a more concise term is used: virtual ethnography or digital ethnography – Boellstorff T., 2008) or nethnography (Kozinets R. V, 2002, pp. 449–467).

Virtual ethnography is defined as studying and describing (characterising) people and phenomena on the basis of users' behaviour and its consequences, which can be observed on the Internet. Field research is conducted in the existing Internet environment in real time (i.e. on-line), while a researcher operates on the same terms as other network users, which means, e.g., that he is a legitimate user of forums, not a guest. Thus, virtual ethnography is not research which only exploits the Internet as a platform for communication purposes, such as conducting group